

Sri Lankan police arrest Tamil rapper under draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act

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Sangeethsan Ganeskumar, 24, who performs under the name “Hiphop Sangee,” a rapper from Udayanagar in Kilinochchi in war-ravaged northern Sri Lanka, was arrested by the Jaffna Police Crime Division on June 2 under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). After being produced before the Chavakachcheri Magistrate, he was remanded until June 17 at the insistence of the police.

Under the PTA, detainees can be held for extended periods, including for more than a year, and subjected to lengthy interrogations. Sri Lankan police are notorious for extracting confessions through torture and other forms of abuse. Sangeethsan now faces these serious dangers.

On May 31, Sangeethsan performed at a musical event held at a Hindu temple in Navatkuli, Chavakachcheri, in the Jaffna District. During the performance, he sang songs that police claim indirectly glorified the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Edited versions of the songs were subsequently posted on his TikTok account.

Following a visit to Sangeethsan at Jaffna Prison, former parliamentarian M. A. Sumanthiran, acting general secretary of the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK), told reporters that lawyer K. Sayanthan had argued in court that the singer’s actions did not constitute an offence under the PTA and that the case should be dismissed. Since the court refused to release him, Sumanthiran said that a fundamental rights petition would be filed in the Supreme Court.

On Saturday, hundreds of people demonstrated in Kilinochchi town demanding the singer’s immediate release. Yesterday, there was also a protest in the northern town of Vavuniya.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) condemns this blatant attack on freedom of expression and demands Sangeethsan’s immediate and unconditional release. The SEP makes this principled demand notwithstanding the

party’s long-standing socialist opposition to Tamil nationalism and the separatist LTTE.

This arrest is part of the ongoing assault on democratic rights overseen by the government of President Anura Kumara Dissanayake. Police-state methods are being used to suppress political opponents and the struggles of workers, the poor, and young people.

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People’s Power (JVP/NPP) government came to power pledging to abolish the autocratic executive presidency, repeal the PTA, and refrain from using repressive laws, while promising to protect freedom of expression. In the north and east—where people are still suffering from the scars of the 26-year anti-Tamil war, which ended in 2009 with the defeat of the LTTE—the JVP/NPP promised to release political prisoners and return lands belonging to ordinary people that remain under military control.

These promises were made only to exploit popular anger against the anti-democratic rule of previous administrations. The pledges were abandoned once Dissanayake’s party came to power. It has backed the police in freely using the PTA, imposed Essential Public Services regulations to ban industrial action, and promulgated Emergency Regulations that can be used to override normal laws.

In the north and east, where the Tamil majority lives, the police and the military are carrying out surveillance of political activists, writers, journalists, and young people under the guise of curbing a “revival of LTTE terrorism.” The government’s actions are in line with the JVP’s long record of promoting Sinhala communal politics and anti-Tamil chauvinism.

The arrest of Sangeethsan is part of the systematic intimidation and repression of journalists, artists and singers. In late May, during a live performance by singer S. Gokulan, police officers appeared on the stage and ordered him to stop, claiming that his song was supportive

of the LTTE. The following day, he was summoned to a police station and questioned.

In August 2025, a journalist named Ganapathipillai Kumanan was questioned by the Anti-Terrorism Squad for reporting on the Chemmani mass grave. About 150 skeletons were found at the site, including those of an infant, believed to be the remains of people killed during the war.

When Pradeepan Deepachelvan, a writer working as a teacher in Kilinochchi, brought books printed in India to Sri Lanka, officials confiscated them at customs, claiming—without a shred of evidence—that they could pose a threat to “national security.”

On Friday, June 5, the president of the Valikamam East Divisional Council, T. Niros, was questioned by police for organising the 52nd commemoration of “Martyr Pon. Sivakumaran,” an LTTE cadre who died in 1974 after swallowing a cyanide capsule to avoid arrest.

This repression has also extended to Muslims opposing Israel’s genocidal war in Gaza. Mohammed Rusdi was arrested by the Police Counter Terrorism Division in Colombo on March 22, 2025, under the PTA for allegedly pasting stickers condemning Israel’s attacks on Gaza. Amid widespread opposition, police were compelled to release him after two weeks of detention.

Mohammed Rifai Mohammed Suhail, a 21-year-old Muslim youth, was arrested on similar allegations under the PTA and detained for nine months from October 2024.

Seventeen years after the military defeat of the LTTE, the ongoing military occupation in the North and East of the country, and the anti-democratic measures imposed more broadly throughout the island, reflect the deep fear in the ruling class about anger over soaring social inequality.

In accordance with the dictates of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the JVP government is imposing brutal austerity measures on working people including higher taxes, increased utility charges, and cuts to social spending. The government is strengthening the machinery of repression in preparation to suppress future struggles by workers and the poor. The draconian action against the singer Sangeethsan must be taken as a further warning of the attacks being prepared against the population more broadly.

A number of Tamil parties have condemned the arrest of Sangeethsan. ITAK MP S. Siridaran said that free speech was being suppressed and that racism is rampant, forcing young people to emigrate. He added that the

Dissanayake government is following the same repressive path as former presidents, including Chandrika Kumaratunga, Ranil Wickremesinghe, and Mahinda Rajapakse.

The Tamil National People’s Front (TNPf) and other nationalist organisations have appealed to the so-called “international community” to intervene. TNPf general secretary Selvaraj Gajendran said that Sri Lankan governments are “escaping international scrutiny” by posing as defenders of democratic rights.

This is bogus. The imperialist powers led by the US have backed, and continue to back, the anti-democratic rule of Colombo regimes in pursuit of their own interests. When they occasionally raise human rights violations in Sri Lanka, it is only to strengthen their control over the government.

The defence of democratic rights for the Tamil people cannot be entrusted to the Tamil capitalist parties, which call for the repeal of the PTA and the release of political prisoners only to hoodwink the masses. They seek the support of the Dissanayake administration to secure the privileges of the Tamil elite.

These parties are openly pro-imperialist and support the ongoing US-Israeli wars and military operations in the Middle East, including the genocidal assault on Gaza.

The Socialist Equality Party opposed the bloody anti-Tamil communal war waged by successive Sri Lankan governments and demands the complete withdrawal of the military from the north and east. We call on the working class and rural masses—Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim alike—to unite and take up the struggle for socialism and internationalism, in opposition to all the capitalist parties. This is the only way to put an end to communal discrimination and secure the democratic rights of the Tamil minority and other oppressed communities.



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