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State repression still haunts Amritsar families

A survey says illegal cremations were resorted to by law enforcing agencies following deaths in custody.

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CHANDIGARH: The trauma being faced by hundreds of families of Amritsar district in Punjab, whose kin were allegedly abducted, tortured, killed and declared unidentified for cremation by security forces to end insurgency in the state, has opened a new chapter on fundamental rights of survivors of state "repression".

A survey conducted in Amritsar district by internationally renowned bodies — Physicians for Human Rights and the Bellevue-New York University School of Medicine Programme for Survivors of Torture — on the physical and psychological impact of human rights violations on families of victims is thought provoking and revealing.

The Committee for Information and Initiative on Punjab (CIIP) has submitted the report before the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

The NHRC is hearing the case of cremations of unidentified dead bodies on behalf of Supreme Court. The apex court on November 15, 1995 appointed NHRC to determine the veracity of allegations of human rights violation and investigate liability and award compensation. The CBI had investigated the case and confirmed 2097 cases of illegal

cremations in Amritsar district alone.

The CIIP has placed the findings of survey report before the NHRC to review its earlier order of limiting the investigation to compensation. The NHRC had announced a compensation of Rs 2.50 lakh for the families of victims but the CIIP has described it inadequate and arbitrary.

Ram Narayan Kumar and Tejinder Kaur both representatives of CIIP said here on Wednesday that monetary compensation was no solution for the sufferings of victims and their family members who are going through psychological disorders and financial hardship.

Mr Kumar said the victims and people of the country want to know who was responsible for the repression and killings.

The survey said that 73.2 per cent of survivors are under depression, 65.2 per cent are showing symptoms of anxiety, 49.1 per cent sleep disorders, 16.1 per cent have developed suicidal tendencies and eight per cent have become alcoholics or drug addicts.

The report said the findings indicate that illegal cremations were committed by law enforcing agencies following deaths in custody that were not merely accidental. The victims who disposed before the survey team, have reported continuous abuse by security forces, including arrest during the time of their relatives death.