

2 MANIPUR JOURNALISTS GET NOTICES UNDER NEW RULES

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Two Manipur-based journalists have arguably become the first ones to be slapped with notices under the newly notified Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 over an online discussion titled “Media under siege: are journalists walking a tightrope?”

But the March 1 notices from Naorem Praveen Singh, Deputy Commissioner of Imphal West district, were withdrawn hours after Paojel Chaoba and Kishorechandra Wangkhemcha received them on Tuesday.

Mr. Chaoba is the executive editor and Mr. Wangkhemcha is the associate editor of *The Frontier Manipur (TFM)*, a digital media outlet. The duo and two others — independent journalist Grace Jajo and columnist Ninglun Hanghal — had taken part in the discussion on February 28.

Letter from Ministry

The withdrawal of notices followed a letter from the Information and Broadcasting Ministry to Rajesh Kumar, Manipur’s Chief Secretary, pointing out that the powers to wield the new digital media rules “have not been delegated to State governments/District Magistrate/Police Commissioner”. Mr. Chaoba, who is also the publisher of the *TFM*, said his family found the withdrawal notice put on the gate of their house in the evening. “It is to inform you that this office notice of even number dated March 1, 2020 served to you stands withdrawn with immediate effect,” the notice read.

In the earlier notice, the two editors were directed to furnish all relevant documents showing that they comply with the provisions of the new rules, failing which “steps as deemed fit shall be initiated without further notice”.

“The new IT rules are being used to intimidate journalists, as was evident from six-seven armed policemen who came to deliver the first notice at 9 a.m. today. The Deputy Commissioner retracted the notice because he is not empowered under the Act,” said Mr. Chaoba.

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