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India: Illegal detention of 11 year old girl in Manipur must be investigated

Amnesty International is calling for the government of India to launch an independent investigation into allegations that an 11 year old girl was illegally detained by police in the state of Manipur to force her parents - suspected of links with local armed opposition groups to give themselves up.

Bidyarani Devi Salam was taken from her home by security forces on the morning of 14 August and held in police custody for five days. Her illegal detention triggered hundreds of protestors to take to the streets and call for her release.

Local human rights organizations have demanded that legal action be taken against the police for illegally detaining Bidyarani Devi Salam. They have alleged that the police kidnapped the girl to make her parents - who were suspected for helping local armed opposition groups – give themselves up.

“A minor being targeted by armed forces to justify their action against armed opposition groups is a shameful act and should not be tolerated under any circumstance, ” said Madhu Malhotra Deputy Program Director Asia Pacific Amnesty International.

Bidyarani Devi Salam was released and handed over to relatives on Thursday, after police had arrested her parents, on suspicion of helping the Manipur People's Liberation Army.

The police maintain that they had taken the girl for medical treatment after she fainted during their visit to her house to search for her parents. However, the police could not explain why she was not sent to a children's home or to a hospital for treatment.

This is the second time in a month that Manipur has come under sharp focus for gross violations of human rights. On 23 July, Manipur police and security forces shot dead a 27-year-old unarmed former insurgent, Chungkam Sanjit, and a pregnant woman bystander in the main market of Manipur.

Manipur chief minister, Ibobi Singh, has ordered a judicial inquiry into the 23 July killings and suspended six policemen. However, the policemen are yet to be formally charged with murder. A court has given the state government until 25 August to file formal charges

On 4 and 5 August, police detained seven human rights activists including three women after they led protestors to the state governor's residence, seeking the dismissal of the policemen for the murders and the filing of formal charges against them.

“Instead of taking legal action against the security forces committing gross human rights violations the state

has chosen to punish local activists for peacefully raising their voices to seek justice, " said Madhu Malhotra

Manipur has witnessed recurrent protests against the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958, which gives immunity to security and paramilitary forces in conflict with armed opposition groups.

Amnesty International and other human rights organizations have repeatedly demanded the repeal of this legislation which went against India's international obligations to protect human rights.