Kerala beedi baron Nisham sentenced to life, fined Rs 80 lakh

Muhammad Nisham, a beedi tycoon had rammed his Hummer SUV into a security guard leading to the latter's death two weeks later

A court in Thrissur on Thursday sentenced beedi tycoon Muhammad Nisham to rigorous life imprisonment and another 24 years in jail for causing the death of a security guard with his Hummer at the Sobha City apartments last year. The 39-year-old businessman, reportedly with assets worth Rs 5,000 crore, will also have to pay a fine of Rs 80.30 lakh of which Rs 50 lakh is to be paid to the widow of the victim, K Chandrabose.

Quoting the verdict of judge K P Sudheer, special public prosecutor C P Udayabhanu said the life term served for murder and 24 years of jail term for other six offences would run consecutively. The appellate courts have to uphold the quantum of punishment.

Nisham was convicted under sections of 302, 326, 323, 324,427,449 and 506(1) of IPC.

The court also asked the prosecution to initiate criminal procedures against Nisham's wife Amal on charges of perjury. Amal, who had been a prosecution witness, had earlier given a statement to the magistrate that she had seen injured Chandrabose in the Hummer SUV of her husband. Later, during the trial, Amal turned hostile.

Reacting to the verdict, Chadrabose's wife Jamanthi said the culprit should have been hanged. "We did not get justice. We are not enthused to hear about the compensation ordered to be paid to us. It was not an accident. He ran the vehicle into my husband. When he tried to escape, Nisham crushed him against a concrete wall using his vehicle. We are not satisfied by the verdict,'' said Jamanthi, who was given the job of a lower division typist with a public sector firm in Thrissur after Chandrabose's death.

Nisham's family members also said they would move an appeal in the High Court as the trial court did not look into the attack against Nisham.

Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala said the prosecution was asked to move an appeal seeking maximum punishment for the culprit.

This has been one of the most sensational cases in Kerala in recent years. Nisham is the managing director of Tamil Nadu-based King Beedi Co. Apart from being a prominent tobacco supplier, he had business interests ranging from a hotel in Dubai to jewellery businesses in the Middle East and Kerala (King's Jewellers in Triprayar, Thrissur) to real-estate. He owned a fleet of 18 imported cars, including Bentley, Rolls-Royce, Aston Martin, Road Ranger, Ferrari and Jaguar. Nisham had faced several traffic offences connected with these massive vehicles.

However, Nisham's return from a late night party in Thrissur to his apartment at Sobha City on the night of January 29, 2014 in his Hummer SUV was the beginning of the fall of the powerful businessman. Nisham rammed his SUV into Chandrabose and pinned him against a concrete wall, reportedly over a delay in opening the gates of Sobha City.

After ramming him against a wall, he dumped Chandrabose at the back of the Hummer and drove to the parking area of the apartment complex, where he further assaulted him. Nisham prevented others from taking the victim to the hospital. Later, the police, who reached on being alerted by the Sobha City staff, rushed Chandrabose to Amala Hospital in Thrissur where he died two weeks later. Nisham was then charged with murder.

The attack leading to the security guard's death exposed the criminal history of Nisham, who had allegedly been involved in 11 cases, but managed to escape prosecution. He had enjoyed clout among leaders of all political parties and police officials.

While an undertrial in the murder case, Nisham was listed as a goon after the state police slapped relevant sections of the Kerala Anti-Social Activities Prevention Act. Accordingly, he

was consigned to jail without any trial for six months.

Nisham moved a bail plea in the Supreme Court which was rejected with the court observing that the case showed the rich were becoming egocentric.

When the trial began, prime prosecution witness K C Anoop, a colleague of Chandrabose, turned hostile. He said he had not seen Chandrabose being hit by the vehicle driven by Nisham. The statement triggered a ruckus, forcing Anoop to correct it. When the trial resumed, Anoop told the court that he had diluted his statement under duress from Nisham’s family, and went back to the original version in which he said he had seen Chandrabose being attacked by Nisham.

The case also triggered ripples in the police department. Former Kerala DGP K S Balasubramaniam faced allegations that he tried to protect Nisham. Then Thrissur city police commissioner Jacob Job was suspended for a secret meeting with Nisham.