

6 April 2020

India: Arbitrary arrests and judicial harassment of members of Youth's Forum for Protection of Human Rights

On 1 April 2020, police arrested the secretary of **Youth's Forum for Protection of Human Rights, T Shadishkanta**, at his home without producing a warrant. The following day, the organisation's president, **Kh Phajaton**, was detained in a similar manner, without being informed of the charges levied against him. Both human rights defenders have been released on bail but remain under investigation.

Youth's Forum for Protection of Human Rights (YFPHR) was established in 2016. The organisation has been on the forefront of the human rights movement in the seven sister states of the north-east region of India. They actively work on the rights of indigenous peoples, women and children, as well as on issues of climate justice and environmental rights. The group has also been advocating against the unsustainable development projects that have been springing up in the region.

On 1 April 2020, at 10pm, Imphal East police officials arrested YFPHR's secretary T Shadishkanta at his home, in the absence of an official arrest warrant. On the following day, Kh Phajaton, the organisation's president, was also detained without being informed of the reason for his arrest. Upon detention, both human rights defenders were asked to sign arrest memos that did not include details of the time and place of arrest.

Later on 2 April, the human rights defenders were informed that a suo-motu case was registered against them under Section 51 of the Disaster management act of 2005, which deals with refusal to comply with directions given by governing bodies; and under section 120B of the Indian Penal Code, which concerns criminal conspiracy. Both defenders were produced before the Link Magistrate at 9:30pm and released after paying a surety bond of INR 30,000 (approximately 360 euros) each. They remain under investigation.

Other YFPHR staff believe that the organisation and its members are being targeted for an article they released opposing the government's proposal to set up a quarantine center in a paddy field, as it might pose a threat to the livelihood of the people of the area. In the article, the group suggested an alternative site for the quarantine center, a vast unused piece of land known as the Koirengei Airfield.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the arbitrary arrests and judicial harassment of members of the Youth's Forum for Protection of Human Rights. It believes that the human rights defenders are being targeted solely as a result of their peaceful human rights activities and their exercise of the right to freedom of expression.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in India to:

1. Immediately cease the investigation close the case against Kh Phajaton and T Shadishkanta, as Front Line Defenders believes that they are being targeted solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Guarantee in all circumstances that 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.

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