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## NHRC orders compensation for custodial death

From Our Correspondent

**NEW DELHI:** The Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) has welcomed the order of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to award compensation of Rs 5 lakh to the family of 17-year-old Sngewlem Kharsati, who had died due to torture in police custody at Mawryngkneng Police Outpost, East Khasi Hills.

The ACHR in its complaint to the NHRC dated May 11, 2009 stated that the deceased boy was picked up by the police at around 7 pm on May 9 while returning home after his work from Sung valley on the charge of possessing a machete in his tiffin bag. The police beat him up on the road in full public view and then took him to the Mawryngkneng Police Outpost where police personnel including the Officer-in-Charge, Manbhalang Rymbai subjected him to torture, the complaint said. The boy was declared brought dead by the doctors in the Civil Hospital in Shillong.

The NHRC also rejected the police version which claimed that Sngewlem, the son of Bliss Kharsati of Puriang village, had attacked a truck driver with the machete while attempting to commit robbery and was severely assaulted by a mob of truck drivers who were stranded in a traffic jam near the village.

The Commission, in its ruling, observed, "It is difficult to believe that any person would dare commit robbery when there is a traffic jam and so many persons are around. The victim had already died when he was taken to the hospital. This would mean that the injuries were serious. The police paid no regard to the gravity of the injuries and instead of taking him directly to the hospital from the place of occurrence, took him to the police outpost. This only shows insensitivity of the police."

The Commission's order of awarding the compensation was based on the points raised in the ACHR's petition and the enquiry report of the Additional District Magistrate, East Khasi Hills which concluded that "the police version of the incident is not validated."

"The order of the NHRC is a step in the right direction. However, the Commission must take further necessary actions to ensure prosecution of the guilty policemen including the concerned Officer-in-Charge," stated Suhas Chakma, director of ACHR.

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