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Body of man killed in 'encounter' taken home 12km away, tied to pole

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TIRUVANNAMALAI: Weeks after a 56-year-old hearing-impaired tribal man was killed in an 'encounter' at Gollapalli forest area in Andhra Pradesh for his alleged involvement in red sanders smuggling, his body reached Tiruvannamalai on Monday night after a second postmortem.

However, blaming the district administration's apathy to arrange for a hearse, villagers had to carry the body on their shoulders for nearly 12km from the foothills to Kanamalai village.

Kamaraj, 56, an impoverished tribal from Kanamalai village in Tiruvannamalai along with a few other villagers was lured by a few middlemen on the pretext of giving them work in the construction sector. But they were engaged in red sanders smuggling, his family said. On August 31, while a few men were involved in cutting sanders inside Golapalli forest area, Kamaraj was killed in a combing operation by forest officials.

Though his body was kept at Srikalahasthi Government General Hospital after conducting a postmortem, his relatives refused to receive the body pressing various demands including a fresh autopsy and compensation. After a case was filed, the Andhra Pradesh high court directed doctors and forensics experts to conduct a fresh postmortem on Monday morning.

I Asirvadam, state coordinator of People's Watch Movement – a Madurai based NGO, said many questions on Kamaraj's death remain unanswered and they helped the family file a petition in the court seeking a fresh autopsy. "As we suspected, the earlier postmortem was not done properly. Forensics experts collected seven bullets from Kamaraj's body during his re-postmortem. We also suspect Kamaraj was tortured and assaulted before being shot down by the forest and police personnel," he said.

Though Kamaraj's kin have filed separate petitions with the collector and chief minister cell demanding compensation and assistance to conduct final rites of Kamaraj, the officials failed to render support to the impoverished family that has lost its breadwinner.

Explaining the apathy of the district administration officials, Asirvadham said, "Though the body reached Puthur around 10pm, the hearse van which transported it from AP could not move through the narrow mountain road leading to Kanamalai. The hearse driver handed over his body to his relatives at Puthur village (basement of Kanamalai village) and left the spot."

As the family members were unable to get a small hearse vehicle, the fellow villagers helped carry his body for nearly 12km by tying the body to a log.

Talking to TOI, Jamunamarathur tahsildar Balaji, who was at the spot, said though they tried to arrange a small hearse van, none was available as it was already 10pm. "We had no other choice when the tribal youths volunteered to carry his body on their shoulders."