TN custodial deaths: More police torture cases surface

TUTICORIN: The custodial deaths of the father-son duo, P Jayaraj, 58, and J Beniks, 31, of Sathankulam do not seem to be the only instances of alleged torture by police in this southern coastal district. Two other cases of alleged torture are being blamed on police in the district. Mass Empowerment and Guidance Association (MEGA), an NGO in the district, has sent a complaint to the CM's special cell, chief secretary and district authorities alleging that a 33-year-old man was severely beaten up by the Arumuganeri police that his kidney was injured, forcing him to undergo dialysis.

Henri Tiphagne, executive director of People's Watch, alleged that another man, Muruganantham of Peikulam village, was tortured and killed by Sathankulam police in the second week of June.

MEGA secretary M S Mohamed Salihu said Habeeb Mohammed, 33, of Kayalpattinam, an autorickshaw driver, was healthy till he was allegedly beaten up by Arumuganeri police. On Friday, the man was seen limping as he went to a private hospital in Tirunelveli for his seventh dialysis.

“I violated the Covid-19 containment zone in Kuthukal Street in our town that was barricaded after a person tested positive. I moved the barricade as the road was the shortest. I was also not wearing a mask and was smoking. Two policewomen there claimed that I blew smoke on their face, which was not true,” Habeeb Mohammed told TOI. At 10.45 am he was taken to Arumuganeri police station.
He was allegedly beaten from his lower back to legs repeatedly. The next day, he went to the Kayalpattinam government hospital where he narrated the cause of injuries. “The police came in a few minutes, started harassing us and ensured that we left without getting treated,” his father Katheev Mohideen Thambi said.

They then approached a private hospital in Tirunelveli city, claiming he fell down from a moving autorickshaw. His injuries affected his urine output and urine colour. His family said they spent more than Rs 1 lakh on his treatment so far.

Henry Tiphagne said Muruganantham was picked up by the police as his brother, who was accused of murder, was at large. “He died a day after he was discharged. We can’t believe that the district SP did not know this through the special branch police at the station level,” he said.

Tuticorin district SP Arun Balagopalan told TOI that two officers in the rank of DSP have been asked to conduct an inquiry into the Arumuganeri police station incident and allegation of custodial death in the Sathankulam police station earlier this month.

A senior police officer said there has hardly been any custodial death or torture incident for which police officers or personnel concerned have been put behind bars. “In most incidents not even a case was registered against them and they are still in service,” he added.