

TAMIL NADU

People's Inquest wants criminal probe into Thoothukudi firing



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Seeks immediate end to intimidation, arbitrary arrest of people

A 23-member team of retired judges, senior bureaucrats, police officers and social activists have called for a full administrative and criminal investigations into the May 22 Thoothukudi police firing and violence that resulted in the death of 14 people.

Citing evidence, the report pointed to a violation of Standard Operating Procedures, a total breakdown of civilian authority and possible mala fide intent and murder.

Releasing the report, former Madras High Court judge D. Hariparanthaman, who was part of the People's Inquest that probed the police firing, appealed for an immediate end to the intimidation and arbitrary arrest of people under open FIRs filed against unnamed people in the town.

He said normalcy must be restored in Thoothukudi and called for all deaths to be treated as murders at the FIR stage. The former judge appreciated the efforts of the lower level judicial officers and the Thoothukudi Bar Association in helping the protesters.

Former IAS officer Christodas Gandhi said civil administration had deliberately absented itself from the vicinity on that day and ceded all its authority and power to the police, which was headless and resorted to arson and violence.

Lawyer Prashant Bhushan called the brutal repression unleashed by police on protesters unprecedented.

Journalist Kavitha Muralidharan said protesters were being branded anti-socials, which showed that justice was being denied to the residents of Thoothukudi.

The report highlighted the presence of sharpshooters and snipers, targeted killing of known anti-Sterlite protesters like Jancy of Thereseapuram and the failure of the administration and police to resolve the matter despite the long notice of 100 days given by protestors.

Former Chief Justice A.P. Shah, who was to release the report and deliver a speech on 'Democracy and Dissent', was taken ill and could not travel. He, however, conveyed his solidarity and urged the State administration to ensure an immediate end to the harassment of Thoothukudi residents by the police and the district administration, a release said.