



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS' ALERT - INDIA

NATIONAL SECRETARIAT

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October 9, 2018

To,

Mr. Khaleel Ahmed

National Focal Point - Human Rights Defenders & Deputy 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 - India - Urgent Appeal for Action – Arbitrary arrest of journalist
Nakheeran Gopal at Chennai Airport - Regarding**

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 writing to express our grave concern over the arbitrary arrest of senior journalist *Nakheeran Gopal* by police at Chennai International Airport.

Status of Human Rights Defender:

Mr. Gopal is the Editor of *Nakheeran*, a Tamil bi-weekly magazine based in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. Mr. Gopal has a journalistic experience of over two decades covering sensitive social and political issues.

Source of Information on the Incident:

- Media Reports
- Communication from other HRDs in the region

Perpetrators:

Chennai City Police

Details of the Incident

Mr. Gopal, was arrested around 8AM at the Chennai airport when he was about to board a flight to Pune for attending an event there, by a team of police personnel from Chennai City Police. It is learned that Mr. Gopal has been accused of defaming the Governor and is charged under Section 124 of Indian Penal Code.

He has been arrested for carrying out an article in his magazine few weeks ago regarding the alleged scandal involving Tamil Nadu college professor Nirmala Devi, who was arrested in the "sex-for-marks" scam. She has been charged for forcing and luring girl students into offering sexual favours to university officials in return for marks. Many audio clippings of the conversations between Nirmala Devi trying to lure girl students were leaked, which erupted to a political controversy and led to her arrest. This case was transferred to the Tamil Nadu Crime Branch – Criminal Investigation Division (CB-CID)

In the recent article in Nakheeran, it was claimed that Nirmala Devi had confessed to the CB-CID officers in meeting the Governor of Tamil Nadu Mr. Banwarilal Purohit, who is also chancellor of the university, and R Rajagopal IAS, Secretary of Raj Bhavan, with girl students at Raj Bhavan and other places too. The Governor has denied the allegations and clarified that he never met the accused professor by holding a press meet and also appointed a one-member inquiry commission headed by former IAS officer R Santhanam.

HRDA is of the view that this is a clear case of attack on freedom of press and intimidation. No proper due process has been followed by the police after a complaint had been registered regarding the article in Nakheeran, and no summons were issued to him to investigate on the complaint. Instead, the police had arrested a senior journalist arbitrarily at the airport.

Appeal:

We, therefore urge you to immediately take necessary steps and:

- Order an immediate, independent, thorough, transparent, effective and impartial investigation into the above-mentioned incident of arbitrary arrest of Mr. Gopal
- Ensure that all the false complaints filed against the HRD to harass and threaten them should be quashed.
- Ensure provision of reparation, compensation, apology to the defender for the psychological sufferings she has undergone because of the threats and provide a re-assurance of not engaging in such acts against HRDs.

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Henri Tiphagne', with a horizontal line underneath it.

(Henri Tiphagne)

National Working Secretary