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India: Judicial harassment of human rights defender Laishram Herojit Singh

On 7 April 2021, human rights defender **Laishram Herojit Singh**, alias Sintha, was arrested at his home by officers from the Thoubal Police station in the North East Indian state of Manipur. The defender was arrested on charges under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for his alleged membership of a militant group. On 12 April 2021, the court accepted the human rights defender's bail application, however the charges against him remain.

[Laishram Herojit Singh](#), alias Sintha, is a human rights defender and a strong advocate against the increasingly powerful drug nexus in the region. He is the Secretary General of the Coalition Against Drug and Alcohol (CADA) in Thoubal District, a civil society organisation campaigning against the impact of drug and alcohol abuse. In his capacity, the human rights defender has led several campaigns to further awareness on the topic. Sintha also actively engages with and advocates against the issues of violence against women and children, mining and its impact on rights of Indigenous communities and the protection and preservation of the environment in the state of Manipur.

On 7 April 2021, about 20 police officers from the Thoubal station arrested human rights defender Laishram Herojit Singh from his home in Thoubal, on charges under Section 39 of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), which relates to the offence of giving support to a terrorist organisation. Neither the human rights defender nor his family, who were present in the house at the time of his arrest, were shown an arrest warrant. Sintha was then taken to the Thoubal police station where, according to the human rights defender, he was slapped and asked to sign an arrest memo, claiming he worked with a militant group, which he refused to sign. Contrary to the fact that he was arrested from his home in Thoubal, the First Information Report (FIR) filed by the police against Sintha states that he was detained in Wangjing, after the police reportedly received information that members of the United National Liberation Front militant group, were in Wangjing at the time. The FIR claims that Sintha was detained for the suspicious manner in which he was behaving while allegedly in Wangjing.

Earlier that day, Sintha had participated in a peaceful protest against the acquittal of an influential individual accused in a highly publicised drug haul case from 2018. Along with placards condemning the acquittal, protestors also carried placards with messages calling for the resignation of the chief minister of the state, for his complacency in the case. Once the protest dispersed, a local police official contacted one of the protest organisers and mentioned that the authorities were unhappy about the slogans directed against the chief minister.

The following day, on 8 April 2021, Sintha appeared before the court of Chief Judicial Magistrate in Thoubal, and was asked whether he accepted the charges against him, which the human rights defender categorically denied. Sintha was then remanded to four days in police custody and on 12 April 2021, was granted bail by the Chief Judicial Magistrate in Thoubal District. The charges against the human rights defender remain however.

Human rights defenders and colleagues of Sintha believe that his arrest and the charges levelled against him are in direct reprisal for his human rights work, advocating against powerful forces within the state and the interests of powerful criminal entities. Front Line Defenders condemns the judicial harassment of human rights defender Laishram Herojit Singh, as it believes he is being targeted as a result of his human rights work to protect the local community against powerful and corrupt interests in Manipur. It believes that the use of the UAPA against him and other human rights defenders is aimed at vilifying them as terrorists and silencing their work in defence of

human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in India to:

1. Immediately drop all charges against Laishram Herojit Singh, as Front Line Defenders believes he is being targeted solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful human rights work;
2. Cease the police, military and judicial harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders in Manipur;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that 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 police and judicial harassment.

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