

M'laya records 2nd highest custodial deaths in N-E

From Our Spl Correspondent

NEW DELHI: With 16 casualties, Meghalaya has reported the second highest custodial deaths in the north-eastern region, next only to Assam.

Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) in its report titled "Torture in India 2009" says the highest number of custodial deaths in the North-East has been recorded in Assam with 74 deaths in police custody.

Assam and Meghalaya are followed by Arunachal Pradesh (11 deaths) and Tripura (nine deaths).

Interestingly, Manipur, the most disturbed state in the region, has reported only one custodial death. But this was challenged by ACHR director Suhas Chakma who said custodial deaths at the hands of defence forces were not reported to National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

The ACHR report released recently said at the national level Maha-rashtra reported the highest custodial deaths with 192 followed by Uttar Pradesh (128), Gujarat (113), Andhra Pradesh (85), West Bengal (83), Tamil Nadu (76), Assam (74), Karnataka (55), Punjab (41), Madhya Pradesh (38), Bihar and Rajasthan (32 each), Haryana (31), Kerala (30), Jharkhand (29), Delhi (25), Orissa (24), Chhattisgarh (23), Uttarakhand and Meghalaya (16 each), Arunachal Pradesh (11), Jammu and Kashmir and Tripura (9 each), Puducherry and Chandigarh (3 each) and Himachal Pradesh (2) while Manipur, Goa, Sikkim, and Dadra & Nagar Haveli recorded one case each.

In the last eight years an estimated 1,184 people were killed in police custody in India. "Most of the deaths occurred as a result of torture within the first 48 hours in police custody. These deaths, however, do not represent the actual number of deaths in police custody," Mr Chakma said.

A number of such cases taken up by ACHR with NHRC show that police had not reported these custodial deaths to NHRC. While NHRC has expressed concern over police's failure to report all cases of custodial deaths the Commission's guidelines on reporting custodial deaths within 24 hours continue to be flouted, the NHRC chief said. Deaths in the custody of the armed forces and the Indian Army are not reported to NHRC as it does not have jurisdiction to investigate violations committed by the armed forces under Section 19 of the Human Rights Protection Act 1993. ACHR itself has lodged 50 complaints about extra-judicial killings in Manipur alone during 2003-09. Many of these extra-judicial killings allegedly took place in the custody of Manipur police commandos. "Since Manipur police commandos claim that they conduct operations with Central armed forces, the deaths in the custody of the police commandos are not reported to NHRC," Mr Chakma said.