

# Firing on anti-Sterlite protestors in Thoothukudi was unprovoked and indiscriminate, finds panel

Thirteen protestors were killed in the police firing on May 22, 2018.



*The Sterlite Copper plant in Thoothukudi. | Reuters*

The police firing on citizens protesting against the [Sterlite Copper plant](#) in Tamil Nadu's Thoothukudi district in 2018 was unprovoked and indiscriminate, a commission probing the incident said in its final report, *Frontline* reported on Thursday.

[Thirteen protestors](#) were killed in the police firing on May 22, 2018, causing national outrage and the subsequent closure of the plant. The demonstrators had claimed that the Sterlite Copper plant [contaminated](#) the region's air and water resources.

“Here is a case of police indulging in shooting from their hide-outs at the protestors who were far away from them,” the commission said in its report said. “[T]here is no material on record to show that it was only to deal with a militant crowd of protestors that the opening of fire was resorted to.”

The commission was led by former Madras High Court judge Justice Aruna Jagadeesan. It submitted its report to the Tamil Nadu government in May, according to *Frontline*, which had accessed extracts of it.

In its report, the commission named top officials including then Inspector General of Police (South Zone) Shailesh Kumar Yadav, Deputy Inspector General of Police (Tirunelveli Range) Kapil Kumar C Saratkar, Superintendent of Police (Thoothukudi) P. Mahendran and Deputy Superintendent of Police Lingathirumaran as the officers responsible for the firing.

Noting that the officers “certainly exceeded the limit”, the commission urged the Tamil Nadu government to take action against them.

The commission said in its report that the [police firing](#) during the incident was carried out not carried from a short but at long range, indicating involvement of sharp-shooters, *The Hindu* reported.

It added that even though the protestors were pelting stones at the police, they were unarmed and posed no imminent threat to the officers.

“No policeman sustained fatal injuries nor suffered any injury grave in nature, barring one Manikandan who sustained grievous injury,” the commission said. “In almost all cases of policemen claiming to have been injured, either the injuries were too minor to be taken note of or no injury at all except small swelling or tenderness.”

It further added: “The police should have used non-lethal weapons and methods to control the crowd instead of resorting to instantaneous shooting.”

Henri Tiphagne, executive director of human rights organisation People’s Watch, said that action against those responsible for the firing was a major assurance in the election manifesto of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam.

“It has been three months since the report was submitted [to the government] but it has not been placed in the Assembly so far,” Tiphagne said, according to *The Hindu*. “This is not an encouraging sign.”

Communist Party of India (Marxist) K. Balakrishnan said he was happy that the findings had come out.

“But it is hard to believe that only a handful of police officers and the Collector are responsible for such a major police firing without the knowledge of the State government at that time,” he said, according to the newspaper.

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