

Rights org slams DMK, says 19 extrajudicial killings since 2021

*People's Watch urged the State Human Rights Commission to probe the recent killing of a chain snatcher by Chennai police and demanded that the police onnel involved be immediately suspended.*



File photo of Tamil Nadu CM MK Stalin

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People's Watch, a human rights organisation, has condemned the extrajudicial killing of a man accused of carrying out a string of chain snatchings in Chennai. The accused, identified as Jaffar Ghulam Hussain Irani, was shot dead in Chennai by Tamil Nadu police earlier this week. In a statement, People's Watch said, "Ever since the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) came to power four years ago, custodial torture and deaths and fake encounters have been on the rise."

On March 25, Jaffar and a man identified as Misamum Dhusvasam Mesam Irani, were arrested at Chennai airport while attempting to flee. The two men were accused of carrying out six chain snatchings earlier the same day and were tracked down after Chennai police launched a massive man hunt. Salman Hussain, the third accused, was apprehended by the Railway Protection Force (RPF) at Ongole railway station in Andhra Pradesh.

Addressing the media on March 26, Chennai Commissioner of Police (CoP) Arun said that Jaffar had led police personnel to an abandoned plot of land near the Taramani railway station in Chennai at 2:30 am, where he had allegedly hidden the stolen jewellery and the motorbike used in the crime. There, police claim, Jaffar pulled out a pistol hidden on the bike and fired at them. They returned fire in "self-defence," wounding Jaffar. He was taken to a private hospital, where he was declared dead.

“CoP Arun seems to be writing a film script. He should work in the cinema industry,” the Peoples Watch statement said.

Pointing out discrepancies in the police narrative, the statement posed several questions to police. “Knowing that an accused person may try to escape, why did the police not handcuff him as per section 43(3) of BNSS? Why did the thieves park the motorbike, said to have a Karnataka registration, at an abandoned plot in Taramani? Why did they hide a pistol on the bike? The thief who was on the train could have easily carried the pistol with him. Why did Thiruvanmiyur Inspector Mohammed Buhari fail in searching the bike? How was the thief able to secure the pistol? What was the reason to take Jaffar to a private hospital when there is a government hospital nearby?”

According to reports, Inspector Buhari allegedly pulled the trigger on Jaffar. The statement also alleged that Buhari was the same police officer who shot and killed another accused, Thiruvengatam, in 2024. “In the eight months since CoP Arun took over, there have been four extrajudicial killings. Has this brought down the crime rate?” the rights organisation asked.

Thiruvengatam, one of the accused in the brutal murder of late Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) Tamil Nadu president K Armstrong, was shot dead in July 2024. In September 2024, a history sheeter identified as Kakathoppu Balaji was also shot in an extrajudicial killing. A week later, a second history sheeter known as ‘Seizing’ Raja was shot and killed. Raja was initially believed to be a suspect in Armstrong’s murder, but police later clarified that he was not connected to the case.

People’s Watch said 19 people have lost their lives so far in 16 extrajudicial ‘encounters’ since 2021—the year the DMK came to power. “On April 18, 2022, a man named Vignesh died due to custodial torture at the Chennai G5 police station. At the time, Chief Minister MK Stalin announced in the state Assembly that such police atrocities would not take place in Tamil Nadu in the future. What happened to that announcement? Is the CM aware of ongoing police atrocities?” the statement asked.

“When Opposition members raise this issue in the Assembly, the state government skillfully replies that crime rates are comparatively lesser under their regime. Crime rates do not decrease just because police turn to violence,” the statement said.

“The police are functioning unchecked in the name of maintaining law and order. The CM has to put an end to this,” the statement said. People’s Watch demanded that the police personnel involved in Jaffar’s killing be immediately suspended. They also urged the State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) to take cognizance of the killing and open an investigation.