

Sterlite firing: Madras High Court orders DVAC probe into 21 officers

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CHENNAI: Stating that the police had opened fire on peaceful anti-Sterlite protesters in Thoothukudi because the people at the helm of affairs and an industrialist wanted to teach them a lesson, the Madras High Court on Monday ordered a Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (DVAC) investigation into the assets of 21 officers, including one IAS and a few IPS officers.



The strong remarks were made by Justices SS Sundar and N Senthilkumar while hearing a petition filed by Henry Tiphagne, executive director of People’s Watch, seeking orders to the NHRC to reopen its inquiry into the 2018 firing in which 13 people were killed.

“The people at the helm of affairs were unable to tolerate the peaceful protest prolonging for about a 100 days against the individual. Their intention/ target is to teach a lesson to the people, who participated in the protest all those 100 days,” the court said.

“All these incidents happened (because) one industrialist wanted them to happen; he wanted to teach a lesson to everyone. Therefore, he made it happen. That’s all. You people (government officials) acted only for him,” the court added.

Madras HC slams CBI for shoddy probe into Thoothukudi firing

Finding lapses on the part of the 21 officials stated to be responsible for the firing, the court ordered a DVAC probe into their assets and sought a preliminary report in two weeks. Further time for probing the assets would be given by taking into account the progress of investigation.

“There must be an inquiry by the DVAC against the assets and liabilities of the officials - police and revenue - who are arrayed as parties in the case and had been working in Thoothukudi during the relevant point of time,” the court ordered. Details of assets acquired by the officials, their spouses and close relatives two years before and after the incident must be collected, the court said.

The court also sought details of the nature of the weapons used during the shooting and the number of rounds fired on the protesters.

The CBI was not spared the court's fury for its alleged shoddy probe into the incident, which resulted in a "false story" and clean chit to the officials as the agency had claimed that "there was no criminality on the part of the officials ordering the firing, which was not predetermined but done to prevent untoward incidents".

Pointing to CBI's report before the special court in Madurai, the court questioned the agency's neutrality. "Conclusions of the CBI worry us. It is an independent agency but this conclusion shows its inefficiency. It is independent but under control of a single man," the court observed, noting it had failed to probe the complaint of a mother that her son was shot at their Therespuram home that is 7km away from the collectorate, the epicentre of the protests.

"You (CBI) should keep in mind that some one (God) above us is watching everything," the court added.

The court however noted that the CBI had 'acted fairly' in the probe into the Sathankulam custodial deaths and adjourned the case by two weeks.

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