

# Human Rights Defenders Alert - India

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**17 May 2013**

The Chairperson

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Dear Sir,

**Sub: *HRD Alert - India - Urgent Appeal for Action – Manipur - Arbitrary Arrest of human rights defenders Mr. Mandir and Mr. Hemo - Reg***

Greetings from Human Rights Defenders Alert - India!

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 now writing to express our grave concern regarding the arbitrary arrest of Mr. Mandir Laishram, and Mr. Ningthoujam Hemo on Sunday, 12 May 2013 at Thoubal Police Station, Manipur.

## **About the Human Rights Defender under attack:**

Mr. Mandir is the secretary of Social Action Development Organization (SADO), a community based organization which works for the promotion of human rights and co-existence and environmental sustainability. Mr. Hemo is the vice-president of Eastern Musical Association (EMA), a local musical/band organization. Both the defenders were arrested by the Thoubal police on Sunday, 12 May 2013 at Wangjing outpost, Thoubal.

**The Perpetrators:**

1. Mr. Ibomcha, Superintendent of Police, Manipur
2. Thoubal Police, Manipur

**Date and Time of Incident:** On Sunday, 12 May 2013.

**Place of Incident:** Wangjing out post, Thoubal, Manipur.

**Incident:**

Mr. Mandir Laishram (40 years) son of (Late) L. Meijao and Mr. Ningthoujam Hemo (50 years) son of (Late) Thambalngou were arrested by Manipur Police stationed at Thoubal Police Station on the day of the incident.

On 12 May 2013, Dr. AK Jhaljit, Superintendent of Police (SP), Thoubal District called up Mandir to have a conversation in connection with a recent incident at Heirok. Mandir and Hemo accompanied by some musicians of EMA visited Thoubal Police Station to meet the SP. But the SP did not turn up till 5.30 in the evening. They returned home informing the officers of the Thoubal Police that they would meet the SP the next day.

On their way home, one Mr. Ibomcha, Sub-Inspector (SI) of Thoubal Police called Mandir over phone asking if they had reached home. Even before they could reach their respective houses, they were intercepted by some personnel of Manipur Police in front of the Police outpost at Wangjing. The police officials asked if Mandir and Hemo were in the group. Mandir and Hemo identified themselves. SI Ibomcha, who is also the Investigating Officer (IO), also rushed to the spot. Thereafter, the other musicians were allowed to leave the place and Mandir and Hemo were taken away by the police team led by SI Ibomcha. Both Mandir and Hemo were produced before the Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM) at Thoubal and remanded to police custody for 5 days. Police registered an FIR No. 84(5)13 TBL-PS under sections 148/149/427/447/353 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) added with section 343 IPC, 3 Prevention of Damage of Public Property Act & 7 Criminal Law Amendment Act. However, the copy of the FIR and arrest memo is yet to be issued to the families of the arrested human rights defenders.

**Background:**

The background of the matter is that on the intervening night of 10 and 11 April 2013, a musician's team of the EMA was returning home in an auto-rickshaw after performing Thabal Chongba, a community dance held at night time. The musician team consisted of Mr. Moirangthem Deepak (27), Mr. N Sanatombi (36), Mr. L Nongdamba (27), Mr. L Angangchaoba, (45), Mr. N Robin (30), Mr. H. Dev (29), and Mr. Thongjao H Keshorjit (38) and included the auto driver Indrakumar. When they reached a place adjoining Heirok and Wangjing village, they were signaled to stop by a torch light shone on them by some police personnel in plainclothes led by the Sub-Inspector (SI) Premjit of Heirok police outpost. As the police personnel were not in uniforms, the team did not know that they were police and so that did not stop. As soon as they recognized some of the police personnel by their looks, the team stopped their auto-rickshaw. However, SI Premjit who was in police uniform came to them and asked why they did not stop and started to beat up the auto driver Indrakumar and pushed him to a nearby drain, even before they could make an explanation. The team were paraded in a line and subjected to torture with rifles butt and sticks by the police personnel. One Mr. Deepak sustained a major injury on his head and the others sustained minor injuries due to the torture. Deepak was taken to the nearby Community Health Centre (CHC). SI Premjit also reportedly threatened the group not to disclose the matter to anyone.

A public meeting was held and a Joint Action Committee (JAC) was formed to ensure that necessary legal action was taken against the high handed police personnel. The meeting appointed Mr. Mandir as the secretary of the JAC. A representation demanding suspension of the police personnel including registration of an FIR against those involved in the torture was submitted to the Chief Minister of Manipur. The JAC also set a deadline to take necessary action. As no action was taken, on 11 April 2013, the indignant community of Heirok village marched towards the Heirok police outpost and staged an angry protest. With no action coming from the authority, the villagers of Heirok burnt down the effigies of the Home Minister, the local MLA who is also Education Minister and SP of Thoubal on 8 May 2013.

Mr. Mandir has been active in defending the basic human rights of the community. In the past, he was also involved in the campaign against the fake surrender. It is to be mentioned that individuals from different parts of the State had been misguided and made to fake themselves as members of insurgent groups and stage surrender dramas. Particularly youths were promised jobs at security forces by some vested interests in connivance with the officials of the security forces. In the month of December 2012, 6/7 youths of the Heirok village, where Mr. Mandir is living, were saved from such incident.

Mandir was also actively involved in campaign against the arming of villagers of Heirok in 2008. On March 24, 2008, some insurgents indiscriminately open fired during the Thabal Chongba dance. As a result, some villagers lost their lives and a girl had lost her eyesight. Villagers, particularly the youth, spontaneously asked the government to provide arms to protect themselves from the insurgents. In response, the State Government recruited youths of the Heirok villagers as Special Police Officers (SPO). They had been given arms and also paid a few hundred rupees as honorarium for their service. The SPOs were later renamed as Village Defiance Force (VDF). The State Government opened a Police outpost at Heirok and posted those villagers, who were recruited, as VDF. Latter, the Director General of Police (DGP) notified the recruitment of 1,550 VDF personnel who would be posted to different parts of the State. As of now there are more than ten thousand youths who have been inducted as VDF in the State of Manipur. Reports accusing the personnel of VDF to be involved in extortion and other crimes are the major concern of the citizens.

## **Appeal**

We, therefore, urge you to immediately take necessary steps to ensure that:-

- Mr. Mandir and Mr. Hemo are released immediately and unconditionally since their detention is only arbitrary as it only aims at impeding his human rights activities. .
- All necessary measures are taken to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Mr. Mandir and Mr. Hemo.
- All acts of repression are stopped and the illegal, unjust and economically destructive project is withdrawn immediately.

- All human rights defenders in India are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment in all circumstances.
- Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by India is guaranteed

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard,

Yours sincerely,



**Henri Tiphagne**

Honorary Working Secretary  
Human Rights Defenders Alert - India

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