

## Tamil Nadu minister dropped from cabinet on abduction charges

Tamil Nadu Minister of Textiles N.K.K.P. Raja was Thursday dropped from the cabinet following allegations that he had kidnapped three of a family in order to usurp their property.

Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi recommended his removal and Governor Surjeet Singh Barnala accepted the recommendation.

Raja was dropped after a couple, who were kidnapped in June by Raja and freed by police, complained Wednesday before the state human rights commission that their son was being held by the minister.

The couple, Palanichamy and Malarvizhi, complained that their son G. Sivabalan is in the custody of the minister.

'We have sought the intervention of the state human rights commission to set him free immediately,' the couple's lawyer R. Ramesh had told IANS.

'Raja is holding my son because he hopes Sivabalan will make a statement in favour of his attempt to grab our ancestral property,' Malarvizhi told reporters.

Raja, however, has denied the allegations.

'Anybody can use my name and accuse me of anything because I am a public figure. That doesn't mean the charges are true,' Raja had claimed July 30 in Erode, his hometown as well as that of the couple.

A division bench of the Madras High Court July 28 ordered the police to give protection to the middle-aged couple, living in Erode's vicinity. The couple were kidnapped in June and rescued by the police upon the intervention of the Madras High Court.

Leader of the Opposition and AIADMK chief J. Jayalalitha had condemned Raja's continuation in the cabinet following the serious charges recorded against him in the high court.

Several reports of land-grabbing have appeared in the local media in Erode, an industrial region that accounts for roughly 25 percent of the nation's machine and hand-woven textile output, following the creation of a railway divisional headquarters in nearby Salem.

Situated in a 100-km radius - some 300 km southwest of [Chennai](#) - the twin textile districts of Erode and Salem were considered very prosperous till industrial pollution, power and water shortage rendered them almost unviable in financial terms.

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