

"Twin Murder": Anger In Tamil Nadu After Man, Son Die In Police Custody

Family members of the store owners - Jayaraj and his son Beniks -- have refused to accept their bodies after the post-mortem last night.

Chennai: The death in police custody of a father and son arrested last Friday for keeping their mobile phone shop in Tuticorin open beyond permitted hours has led to anger across Tamil Nadu. Shops in the state will be shut tomorrow in protest against what the family of father-son pair alleges was police brutality in jail.

Family members of the store owners - Jayaraj and his son Beniks -- have refused to accept their bodies after the post-mortem last night. They allege that there were injuries to the rectum and other tell-tale signs of torture on the two bodies, and have demanded murder charges against the policemen involved.

"It's a twin murder. There has been inexplicable torture, which as a woman I can't even describe. We will not collect the bodies until murder cases are filed against them (police)," said Jayaraj's daughter Persis.

Jayaraj and his son, who ran a mobile phone store in Santhankulam, were arrested on Friday.

According to a First Information Report (FIR) filed on the basis of a police complaint, the two men rolled on the ground and that is how they suffered internal injuries. They were also accused of throwing abuses at the police and threatening to kill them. Charges against them include criminal intimidation, defiance and abuse.

Though the FIR mentions the name of the son as Pennis, his family says his name is Beniks. A Madras High Court document has spelt it as Bennicks.

The family alleges that the men were kept in the police station all night and tortured till the next morning, when they were to appear before a Magistrate.

At the sub-jail where the store owners were kept, Beniks, the son, first complained of chest pain. He died in hospital. His father, who complained of severe fever, was also shifted to hospital, where he died. Tuticorin police chief Arun Balagopalan told NDTV: "We have ordered a probe".

The Madurai bench of the Madras High Court, which took up the case, has ordered a post-mortem by three government doctors, which will be videographed.

Chief Minister E Palaniswami, who heads the police force, has announced Rs 20 lakh to each family and a government job for a family member.

Though he condoled the deaths, his statement was silent on the allegations of police torture. The government, he says, will abide by the High Court order.

Opposition DMK MP Kanimozhi, who represents Tuticorin, has complained to the police chief and demanded action.

Human Rights group People's Watch has even pointed fingers at the Magistrate. Henri Tiphagne of the group says: "Our enquiry sadly reveals the Judicial Magistrate had not personally met the men before they were remanded. They were hidden in the van. This is contrary to law. Had he met them, they could have narrated what happened and showed the injuries as a result of torture".

A few years ago, the police in Tuticorin came under scrutiny over firing that killed 13 anti-Sterlite protestors.

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