

1992 Vachathi brutality: HC confirms conviction and sentences of forest, police and revenue officials

Mohamed Imranullah S.
CHENNAI

The Madras High Court on Friday dismissed all criminal appeals filed against the conviction of, and the sentences awarded by a trial court in 2011 to officials of the Forest, Police and Revenue Departments for the atrocities committed on the residents of Vachathi, a tribal village in Dharmapuri district, in 1992.

Justice P. Velmurugan confirmed the conviction as well as the punishment, ranging from one to seven years of rigorous imprisonment, imposed by Dharmapuri Principal Sessions Judge S. Kumaraguru on September 29, 2011. The convicts included Indian



Day of reckoning: Survivors celebrate in Vachathi following the Madras High Court's verdict on Friday. N. BASHKARAN

Forest Service (IFS) officials who had raided the village for smuggled sandalwood.

Higher compensation
Though the trial court had ordered a compensation of

₹15,000 each to the 18 women who were raped by the raiding party and had said the amount could be given from the fine collected from the convicts, Justice Velmurugan directed the State government to

pay a compensation of ₹10 lakh each to the victims.

He made it clear the government would be at liberty to recover 50% of the compensation amount from those who had been convicted on the charge of rape.

He also directed the government to ensure the livelihood of the victims either by providing them jobs in the government service or by creating self-employment opportunities.

Stringent action

The judge also ordered stringent action against the then Dharmapuri Collector, Superintendent of Police and District Forest Officer for having failed to protect the hapless villagers.

He called for a report of compliance from the government on the steps taken for improving the livelihood and standards of living of the villagers.

CBI probe

The case was probed by the Central Bureau of Investigation on the direction of the Madras High Court in 1995.

It filed a charge sheet against 269 accused persons, who included the then Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF), M. Harikrishnan, Conservators of Forests P. Muthaiyan and L. Nathan, and District Forest Officer S. Balaji.

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A host of personnel were listed as accused before the trial court by investigating officer S. Jagannathan. Since it took 19 long years, from the date of the incident, for the trial to complete, 54 accused persons died pending trial. Hence, the case against them stood abated. On September 29, 2011, the trial court convicted the 215 surviving accused persons, who included Harikrishnan and four other IFS officials. The charges against them were that they had ransacked the houses of the villagers; assaulted them indiscriminately without sparing even the aged, women, and children; raped women; detained the villagers illegally; destroyed their belongings; and slaughtered the cattle in the village and threw the carcass in the open wells.

After a full fledged trial, the court had found the accused persons guilty of various charges under the Indian Penal Code as well as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. Pending appeal since 2011, many of the 215 convicts, too, died, leaving the High Court to confirm the conviction and sentences of those who had survived.

Pay compensation immediately: Ramadoss

In a release, PMK founder S. Ramadoss welcomed the judgment and urged the government to immediately pay the compensation awarded to the women without taking into consideration whether the convicted people appeal in the Supreme Court or not. Tamil Maanila Congress president G.K. Vasan said his party welcomed the judgment even though it had come after many delays.

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Medals galore

India won eight medals on Friday to take its tally to 33 at the Hangzhou Asian Games

THE PODIUM FINISHERS

Gold

- Palak (10m air pistol)
- Aishwary Pratap, Swapnil Kusale and Akhil Sheoran (men's 50m rifle 3 position team)

Silver

- Esha Singh (10m air pistol individual)
- Esha Singh, Palak and Divya Thadigol (10m air pistol team)
- Aishwary Pratap (men's 50m rifle 3 position individual)
- Saketh Myneni and Ramkumar Ramanathan (men's doubles tennis)

Bronze

- Kiran Baliyan (women's shot put)
- Joshna Chinappa, Tanvi Khanna, Anahat Singh (squash women's team)



Swapnil Kusale, Aishwary Pratap and Akhil Sheoran



Ramkumar Ramanathan and Saketh Myneni



Kiran Baliyan

Palak

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18 and counting: India has its best ever medal count

Teen sensation Palak lands a gold with a record to boot; Aishwary, Esha add two each to complete a medal quartet; Kusale disappoints with a below average show after being in the top-three initially

SHOOTING

Uthra Ganesan
HANGZHOU

The rifle hall at the Fuyang Yinhu Sports Centre was witness to the highs of ecstasy and the lows of disbelief in Indian shooting simultaneously on Friday even as the country added two golds and three silvers to its medals tally from the sport.

Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar took his personal tally to four with a gold and silver each in the rifle 50m 3-Position on the day. Shooting's own tally went up to 18 medals so far in this edition – six gold, seven silver and five bronze – with two more days of action remaining, bettering the previous best of 14 medals in 2006 at Doha.

Also adding two silvers to take her personal medal count to four was Esha Singh, taking the team and individual second spot, the latter behind compatriot Palak in the 10m air pistol as India finally got a 1-2 in shooting.

Four medals in your maiden Asian Games, including two gold, at the age of 22 would be a matter of



On target: Swapnil, Aishwary Tomar and Akhil with their 50m Rifle 3 Positions men's team gold. Right: Palak finished on top in women's 10m air pistol. AP



Terrific trio: Divya, Esha and Palak took the second spot in 10m air pistol. PTI

pride for anyone. For Tomar, it was just reward for the efforts the youngster has put in over the years. He took an individual silver with 459.7 points, having led to a team gold earlier in the day along with Swapnil Kusale and Akhil Sheoran for a new World Record total of 1769 points.

"We have been preparing for these competitions for a long time so it feels really nice. Coming here and winning medals, achieving my goals slowly, feels good. 'Expectation se to zyada hi hai par jitni

mehnat aur training ki hai, us hisab se thik hai (What I have achieved here is more than what I expected but considering the hard work and amount of training we did, not surprised)," a beaming Tomar told *The Hindu*.

Having started badly and struggling at seventh in the initial stages, Tomar pulled himself up gradually, climbing the ranks through prone before going all out in the standing section to get himself into the medal bracket.

At the other end Kusale,

having been in the top-three all along and comfortably placed for a medal, shot a 7.6 on the 41st shot to drop from 1st to 5th – he still got a 10.5 and 10.1 in the next two shots, but the damage was done – and eventually he eliminated, finishing 4th behind China's Jianming Tian.

"I don't remember, maybe years ago when I was just starting, never in competition," a poker-faced Kusale said about shooting such a low score.

"Feels bad, a lot, must have been some mistake

by me only but I don't know what happened. But it's a game, will come back stronger the next time," he added, bemused.

"There was pressure, some doubts also because everyone else was doing well. Then I thought standing was left and I will do well in that, forgot everything and focused on the target and managed to get through," he explained.

Meanwhile, 17-year-old Palak, the youngest Indian shooter here, was speechless after claiming gold in the 10m air pistol. That it

came with a new Games record of 242.1 points only made it special even as Esha finished 2.4 points behind to take silver.

"It feels so great, I am not able to express the feeling in words. I don't think I am old enough to give any message to anyone but all I can say is if you work hard, everything will fall into place on the right path.

"I did expect a podium finish because I had trained hard for that but definitely not gold," she admitted.



Esha Singh and Aishwary Pratap. ANI & PTI

Extended exclusion

With or without AFSPA, Centre should not allow Manipur situation to fester

Hill areas in Manipur will continue to be under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) for another six months from October. The State government has issued a notification to extend the law's imposition to the whole State, barring the areas falling under 19 police stations in the Imphal valley. The notification maintains the status quo on the applicability of the potent law that grants extensive powers to the armed forces in notified 'disturbed areas' in the use of force. In normal circumstances, the only question that may have arisen is whether AFSPA is needed any longer. However, given the violent ethnic conflict since this May between the Meitei and the Kuki communities, the exclusion of the Imphal Valley from its purview even while extending it elsewhere comes across as quite ironical. The Army had sought its re-imposition in the Valley districts, as it felt that the absence of the law is hampering its operations against insurgent groups, which may be using the unrest to gain a foothold in the State. It can be nobody's case that AFSPA should remain or its ambit increased; but it is difficult to avoid the question whether, if at all AFSPA is needed for some more time, areas that have witnessed considerable violence in recent months should remain excluded.

Perhaps, the government's logic is that AFSPA is meant only to provide legal protection to forces engaged in counter-insurgency operations and not those engaged in law and order duty amidst internal conflict. However, the exclusion of the valley districts from AFSPA at this stage is liable to be interpreted as yet another instance of the government's partisan conduct. One of the reasons for the government maintaining the status quo on the extent of the 'disturbed areas' is that a detailed assessment of the ground situation is not possible at the moment when the security agencies are engaged in maintaining law and order. Further, the notification says the issue of declaring an area as 'disturbed' is quite sensitive and it may lead to public criticism and resistance. The only possible interpretation is that the fear of displeasing the majority Meitei seems to be the core aspect of the government's policy. In the backdrop of the hostility of the community towards the Assam Rifles, and the Assam Rifles' apprehension that trucks made to resemble its vehicles may be used to commit offences in a bid to tarnish its image, the situation is rife with possibilities of further conflict. The Centre should not delay any further a serious initiative to bring about reconciliation between the two communities, lest the situation fester and deteriorate.

Ruixiang Zhang to receive SASTRA Ramanujan Prize

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The 2023 SASTRA Ramanujan Prize will be awarded to Ruixiang Zhang of the University of California, Berkeley. This annual \$10,000 prize is for outstanding contributions by individuals in areas of mathematics influenced by Indian mathematics great Ramanujan (in a broad sense).

The prize will be awarded at an International Conference in Number Theory on December 20-22 at SASTRA University in Kumbakonam, Ramanujan's hometown.

Mr. Zhang received his BS degree in mathematics from Peking University in 2012 and his PhD in mathematics at Princeton University in 2017. After working at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, and the University of Wis-



Ruixiang Zhang

consin, since 2021, he has been an assistant professor at the University of California, Berkeley.

His fundamental work spans analytic number theory, combinatorics, Euclidean harmonic analysis, and geometry. Building on his doctoral thesis, he and Shaoming Guo proved a generalisation of the main conjecture in Vinogradov's mean value theorem, which is concerned with the sums of numbers raised to a certain power.

Indian women clinch bronze, men to contest for the gold medal

Joshna-Anahat-Tanvi trio goes down fighting to Hong Kong in the semifinals; the Ghosal-led men's team knocks out defending champion Malaysia in the last-four clash, meets Pakistan

ASIAN GAMES SQUASH

Sports Bureau
HANGZHOU

India's impressive show in team events continued with the men and women securing a place on the podium in squash at the Asian Games here on Friday.

The Indian trio of Joshna Chinappa, Anahat Singh and Tanvi Khanna finished its campaign with a bronze medal after a 1-2 loss to Hong Kong in the semifinals.

India started on a losing note with Tanvi falling to a 6-11, 7-11, 3-11 defeat against Chan Sin Yuk. Joshna levelled the tie for India, drawing from her experience to secure a close 7-11, 11-7, 9-11, 11-6, 11-8 win over Ho Tze Lok.

India's fate in the event came down to 15-year-old Anahat, who went up against Lee Ka Yi in the decider.

While she managed to save eight match points against her opponent who is almost twice her age, she went down in a 8-11, 7-11, 10-12 loss.

India's bronze in Hangzhou follows a silver medal in the 2018 edition



Memorable day: Anahat, Tanvi, Dipika and Joshna finished on the podium. PTI

of the tournament in Jakarta. Both medals came after losses to the same opponent - Hong Kong.

Saurav Ghosal, Abhay Singh and Mahesh Mangonkar made it to the final after beating defending champion Malaysia 2-0 in the men's team semifinal.

Abhay overcame an injury scare to give India a winning start with a 11-3, 12-10, 9-11, 11-6 triumph over Muhammed Addeen.

Veteran Ghosal's rich vein of form continued as he overcame a stiff challenge from Eain Yow Ng in a 11-8, 11-6, 10-12, 11-3 win.

India will take on Pakistan

in the summit clash. The teams met once in the pool stage where Pakistan beat India 2-1, with Ghosal being the lone Indian winner.

The men's side won bronze in the 2018 edition in Jakarta and will hope to ascend the podium top step on Saturday.