

# Nassau Inmate Awarded \$1.6M

## County negligent in a beating case

By Andrew Metz and Tom Demoretcky

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A Jamaican immigrant who acted as a confidential informant for police and was locked up on the same tier of the Nassau County jail with and beaten by a man he had informed on was awarded \$1.6 million yesterday from the county.



Neville Rangolan

The award to Neville Rangolan, 36, and his wife, Shirley, 35, of Hempstead, came from a jury in U.S. District Court in Uniondale one day after an unrelated case in a federal court in Brooklyn resulted in a nearly \$1 million award to another inmate.

Although federal civil rights claims in Rangolan's suit were thrown out by Judge Arthur Spatt, the judge



Newsday Photo / Phillip Davies

Shirley Rangolan believes the inmate her husband had informed on was purposely placed in his same cell block.

ruled that Nassau County had been negligent under state law. He told the jury to determine the amount of damages.

According to authorities, Rangolan was awaiting trial for selling small amounts of cocaine and marijuana when the beating occurred March 9, 1996. He subsequently pleaded guilty to drug charges and was sentenced to 2 to 4 years, court records show.

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Rangolan sustained a depressed skull fracture and has suffered seizures since. He is expected to be on medication the rest of his life, his lawyer and family said.

He is in federal custody because he has been ruled an undocumented alien. He is fighting deportation.

Nassau Deputy Undersheriff Ernest Weber called the amount of the jury's award "insane" and blamed intense scrutiny of the jail by the media after the death of inmate Thomas Pizzuto. Pizzuto was a 38-year-old heroin addict who was beaten at the county jail, allegedly by correction officers, in January. A federal grand jury is considering charges in that case.

"It is impossible for law enforcement to get a fair trial in the present climate," Weber said. "What we have here is a situation where juries are deciding to give millions of dollars in taxpayer money to convicted rapists, convicted drug dealers, because they were assaulted by other inmates."

Weber said the jail admitted that an error had been made, that a correction officer had made a simple mistake. He said the officer was given a written reprimand after the incident. He added that Rangolan had the opportunity but didn't tell correction officers of his problem with the other inmate.

However, Rangolan's lawyer, Robert Ginsberg of Manhattan, and Shirley Rangolan said she informed several

officials upon learning of the situation. Shirley Rangolan said she believes the placement was done deliberately because her husband, who had been forced to inform, had stopped.

Steven King, the inmate he had given information about, was put in the same cell block with him the day before the beating. Rangolan's suit said King went in his cell and beat him.

Jail records of the two inmates carried a notation that they should not be mingled.

King was convicted of assaulting Rangolan and selling drugs and is currently serving time in state prison.

James Keefe, a Garden City attorney who represented Nassau, argued to the jury that Rangolan initiated contact with King, leading to the fight. "I didn't say we didn't make a mistake, we certainly did," Keefe said last night. "But Rangolan had an opportunity to rectify it, but he never said anything to anybody."

Keefe asked Spatt to set aside the jury award, and Spatt scheduled a court session for Friday to discuss whether the award should be reduced.

Shirley Rangolan said after the ruling, "Everybody asks me if I'm happy, but I'm not happy. I'll be so happy when my husband" is out of custody."

A jury in U.S. District Court in Brooklyn on Monday found that Nassau failed to adequately protect inmate Steven Arnold from being attacked by fellow inmates in 1992. The jury ordered the county to pay him \$900,000.