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## 'Unprovoked': Thoothukudi firing probe panel report indicts police, Collector

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**Chennai, Aug 19 (IANS):** The Justice Aruna Jagadeesan (retd) Commission, which probed the police firing on May 22-23, 2018 on protesters in Tamil Nadu's Thoothukudi, leading to the death of 13 persons, has come out heavily against police officers involved as well as the then district Collector N. Venkitesan.

The report, submitted to the state government on May 18, is still to be tabled in the Assembly. However, according to the report, as accessed by the IANS, the Commission has held the police firing to be "totally unprovoked and indiscriminate" and coming down heavily against Venkitesan, said that he "had made ill-conceived decisions".

The report also said that police had fired at fleeing protesters and that there was no material evidence with the police that indicated that the protesters were militant.

Noting that police had taken safe shelter and used sharpshooters from long range to fire at the protesters, the Commission, in its report, has recommended action against 17 officials including then IGP, South Zone, Shailesh Kumar Yadav, then DIG, Tirunelveli, Kapilkumar Saratkar, then Thoothukudi SP P. Mahendran, and Venkitesan.

The commission, in its report, also came down heavily against the officers for not properly promulgating prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the CrPC. It said that even after promulgating prohibitory orders in respect of two police station limits, the officials did not prevent the demonstration against Sterlite on SAV school grounds in Thoothukudi. This has led to confusion and police not being able to prevent the public from turning violent.

The report, however, said that there were no intelligence failures but the district administration did not attach much significance to the intelligence report.

Initially, four people died in police firing and the mob turned violent and started destroying public property, leading to further shooting. In the end, 13 people died in police firing.

Human Rights organisation, People's Watch welcomed the report of the Commission, and its Executive Director, Henri Tiphange called upon the government to convene a special session of the Assembly to release the report.

He said that action against those involved in police firing was one of the major election planks of the DMK and said that the government has a responsibility in placing the report before the house as it has already been three months since the report was submitted to it.