

News

The lawyers who were arrested for opposing the plan to privatize sewage services have been released by the Madras High Court.



Two law students who had been arrested by the police were also ordered to be released by the police.

Six people, including four attorneys and two law students, were arrested by the Tamil Nadu police last night in response to demonstrations against the Greater Chennai Corporation's plan to privatize conservancy services in two Chennai zones. The Madras High Court on Thursday ordered their release.

*The ruling came from a habeas corpus petition that was heard by a bench of Justices MS Ramesh and V **Lakshminarayanan**.*

"We believe it may be illegal for the police to have detained four lawyers and two law students. The bench noted in the decision that none of the arrested individuals had been taken before the relevant Magistrate's Court for remand.

The Court did, however, place stringent restrictions on the lawyers' and law students' release, such as the need that they refrain from speaking to the media or posting anything on social media until August 21, the next hearing date.

The Court stated in the interim ruling that 930 people, including the six individuals for whom the habeas corpus plea was filed, had been taken into custody by the police. Additionally, it discovered that the buses' glass doors, which had a placard that read "MTC Police," were broken.

But the Court also pointed out that when the buses were destroyed, the demonstrators had already been taken into custody.

"Those suspected of inciting unrest were detained and imprisoned aboard the buses on the basis of the evidence. In other words, the damage to the buses appears to have occurred later, and the police seem to have already apprehended the suspects," it stated.

Following the detention of hundreds of sanitation workers and others who opposed the decision to privatize sewage services in two Chennai zones late last night, the court was considering a habeas corpus plea.

According to reports, a different High Court bench ordered the demonstrators to relocate to a different protest location.

According to the State, despite demands to leave the protest site near the Ripon Building, the headquarters of the Greater Chennai Corporation, the demonstrators—including attorneys—refused to move.

As a result, protesters were forcibly removed by the police and relocated to mandapams, or marriage halls.

Justices Ramesh and Lakshminarayanan consented to hear the issue in the afternoon after the matter was urgently brought up before them this morning.

Since the brother of one of the judges had just appeared in a comparable public interest litigation (PIL) matter, the Court first questioned whether it was proper for the Bench to hear the case when it was brought up in the afternoon.

The case was considered by the Bench after all of the present attorneys affirmed that they had no objections.

Advocate M Radhakrishnan, speaking on behalf of the petitioner, denounced the detentions last night as unlawful. He asserted that the arrested attorneys had been severely beaten. He insisted that they be released right away.

Why is it necessary to make an arrest at midnight? People from Tamil Nadu and people from all political backgrounds attended the peaceful demonstration, which was similar to Jallikkattu. "You can refer to these two women as Maoists, Naxalites, or anything else you want, but they are entitled to legal protection," Radhakrishnan stated. "They were severely beaten."

Additional Advocate General J Ravindran, speaking on behalf of the State, refuted claims that individuals were unlawfully detained. He claimed that after the demonstrators disobeyed court orders to relocate to a different protest location, the State had moved them in compliance with the law.

He claimed that during the rallies, state officials, including women, and police constables were attacked, and buses were looted.

He went on to say that the State could not have been expected to stand by and do nothing.

He maintained that the demonstrators were only taken into custody because they disregarded the State officials' adamant pleas for them to leave the Rippon Building protest location in accordance with the court's previous orders.

"They were literally urged to disperse by officials... **(Sanitation workers)** have our sympathies and support. However, please keep in mind that it would be a very dangerous precedent if Lordships stepped in at this time," he urged.

With the exception of six individuals who were alleged to have had a significant role in the unlawful acts, he continued, the majority of those detained—including a number of law

students—have subsequently been released.

They have been placed under custody, he said.

He asked the Court to hold off on issuing any orders that would free them until the State could provide the evidence that led to their arrest. He said that this stuff could be delivered by **Monday, August 18.**

However, the AAG asked that the released individuals be prohibited from speaking to the media or posting on social media for the time being if the Court insisted on granting their temporary liberty.

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