

Police firing on anti-Sterlite protesters in 2018 was at the behest of one industrialist: Madras HC

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A Division Bench of Justices SS Sundar and N Senthil Kumar, while observing that the officials had made the firing with an agenda, directed the TN Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (DVAC) to collect the details of the assets acquired by the officials named as accused and by their spouses as well as close relatives two years prior to the incident and two years after and file a report. The DVAC has to investigate all the accused police and revenue officials.

“We want to know where their assets stand,” the Division Bench said.

The Bench passed the order while hearing a plea of Henry Tiphagne, Executive Director of Madurai-based rights NGO, People’s Watch, challenging the NHRC’s closure of its suo-motu probe into the incident, in which 13 people were killed by indiscriminate firing on unarmed protestors. He also sought a direction to the NHRC to reopen the case. Earlier, the court had said that the officers responsible for the crime should be prosecuted for murder.

Expressing dissatisfaction over the CBI chargesheet, the Bench said the agency, acting swiftly in some cases, is taking sides based on the preferences of a ‘single man.’

“We feel sad the CBI report actually worries us. The whole country is dependent upon you. We used to appreciate the efforts of some officers. But, now, you are taking sides. It has come under the control of a single man. If the head is not bothered, the result of the investigation will not be fair... All this happened because one industrialist wanted it to happen. Let us assume that there is a defective charge sheet, who will benefit from it?... You people acted for him,” remarked the judges orally.

When the CBI counsel defended the probe, the Bench asked how the agency could come to a conclusion that the firing was not pre-planned. For 100 days, the protestors were holding peaceful protests against Sterlite’s copper plant, the Bench noted.

Some people could not digest the fact that the voiceless had gathered to protest and wanted to teach a lesson so as to silence them and the police had acted accordingly. Everyone has to pay his price one day, added the bench.

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