

Will Manipur government arrest those who discuss govt decisions?



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A human rights activist was arrested in Manipur for discussing a state government's decision in a public forum.

Sapam Kangleipal Meitei, 27 years, was discussing the impact of arming the civilians with weapons on the conditions prevalent in Manipur state. The state government had decided to give 500 gun licenses to natives of two villages in Manipur state.

State government decided to hand over 500 gun licenses to civilians because armed cadres of People Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), an armed opposition group in Manipur, had reportedly shot-dead two girls and a boy while seriously injuring the eyes of another girl on 24 March 2008. So the civilians of these villages were demanding arms for self-defense.

The only crime of Sapam was to have a public dialogue on the government's decision to allot gun licenses to civilians for self-defense.

Sapam was picked up from the Manipur Press Club on 7 May 2008 on charges of sedition against Government shortly after the public discussion.

The police team reportedly led by Mr. Munan and Mr. Khomdon, officer-in-charges of City Police and Imphal Police Station (West) respectively and forced to switch off the live telecast of the public discussion through a local cable TV network (ISTV).

Soon after Sapam completed his speech, a (special) police commando team also allegedly entered the venue on the main entrance of the hall and physically pulled him aside. A lawyer who was one of the panelists requested the police not to do any undesirable illegal action.

The police waited until the end of the programme to arrest Sapam without any legal procedure.

Before his arrest, Mr. Kangleipal reportedly told to the media "If we could not discuss and express regarding a decision of a Democratic Government, what is the meaning of democracy".

He was arrested in connection with FIR No. 129 (5) 08 Indian Penal Code (IPC) under section 124 A IPC and section 9 of Punjab security Act and Section 8 (b) Assam Maintenance of Public Order Act.

Is it illegal to hold discussions on the merits and demerits of the decisions of your own state government?

The issue of arming the civilians for self defense in a violence-torn state like Manipur is of deep concern.

"Weapons have never brought peace and security to communities. It has only aggravated the polarization by exacerbating the inequities" said Dr Sandeep Pandey, who is a Ramon Magsaysay Awardee (2002) and a

noted social activist heading National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM).

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