

TAMIL NADU

Death toll rises to 4 in Theni forest fire tragedy

STAFF REPORTER

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The victims were part of a group of estate workers returning from Kerala

Two more people died in the [forest fire at Rasingapuram in Theni district](#) on Tuesday night, taking the death toll to four.

V. Manjula (46) and S. Maheswari (43) were climbing down from Pethotty in Kerala's Idukki district to Rasingapuram in Bodinayakanur after completing their work at an estate. They were part of a group of 10 people -- six women, three men and a child -- who were walking through a dry canal when they a forest fire engulfed them at around 2.30 p.m. While a 43-year-old woman and her one-year-old granddaughter died on the spot, Ms. Manjula and Ms. Maheswari died on their stretchers while being rescued near the Rasingapuram foothills at around 10.30 p.m.

District Forest Officer (DFO) S. Gowtham said that the path that they used was a difficult trek -- both up and downhill. It stretched to around nine kilometres. "This path was frequented around 15 years ago. After motorised transport came in, most of the workers took jeeps sent by the estate into Kerala, thus rendering the path unused. Ever since the borders between Tamil Nadu and Kerala have closed due to COVID-19, there has been a spike in the number of illegal paths used," he said.

The DFO added that Forest Department personnel had been stationed in paths frequently used by estate workers and locals two days ago on Monday to ensure that they could monitor the spread of cases. Guards were asked to patrol routes including Kurangani to Top Station, Kurangani to Mutton, Sakalathumettu and Ramakalmettu.

Only 15 days ago on March 10, residents of Kurangani paid tribute to 23 victims who lost their lives to a similar forest fire tragedy in 2018.

The public can report fires to 04546-252552 or reach out to the disaster management team at 1077.

A letter from the Editor

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