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NHRC's closure of case draws rights body ire

Garro Hills firing

From Our Spl Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Monday came in for severe criticism from the Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) for closing down the case pertaining to the death of 11 people in firing by security forces at Tura and Williamnagar on September 30 last without any hearing from the victims and their kin.

The ACHR registered a complaint with the NHRC on October 3 against the killings. The later decided to close the case on May 5 after reviewing the report submitted by the Meghalaya government. The NHRC accepted the report of the Meghalaya government that the security forces were forced to resort to firing by the uncontrolled mob at both the places.

A total of 11 people died and 40 were injured in two separate incidents of firing by the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel in the West Garo Hills district on September 30. The firing took place on agitators opposing plans of the state government to shift the headquarter of the MBOSE from Tura to Shillong.

The ACHR lashed out at the national human rights body for 'abruptly closing the case' without giving it a chance for further deliberation.

"The decision of the NHRC to close the complaint without giving the complainant an opportunity to respond to the report of the state government of Meghalaya violates the cardinal principle of natural justice that both the complainant and the respondent be given adequate opportunity to respond to each other's submissions," Mr Suhas Chakma, director of the ACHR said in a statement issued here.

"The decision of the NHRC is incongruous as it enjoys the power of a civil court and majority of its members consist of retired justices from the Supreme Court of India and High Courts, but it does not follow the basic principles of administration of justice," said Mr Chakma.

"By accepting the report of the state government, NHRC has justified the disproportionate use of force and prejudiced the outcome of the Commission of Inquiry headed by Justice (Retd) T C Das that is inquiring into the killing. How can the NHRC close the compliant when the Commission of Inquiry is yet to complete its task?" said Mr Chakma.

Following media report of killing the NHRC had sought comment from the State Chief Secretary on the matter. The State Government informed the Commission that an amount of Rs. 5 Lakh as special financial assistance has been paid to the family of each of those killed in the police firing in addition to Rs 1 lakh ex-gratia and other benefits.

The ACHR also submitted a video clipping of the shooting incident at Tura to the NHRC and demanded reopening of the case based on the footage.