

[Sathankulam Custodial Deaths] CBI investigation appears to be proceeding on right track: Madras HC

The Madras High Court today expressed that the CBI investigation into the [Sathankulam custodial deaths](#) appeared to be moving in the right direction, after perusing the Central agency's first status report (*Registrar General (Judicial), Madurai Bench of Madras High Court v. State of Tamil Nadu and ors*).

Pursuant to the Court's directions in the last hearing, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had filed its report on the status of its investigation in a sealed cover.

The Bench of Justices **M Sathyanarayanan** and **P Rajamanickam** today observed that *much progress* has been made in the case investigation by the CBI, orally observing that "*Prima facie, it appears that investigation is proceeding on the right lines.*"

While taking the report on its file, the Court observed that more time may be required for the investigation as the CBI is in the process of carrying out scientific collection and analysis of evidence.

Notably, the Bench also took note that the majority of the CBI officers have been affected by COVID-19.

The Court added that it cannot comment further on the status report since it is an ongoing investigation. Therefore, the Bench adjourned the matter to September 7 and directed the CBI to file a further status report in sealed cover by then.

Various impleadment applications were also mentioned today before the Court, including one by the widow of Jayaraj, who is also the mother of Bennix - the two persons who died while in the custody of the Sathankulam police.

Other impleadment pleas filed included those by NGO, *People's Watch*, L Vasuki and KS Arjunan. The respondents before the Court today informed the Court that they do not have any objections to the Court taking up the impleadment pleas.

The Court also took on record the submission by the Additional Advocate General that a status report on the CB-CID investigation into allegations concerning the custodial torture of one, S Raja Singh will be filed in a sealed cover.

Singh is alleged to have been tortured while in police custody by two of the police officers accused in the Sathankulam custodial deaths case, i.e. SIs Ragu Ganesh and Balakrishnan.

The Sathankulam custodial deaths case involves allegations of police brutality, a mechanical remand by the judicial magistrate and inadequate medical treatment leading to the death of Jayaraj and Bennix while in police custody.

The two were arrested on June 19 citing a violation of the COVID-19 curfew. A judicial inquiry into their deaths, under Section 176, CrPC, is being [conducted by the Judicial Magistrate No. 1, Kovilpatti](#). The investigation was earlier being handled by the CB CID until the CBI took over the probe earlier last month.

The matter will be taken up next on September 7.

Cannot pass general order for police to interrogate accused in their residence, says Court

During the hearing today, a counsel mentioned that there were five connected cases involving the accused arraigned in the Sathankulam case, where the accused are afraid to go to the police station.

The counsel, therefore, urged the Court to direct that these accused persons be interrogated in their residence instead.

The Bench, however, pointed out that if any such general order is passed, it is likely to be abused by other accused persons as well.

The Court, therefore, declined to accede to the request, orally observing that,

"Once we pass an order, it will be treated as a precedent. Every accused will say 'come to my residence' and investigate.... We will consider on a case to case basis."

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