



CPA Statement on the Arrest of the Mayor of Jaffna

9th April 2021, Colombo, Sri Lanka: The Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) condemns the arrest of Mr. Viswalingam Manivannan, the Mayor of Jaffna, under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act, No. 48 of 1979 [PTA Act] and calls for his immediate release.

Details surrounding the arrest are limited but based on the statement issued by the Police spokesperson and statements made in Parliament today (9th April) the arrest is based on a uniform worn by several individuals recruited to the Jaffna Municipal Council. The Police spokesperson's statement alleges that this uniform was "similar to the uniforms worn by the de facto LTTE police during the war" but provides little details on what the similarities are. The spokesperson also states that the arrests were carried out on the instructions of the Minister of Public Security.

Whilst details remain unclear, on the face of it, this seems to be a dispute about the functions of a unit set up by the Jaffna Municipal Council. The Constitution and other laws provide for mechanisms to resolve such issues. It is deeply troubling that the government is resorting to the criminal legislation such as the PTA in order to stamp its authority over decentralized government entities and to detain an elected official on such tenuous grounds. CPA has over the decades noted the deeply problematic use of PTA to detain individual for prolonged periods of time without charge and with limited due process safeguards. It is a draconian law which should have no place within a democracy. Further, CPA calls on the government to respect the democratic process and to desist from using criminal law to resolve any disputes that might occur with decentralized government entities. Such highhanded actions are unwarranted and, as seen in the past, will be counterproductive to the long term peace and security of the Sri Lankan state.