



Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF)
Conglomerate of Recognised Tribes in Lamka, Outer Manipur

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PRESS RELEASE

The Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF) is concerned about the possible fallout of bail being granted to five armed men who were impersonating security forces in Manipur.

The five men were wearing camouflage dress and carrying sophisticated weapons - one INSAS rifle, one SLR rifle and two .303 rifles - along with ammunition in their vehicle when they were arrested on September 16. They were charged under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

Despite this, members of their community led by women (Meira Paibis) have been protesting for almost a week to demand their release.

The fact that the men were dressed in uniforms shows they had nefarious intent, and the argument that they are volunteers defending "innocent villagers" rings hollow.

Security forces have repeatedly flagged their concerns about the misuse of police and security force uniforms by Meitei militants, who are using it to get past security barriers to attack Kuki-Zo tribals.

Compare this to the May 22 arrest and denial of bail to former tribal MLA TT Haokip, who is accused of instigating two youths including his son to threaten women vendors at a market. Police said they recovered registered weapons from his home. But even after four months, women vendors of the said market have not identified Mr. Haokip and his son in the case and, significantly, police have not been able to file charges.

Mr Haokip's counsel also submitted that his client was 71 years old and suffered from various ailments. Despite all these factors, Mr Haokip has been unable to get bail.

Finally, ITLF is fearful that granting of bail to the five Meitei men will only encourage the misuse of uniforms by radicals in the community, who may feel that even if they are caught, the law will not go down hard on them.

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