



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS' ALERT - INDIA

NATIONAL SECRETARIAT

No. 555, West Cross 4th Street, K.K.Nagar, Madurai - 625 020, Tamil Nadu, India.

Mobile: 99943-68540

E.mail: hrda.india@gmail.com Web: www.hrdaindia.org

January 05, 2023

To,
Mr. Indrajeet Kumar,
National Focal Point - Human Rights Defenders & Assistant Registrar,
National Human Rights Commission,
Manav Adhikar Bhawan,
Block-C, GPO Complex, INA, New Delhi –110 023
Email: hrd-nhrc@nic.in

Dear Sir,

Sub: HRD Alert – Urgent Appeal for Action – Manipur- Intimidation, harassment and arbitrary detention of senior journalist by the Manipur police for expressing his opinion on TV.

Greetings from Human Rights Defenders Alert!

HRD Alert -India is a forum of Human Rights Defenders for Human Rights Defenders. It endeavours to initiate actions on behalf of Human Rights Defenders under threat or with security concerns.

We are writing to express our concern regarding the harassment, illegal house search, and arbitrary detention of senior journalist Mr. Hemantakumar Ningombam by police personnel of Imphal East, Manipur for expressing his opinion on TV on the state government's anti-drug policy.

Source of Information:

HRDA North-East Regional Consultant
Other HRDs in the region

Date of Incident:

January 04, 2023

Place of Incident:

Imphal East, Manipur

Perpetrators:

- Police officials of Iribung Police Station Manipur
- Mr. M. Pradip Singh, SP Imphal East
- Mr. Themthing Ngasangva, IPS, Inspector General of Police

About the Human Rights Defenders: Mr. Hemantakumar Ningombam is a senior journalist in Manipur and the Editor of Sanaleibak Daily Manipuri Newspaper.

Details of the Incident:

On 4 January 2023, at around 7:30 AM, three vehicles of Manipur Police personnel lead by the 2nd Officer in Charge of Irilbung Police Station went to the residence of Mr. Hemantakumar Ningombam, editor of Sanaleibak Daily, a newspaper in Manipur. The police personnel entered and searched all the rooms, including that of the ladies, looking for Ningombam.

Later, the security personnel took him to the Irilbung Police Station and detained him there. Hemantakumar was taken to the police station in his own vehicle with one police personnel. Mr. M. Pradip Singh, SP Imphal East and Mr. Themthing Ngasangva, IGP came to meet the editor at the police station. He was detained for around 4 hours at the police station and later released.

The reason for the detention as given by the police was for expressing his opinion on War on Drugs in relation to the poppy cartel in ISTV (local cable TV network) discussion. The statement that Mr. Ningombam expressed in the discussion was:

“The government claims to be sincere in trying to stop poppy plantations in the State. The government has been claiming to uproot poppy plantations completely for some time. I feel that poppy should have been completely eradicated by now but I feel sad that they are not able to do so till now. I want to appeal to the Government and people that to eradicate poppy plantations, please bow down to two women with full submission, only two women. Government, please bow down to these women in high positions. That’s it! I won’t take the names. I am not saying that they are responsible. But only imploring that the Government should seek their support to solve the problem. Otherwise, the land will be doomed and ask them to love the land. Hon’ble Chief Minister please use any means, witchcraft or sorcery to take help of these two women. Then, and only then, half the problem will be solved. Sending police and thrashing poppy with sticks and posting photos will not solve the problem. Kindly look into the matter. ”We believe that the illegal house search and detention of a senior journalist for expressing their opinion on TV is a shocking act of curtailment of the Right to Freedom of Expression.

Our Constitution gives journalists the right to exercise freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(a) of the Indian Constitution which is crucial to the work of journalists. The right to freedom of expression encompasses three different aspects: 1) the right to hold opinions without interference; 2) the right of access to information; and 3) the right to impart information and ideas of all kind.

The UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders 1998 seeks to protect the monitoring and advocacy functions of defenders by recognizing their right to obtain and disseminate information relevant to the enjoyment of human rights. If journalists are muffled up their reporting on facts when they criticise politicians and public officials, seldom will they dare to take a stand and the fourth pillar of democracy will be crushed further. The protection of journalists and human rights defenders, and ending impunity for attacks against them, is a priority for safeguarding freedom of expression. States are under an obligation to prevent, protect against, and prosecute attacks against journalists and human rights defenders. A free press and active civil society are

essential to ensure the public's right to know so that governments and institutions can be held accountable.

This is not the first time the security personnel arrested and detained journalists in the state for expressing his/her opinion against the government. Earlier, there have been numerous cases where many journalists have been arrested and booked under the National Security Act on frivolous charges. However, in the present case, it is for suggesting to the Government how to effectively conduct its War on Drugs. We firmly believe that the act of subjecting a senior journalist to a search without any search memo and then subjecting him to harassment by detaining him in a police station are acts of political reprisal to suppress any dissent against government policy of the war on drugs. Mr. Hemantakumar Ningombam also said that the police could have called him in good faith rather than the heavy-handed approach where he was publicly humiliated in front of the locality as if he is a criminal. A house search needs a prior notice or search warrant which was not given by the police.

Appeal:

We appeal to the NHRC to treat this as a case of reprisal against a journalist and human rights defender for exercising his constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights, and urge the NHRC to urgently –

- Direct the Director General of Police of Manipur to initiate an immediate, independent, thorough, transparent, effective and impartial investigation into the arbitrary detention of journalist and submit a report to the NHRC within two weeks.

Provide security to the journalist Mr. Hemantakumar Ningombam as he stands at further risk of reprisals and submit a report to the NHRC within two weeks. We hope to hear from you soon,

Yours Sincerely,



Henri Tiphagne
National Working Secretary