

**RECORD OF THE DISCUSSION OF THE NHRC WITH THE CHIEF SECRETARY, DMs AND CONCERNED OFFICERS OF ASSAM ON PENDING HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES**

**28 – 29 MAY 2012 – GUWAHATI, ASSAM**

A Camp Commission Sitting of the National Human Rights Commission in the State of Assam was held at Guwahati, Assam from 28 – 29 May 2012 to discuss pending cases and other human rights issues with the Chief Secretary, DGP, DMs, SPs and other State Officers.

The Camp Commission Sitting was chaired by Justice Shri KG Balakrishnan, Chairperson, NHRC, and attended by the Members, Justice Shri G P Mathur, Justice Shri B C Patel, Shri Satyabrata Pal, and Shri P C Sharma, Director General (Investigation), Registrar (Law), and officials of the NHRC, and the Chief Secretary, DGP, DMs, SPs and other officials of the Government of Assam.

In the two-day Camp Commission Sitting held in Guwahati, Assam from 28-29 May 2012, 50 cases were taken up for hearing in the sittings of the Full Commission and Division Benches. On the opening day of the Camp Sitting, the Full Commission headed by the Chairperson Justice Shri KG Balakrishnan, and Members, heard 17 cases. Of these, six cases were finally disposed of.

In the case relating to the rehabilitation of children rendered orphan/destitute in communal riots in the upper Assam District of Tinsukia, the Commission asked the State Government to identify the child victims without any further delay and grant financial assistance to them and send a compliance report along with proof of payment within eight weeks. The Commission observed that the orphaned children had been unable to receive timely assistance due to the negligence of the state officials even after a number of years since the riots.

In the case relating to forced prostitution of three women in Cachar District, the Commission recommended to the State Government to pay Rupees One Lakh each to the three victims. The Commission further called upon the State Government to inquire into whether any organized trafficking

activity was going on in the State of Assam, wherein young girls were being brought in from Meghalaya to Cachar and Silchar Districts in Assam and were being forced into prostitution. The state authorities were also asked to initiate stringent action against the guilty.

In the matter relating to starvation deaths in the Bhuvan Valley Tea Garden in Cachar district, the Commission recommended to the State Government to pay Rupees Two Lakh each to the next of kin of the two workers who died due to starvation, and Rupees One Lakh each to the next of kin of the dependents of the tea garden workers who died due to starvation.

The Commission also directed the State Government to inquire into the role of the Tea Association of India (TAI) in this matter and enquire whether there was any laxity on the part of the TAI in providing/distributing food grains among the tea garden workers, which may have exacerbated the situation, leading to the deaths of the tea garden workers and their dependents.

The Commission also heard the matter pertaining to the allegations of the eviction of 6000 *adivasis* by forest officials from the Lungsun Forest area, under the Bismuri police station, Kokrajhar District. The Commission was informed by the state authorities that the hutments were dismantled, but not set on fire as had been alleged. The Commission asked the authorities to expedite the rehabilitation of the affected *adivasis*.

On the issue of witch hunting, the State Government informed the Commission that during the last five years, about 88 women and over 40 men had become victims of such incidents. The Commission stressed upon the state authorities to initiate an extensive awareness campaign among the people and conduct prompt investigation and speedy trial in incidents of witch hunting. The state authorities informed the Commission that the practice of witch hunting is prevalent in backward and distantly located places.

It came to the notice of the Commission that a certain individual had approached the State Authorities, posing as a representative of the NHRC,

India. The Commission stated in unambiguous terms that it takes the misuse of the NHRC name and logo very seriously.

The Commission stated that while a circular on the subject had already been sent to all states and UTs in the past, it would send a copy of the same to the Assam State Government for its ready reference and necessary action in the said case.

The Division Bench I comprising Justice Shri GP Mathur and Shri PC Sharma heard 12 cases. The Division Bench II comprising Justice Shri BC Patel and Shri Satyabrata Pal heard 21 cases. The Division Bench recommended compensation of Rs. Five Lakh each to three victims in cases of death in police action. The Division Benches asked the Police Authorities to scrupulously adhere to the Guidelines of the Commission in cases of death in police action and submit all requisite reports to the Commission on time for the early disposal of these cases.

**DISCUSSION WITH THE CHIEF SECRETARY, DGP, DMs, SPs ON VARIOUS  
HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES**

The Chairperson, Justice Shri KG Balakrishnan welcomed the State Government officials to the interaction. He stated that the NHRC has been holding Camp Commission Sittings in the states with a view to ensure speedy disposal of cases targeting towards better protection and promotion of human rights.

These Camp Commission Sittings provide a good opportunity to the Commission as well as the State Governments to understand each others' points of view, and also provides the Commission an occasion to take stock of the action taken by the State on important issues. The Chairperson informed that the Commission has so far held Camp Commission Sittings in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka (covering southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka) and Odisha.

The Commission, in its meeting with the Chief Secretary, Director General of Police and other senior civil and police officials of the state discussed various issues of human rights concern in the state, chief among which were the following issues:

- ◆ Mental Health
- ◆ Bonded Labour
- ◆ Prison Reforms
- ◆ Crimes against Women

The Chairperson asked the State Officials to explain the steps being taken by them on the issues listed in the discussion agenda.

## **(A) SILICOSIS**

### Background:

The Commission has been deeply concerned about the health hazards posed by an occupational disease, silicosis, which is a fibrotic lung disorder

caused by inhalation, retention and pulmonary reaction to crystalline silica during mining, stone crushing, quarrying and such other activities.

The Commission has adopted a twin-pronged approach to tackle the issue of silicosis. On one hand, it is considering individual cases and directed the concerned State Government to give compensation to the victims. On the other hand, it has preventive, rehabilitative and remedial measures to be taken to deal with the issue of silicosis recommended to Government(s).

With a view to assess the action taken by the State Governments to tackle the problem of silicosis especially with respect to the action taken by the State/UT Governments on NHRC's recommendations on the issue of Silicosis, the Commission organized a National Conference on Silicosis on 1 March 2011 at New Delhi. The important decisions and suggestions emanating from the Conference were sent to all States/UTs vide letter dated 11 April 2011 including to the Government of Assam.

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## **Justice Shri KG Balakrishnan, Chairperson**

The Action Taken Report (ATR) from the State of Assam on the important decisions and suggestions emanating from the *National Conference on Silicosis* held on 1 March 2011 at New Delhi, is awaited. The Government of Assam is requested to send its ATR to the Commission at the earliest.

### **SUMMARY/OVERVIEW**

*The Government of Assam has been directed to send an ATR to the Commission at the earliest, on the implementation of the important decisions and suggestions emanating from the National Conference on Silicosis held on 1 March 2011 at New Delhi.*

## **(B) MENTAL HEALTH**

### **Background:**

It was brought to the notice of the Commission via various media reports (both print and electronic) that in many places, persons with mental illness were left wandering in streets without proper care and treatment. They are

subjected to ill treatment and even sexual exploitation in the case of women/girls.

The Commission was of the view that this is largely due to the poor implementation and limited knowledge of the existence and provisions of the Mental Health Act, 1987 by the law-enforcing authorities. Under the Section 23 of the Act, the police have an obligation to take or cause to be taken into protection, a wandering or neglected mentally ill person and to produce such persons before the nearest magistrate for issue of reception orders within the stipulated period of time.

In this regard a letter was sent to all the Chief Secretaries and Director General of Police of all States/UTs asking them to take appropriate steps to ensure the implementation of the Mental Health Act, 1987 in their respective states so that the rights of mentally ill persons are secured as per the provisions of the said Act.

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## **Justice Shri KG Balakrishnan, Chairperson**

The Action Taken Report has not been received from the Assam State Government on the issue. What is the status of the implementation of the Mental Health Act in the State of Assam?

### **State Government**

After receipt of the DO Letter from the NHRC dated 3 June 2011, the State Government circulated the letter to all concerned police officials in the state, instructing them to impart sensitization and training regarding the Mental Health Act, 1987, particularly to those working in the field. In particular, Section 23 of the Act which outlines the powers and duties of police officers in respect of mentally ill persons.

In two cases of mentally ill patients wandering the streets without proper medical treatment or care, the patients were promptly taken to hospital by police officials.

On 24 May 2012, the State Government sent a reply to the NHRC stating that it had taken necessary action in accordance with its directions relating to the mentally challenged and the implementation of the Mental Health Act, 1987.

**Shri P C Sharma, Member**

In such cases, taking mentally ill patients to hospital is only one aspect of the problem and one of the responsibilities of the state authorities towards such persons. The other, equally vital aspect is to ensure that such patients are sent back home once they have regained their health and properly rehabilitated. This category of patients is also deserving of the highest attention of the state.

Rehabilitating and re-integrating individuals who have been labeled “mentally ill” into mainstream society, is an uphill battle, given the social stigma attached to mental illness. However, the state authorities must ensure that such persons are sent back to their families as soon as possible.

## **State Government**

The State Government is concerned about and is actively engaged in taking measures and initiating action to ensure that the Mental Health Act is implemented effectively across the state. The State Government is actively collaborating with the state medical colleges and NGOs to provide medical care and rehabilitate these individuals. Recently, directions have also been received from the Gauhati High Court in this regard which the State Government is adhering to.

As soon as the families of these persons are identified and traced, the state authorities try and re-integrate them into their families, using counseling where necessary. In the event that the families of such persons cannot be located, the state continues to care for such persons. The state government is making a huge financial investment to create the requisite infrastructure and logistical support that will be needed to work and care for the mentally ill. In this regard, the State is working closely with the NGO, *Aashadeep*, which works for mentally ill persons.

In addition, the state has also set up 9 centres/homes to accommodate mentally ill patients where they receive proper care before they are sent to hospital for medical treatment. In the long term, the state proposes to build a permanent rehabilitation centre in partnership with the NGO, *Aashadeep*, for which the Government has ear-marked Rupees One Crore.

### **SUMMARY/OVERVIEW**

***The Commission instructed the State Government of Assam to send to it a detailed Action Taken Report (ATR) on the implementation of the Mental Health Act, 1987 by the law-enforcing authorities in the state and initiatives undertaken to enhance knowledge among state officials regarding the various provisions of the Act.***

***The Commission underscored the need for the State to build institutional facilities for the care and protection of the mentally ill/challenged and for their re-integration into mainstream society once they have regained their mental health.***

## **(C) MANUAL SCAVENGING**

### Background:

The inhuman and degrading practice of the manual handling of night soil which is an affront to human dignity has been receiving the attention of the Commission. The Commission considered this to be a major social evil and ever since its inception, has been pursuing the matter to realize an end to this degrading practice. It has taken up this matter at the highest echelons of the Central and State Governments through a series of personal interventions by the Chairperson of the NHRC.

The Chairperson of the Commission wrote letters in October 1996, January 1997 and August 2001 to the Chief Ministers of all the States and UTs, requesting them to implement the Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993. This Act was notified by the Central Government on 24 January 1997.

The Commission had sent certain recommendations that emerged during the National Workshop on Manual Scavenging and Sanitation held on

11.03.2011 and requested Central/State Governments to take necessary action and send an ATR to the Commission.

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**Justice Shri KG Balakrishnan, Chairperson**

The Commission vide DO Letter No. 7/8/98-PRP&P (Vol-VII) had written to the Chief Secretaries of all States and UTs requesting them to advise the concerned departments to take action on the recommendations emanating from the *National Workshop on Manual Scavenging* held on 11 March 2011, and send an ATR to the Commission at the earliest. The Action Taken Report from the State of Assam is awaited in this regard. The Government of Assam is requested to send its ATR to the Commission at the earliest.

**SUMMARY/OVERVIEW**

***The Government of Assam has been directed to send to the Commission at the earliest an ATR on the action taken on the recommendations emanating from the National Workshop on Manual Scavenging and Sanitation organized by the NHRC in March 2011.***

## **(D) PRISON MATTERS**

### Background:

The issue of custodial justice has been a continuous concern to the Commission ever since its inception. Through the reports of the Special Rapporteurs of the Commission who visit jails, issues related to inmates are brought to the notice of the Commission.

The NHRC organized a “National Seminar on Prison Reforms” on 15 April 2011 at New Delhi. The Commission had sent certain recommendations that emerged during the Seminar and requested state governments to take necessary action and send an action taken report to the Commission.

Concerned about the hygiene and sanitation facilities for prisoners in various jails, the Commission had decided to collect basic information on hygiene and sanitation in each jail of the States/UTs. The Commission had

designed a format and sent to all the State Governments for sending the information.

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(I) DE-CONGESTION OF PRISONS; HEALTH AND SANITATION FACILITIES;  
AND SKILL-DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRISONERS

**Justice Shri KG Balakrishnan, Chairperson**

It has come to the notice of the Commission that a large number of prisoners are awaiting trial and people are not being released on bail. The trial of the prisoners should be expedited, especially those facing trial in cases relating to petty offences.

**Shri P C Sharma, Member**

The conditions prevailing in prisons have been brought to the notice of the Commission by the Special Rapporteurs of the NHRC from time to time. It has been brought to the notice of the Commission for example, that a large

number of Under Trial Prisoners (UTPs) who have been granted bail, are still languishing in prison due to their inability to provide surety for their release.

Additionally, a large number of UTPs also suffer from a host of ailments, particularly tuberculosis, owing to the abysmal lack of hygiene in prisons, including the appalling condition of lavatories and an acute shortage of water in jails. These are crucial areas which need the immediate and undivided attention of the state government.

In most of the jails, doctors do not visit regularly and are only posted on a part-time basis, leading to poor health of the inmates and high incidence of various kinds of disease. There is an urgent need therefore, for an overhauling of prisons to ensure that the inmates can live with dignity within the confines of the prison.

Another area of grave concern is the congestion in prisons, which not only prevents a fair distribution of/access to facilities among prisoners,

including hygiene and sanitation, but also results in the breeding of all kinds of crimes in prisons.

**Justice Shri B C Patel, Member**

Often times, doctors are not posted in prisons and the prisoners are left at the mercy of the compounders. The situation in some states is so grim that it has been reported that doctors employed by civil hospitals do not attend to their duties for periods ranging from 6 months to several years on end.

Strict action must therefore, be taken by the state against such errant doctors. Further, a regular and periodic examination of prisoners should be undertaken so that deaths in jails, particularly due to diseases such as tuberculosis, can be avoided by detecting the disease well in time and treating it effectively.

## **State Government**

The State Government has undertaken a range of measures to address the issue of the over-crowding/congestion of prisons. The Government is in the process of upgrading and over-hauling the facilities in jails and is also providing requisite training and human rights sensitization to the prison staff. Further, additional accommodation space has been created in different jails across the state.

In addition, the state government has set up new jails in the Tinsukhia District and has shifted the Central Jail, Guwahati to Sarusajai, in the process of which space to accommodate an additional 868 prisoners has been created (493 in the Central Jail and 375 in the District Jail, Tinsukia). In addition, a proposal has also been received from the Inspector General of Prisons, Assam for the creation of an additional 450 nos. of accommodation for prisoners at Abhayapuri by extending the Jail Campus.

As regards sanitation and the supply of drinking water, there is a lot that needs to be done. While there are a sufficient number of sanitary toilets in

prisons, which do not require manual cleaning, there is no mechanical system for cleaning the septic tanks or sewerage system. The State is proposing to introduce a new sewerage disposal system this year, and is considering outsourcing these services.

There are 21 permanent jail doctors and about 10 doctors who are taken from the Joint Director of Health Services on a deputation basis to attend to the prisoners in jails. Additionally, the State Government strictly adheres to the guidelines issued by the NHRC on various issues.

**Shri Satyabrata Pal, Member**

It has been observed that a large proportion of deaths in jails result from natural causes. There is a certain laxness in conducting medical examination of the inmates when they are first admitted to prison. In the absence of such preliminary examination, diseases often go undiagnosed, until much later, when the disease has reached an advanced stage. If inmates are screened properly, prompt medical attention can be provided in the prison itself, wherever required.

The other problem that has come to the Commission's notice is that the NHRC proforma is not being filled in detail. The record/report at the time of the admission of the prisoner is not properly filled out by the jail doctors. In this respect, the NHRC's Guidelines must be strictly adhered to by the state prison authorities.

The other issue of concern for the Commission is the increasing number of cases of death in prisons due to Tuberculosis (TB), which is regarded as one of the major causes of death of inmates.

Moreover, the incidence of HIV/AIDS among inmates is on the rise in prisons. If a prisoner for instance, has been in jail for 1- 2 years and has died of HIV/AIDS, the chances are that she/he contracted the disease before entering prison. Therefore, it becomes crucial for the state to ensure that proper medical screening of prisoners is undertaken by the doctors when they are being admitted to the prison to ensure that proper and timely medical treatment is provided to prisoners in need of such treatment.

The latest statistics given in the reports of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) regarding congestion in jails shows that there is no overcrowding in the prisons in Assam. Thus, even with limited efforts, there can be a marked improvement in the condition and amenities for prisoners in the prisons in Assam and the State must make every effort to ensure that this is realized.

### **SSP, NHRC**

There is the peculiar case of an inmate admitted in jail in an injured condition that has come to the notice of the NHRC. The inmate's ribs were fractured and he was treated for three months in hospital. After four months of admission however, he died of Tuberculosis. It is strange that he was being treated for rib injuries the whole time, and that the fact that he was suffering from TB was never detected in the four months of his regular treatment.

### **State Government**

The prisoner in question was being treated in the civil hospital. The details of the case will have to be checked from the hospital authorities to

ascertain if there was any lack in the medical treatment provided to the inmate.

The State Government has made note of all the suggestions made by the NHRC and will ensure that the Commission's Guidelines on the conduct of preliminary medical examination of all prisoners while being admitted to prison, are strictly adhered to.

As far as congestion or overcrowding in jails is concerned, the State Government is confident of tiding over this problem within a short period of time, particularly with the construction of new jails in the State.

The State has also undertaken numerous initiatives to ensure that skill enhancement and capacity building programmes and education are made available to the prisoners.

There are, for instance, school teachers in 13 jails who teach the prisoners, including the children who live with their mothers. For higher education there is a tie-up in different jails with the K K Handique Open University and IGNOU. A proposal has also been received from the Inspector General of Prisons, Assam for filling up another 17 vacancies for Jail Teachers, which is under consideration of the State Government.

Manufacturing activities are also undertaken in the state prisons including, cane and bamboo works, weaving, blacksmithery, and chemical units for manufacturing soap and phenyl, among others. The prisoners are engaged in these activities and are trained for the purpose by the concerned instructors. Additionally, prisoners are also engaged in horticultural and agricultural activities, where there is sufficiently available agricultural land.

The State imparts capacity building and personality development training to the prisoners, in addition to organizing yoga classes, art of living workshops, and training in other skilled/semi-skilled manufacturing activities. There is scope for a lot of reform in the manufacturing activities in jails. A high-level delegation of the State Government recently visited the

Tihar Jail in New Delhi to observe and learn from the correctional activities of skill training and education of inmates. The State is actively considering initiating such activities in 31 jails of the state located in different districts, in a phased manner.

**Justice Shri B C Patel, Member**

In one jail in Bihar, products made by prisoners are being sold in the open market at a huge profit. Similarly, in Yerawada Jail, Pune, prisoners are actively engaged in manufacturing and other skilled activities. The same can also be tried in the jails in Assam.

**Shri P C Sharma, Member**

De-congestion of jails should be taken up on a priority basis by the state authorities; simply constructing new jails will not solve the problem. The state government should take other initiatives to de-congest existing jails. In particular, prisoners charged with petty offences should be released from jail on priority.

## **State Government**

In some existing jails, certain spaces/portions within the prisons have been converted into de-addiction centres since drug addiction is a pressing problem in Assam. On the question of prisoners charged with petty offences, most of these prisoners have not been released owing to their inability to furnish surety. The Gauhati High Court had passed an order regarding this and the State Government is working to ensure their early release.

## **Justice Shri G P Mathur, Member**

The State Government of Assam must forward a copy of the order of the Gauhati High Court directing the release of under trials languishing in different jails, on personal bonds in case charge sheets had not been filed within the stipulated time period.

- (II) DEATH IN PRISONS, POLICE CUSTODY & ADHERENCE TO NHRC  
GUIDELINES

## **DG (I), NHRC**

In the case of the death of persons in prison and police custody, an impartial enquiry should be conducted. Further, it has come to the notice of the Commission that police escorts are not provided in time for taking prisoners to hospitals which results in delays in providing timely medical treatment to the prisoners concerned.

## **Justice Shri B C Patel, Member**

The intimation of death of persons in custody should be sent within the prescribed time limit to the Commission. When a prisoner dies of disease, the enquiry should be carried out quickly since the record of the treatment provided to the patient and other details relevant to the inquiry are readily available. It has been observed that the Commission often has to send notices and reminders to get the Magisterial Inquest Report, which ideally should not take more than two months to be sent to the Commission.

The Chief Secretary, Assam is requested to send to the Commission a list of the e-mail addresses and other contact details of all officers of the state who

may be required to be contacted by the Commission from time to time. The State can also send reports to the Commission through e-mail.

### **Shri Satyabrata Pal, Member**

Assam is one of the states from where the Commission is not receiving regular reports, and also incomplete reports regarding death of persons in prison and police custody. The Commission has observed that over a six-month period, while 91 deaths in police action have been reported in the state police newsletter, only 31 of these cases were reported to the NHRC, with no information forthcoming on the remaining 60 cases.

### **State Government**

There has unfortunately been an oversight by the State in this matter. The 2003 Guidelines issued by the NHRC have been strictly adhered to by the State. Earlier, these reports were submitted to the Commission on a six-monthly basis and it is likely that police officers responsible for preparing and sending these reports to the Commission were under the impression that the reports still have to be submitted bi-annually. The State authorities have

enquired with the concerned SPs and presently, only 11 cases are pending reportage. On the question of post-mortem reports, these take time to be prepared and hence, there may have been delays in sending these to the NHRC.

**Justice Shri G P Mathur, Member**

The 2003 Guidelines of the Commission were revised in 2010. The State must circulate copies of the revised guidelines to all concerned officers. The inquest and magisterial inquiry reports take time and can be sent to the Commission in due course. However, other reports such as the post-mortem, must be sent immediately to the Commission.

It is strange that post-mortem reports take time. In other parts of the country, post-mortem reports are submitted almost immediately to the Commission. If the preparation of the post-mortem report is delayed, then there is apprehension and a very real possibility of the manipulation of the report and its findings. Hence, the State must ensure that the post-mortem report is sent promptly to the Commission.

**Justice Shri B C Patel, Member**

The State must insist that the doctors prepare the post-mortem reports within 24 hours and also ensure that the post-mortem reports are legible and written in CAPS if possible. Instructions to this end must be conveyed to the concerned doctors by the state authorities.

**Shri P C Sharma, Member**

Deaths in police custody are a common feature across all states of the country. A large number of such deaths occur due to torture of prisoners. A person, when in custody of the state, must be protected. Often, the Commission is unable to get a correct picture of the case under consideration given the protective approach towards the accused police officials.

The image of the police in the country is suffering and has now caught international attention, where an increasing number of individuals and organizations are asking why there are such large numbers of custodial deaths in the country. The police must give serious consideration to this, especially the field officers.

## **Shri Satyabrata Pal, Member**

It is interesting to note the figures relating to human rights violations in Assam in the report of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). Child trafficking is a major problem, particularly in the Northeastern states. Similarly, atrocities against SCs and STs are also another important matter of concern. However, the figures for these in the records of the NCRB are very low with respect to Assam.

In fact, allegations of human rights violations against the Police also amount to almost zero according to the NCRB. This is strange given the number of cases the Commission receives from the State. These figures therefore, seem inaccurate. The State Government must look into the matter and check the data sent by the Assam Police to the NCRB for any under-reporting that may have taken place.

## **State Government**

In Assam the problem of violence against people belonging to the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) is not as acute as in other

states, which may be the reason for the low figures in the NCRB report with respect to Assam. On the issue of human rights violations or atrocities committed by the Assam Police, it is submitted that Assam has established State Police Accountability Commissions in the state, which is perhaps where most complaints get sorted out resulting in the low figures in the NCRB report.

The State Government will ensure that the Commissioner, Health of Assam issues relevant directives to the doctors concerned to follow the Guidelines laid down by the NHRC with respect to the preparation of post-mortem reports.

(III) CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN

**Shri P C Sharma, Member**

Another significant area of concern regarding human rights violations in the state is the issue of the crimes against women, which deserves the state's immediate and highest attention. It is an issue which has long been ignored with a very small percentage of cases being actually reported. All kinds of

crimes are being committed against women and these seem to be on an upswing.

There is a high incidence of domestic violence and other forms of physical and emotional abuse against women. While women contribute significantly to the state economy, little is being done to protect them against violence and other forms of abuse. The women are over-burdened, working not only in their homes, but also outside their homes, in various occupations, yet they continue to face immense physical and emotional violence. The Commission gets the impression that not much is being done by the state authorities in this regard.

### **State Government**

Assam has the unfortunate record of having the second highest number of cases of crimes against women in the country. There is a lot of overt and hidden brutality and violence against women and the state is trying to find ways to protect the women against abuse, in collaboration with NGOs and civil society.

The State has set up a statutory body, the State Commission for Women to look into issues concerning violence against women. Crimes against women are a major concern in the state, to combat which, the state has initiated, among other measures, an awareness programme on the *Domestic Violence Act*.

Further, the state has introduced across the various districts, the several women empowerment schemes launched by the Government of India. The State Government is devising programmes in collaboration with civil society and NGOs to address this problem more effectively. The 'Empowerment of the Girl Child' programme for instance, has been introduced in 8 districts of Assam and includes training for skill development, particularly for girls who are out of school, to help them earn a living.

**Shri P C Sharma, Member**

Empowerment is just one aspect of this multi-faceted issue. However, the important thing is for the state to ensure that where cases have been

registered, the police act with sensitivity to the survivors of the violence/abuse.

Domestic violence is not the only crime being committed against women; molestation, rape, eve teasing are equally acute problems being faced by the women of the State. The state police will have to come forward to deal with these issues. When a woman approaches the officials in a police station and is not heard out, that is a huge problem since it adds to the discomfort and misery of the woman in question. Lack of an effective redressal system and lack of access to the police station are in themselves a violation of human rights.

### **State Government**

All state police stations or *thanas* have special cells for women, which have been set up to look into issues and problems specific to women. The State Commission for Women, together with the Special Women Cells and the collaborative efforts of NGOs and civil society will help address the issue of violence against women.

### **Shri P C Sharma, Member**

There is no need to set up special cells for women in police stations. What is required are just, responsive and sensitive police personnel committed to hearing out those who approach them for help and acting to resolve their complaints.

### **Registrar (Law), NHRC**

There is a system/practice in the *thanas* in Delhi, which is to conduct a preliminary investigation into complaints regarding Dowry under Section 498-A before registering an FIR. While this practice has its advantages, in that it can help resolve problems through counseling and mediation, it can also prove disadvantageous since the process may take an inordinately long time.

### **State Government**

There is no such practice in Assam; FIRs are directly registered.

## **Registrar (Law), NHRC**

The Assam Police may consider introducing such a practice within its *thanas* given that such a preliminary conciliatory process can be useful, provided it does not take an inordinately long time.

### **SUMMARY/OVERVIEW**

*The Commission pointed out several areas where prison reforms needed to be carried out on a priority basis by the State Government, such as the speedy trial and release of UTPs incarcerated on petty offences, conducting a mandatory preliminary medical examination of prisoners on their admission to prison, ensuring availability of doctors round the clock and providing skill development opportunities to the inmates.*

*Specifically, the Commission directed the State Government to ensure that the state prison authorities strictly adhere to the NHRC's Guidelines on filling up of the NHRC proforma with details about the medical examination of the inmates at the time of their admission to prison.*

*A major problem, the Commission pointed out, was the illegibility of the post mortem reports received from states which causes considerable delays in concluding cases.*

*The Commission has therefore, offered to send to the Police Department copies of the desired format of the post mortem report and also, copies of magisterial inquiry reports of other states as an example of how these must ideally be drafted.*

*The Commission has instructed the State to circulate the revised guidelines of the Commission on the issue of reporting death of persons in prisons and police custody to all concerned police officials and other concerned persons for compliance, and to provide necessary training and instructions to them in this regard.*

*The Commission has also directed the state government to compile and forward to it a list of the e-mails, telephone numbers and other contact details of the state DMs, prison authorities etc. to enable the*

*Commission get in direct touch with the concerned officials as and when required.*

*The State Government of Assam has also been requested to send to the Commission a copy of the order of the Gauhati High Court directing the release of under trials languishing in jails, on personal bonds in case charge sheets had not been filed within the stipulated time period.*

## **(E) LABOUR ISSUES**

### Background:

The Commission on receiving complaints regarding denial of minimum wages to the workmen employed in brick kiln industries, sought some information from all States/UTs on the notification of brick kilns as a scheduled employment, fixation of rates of wages for all categories, revision of rates of wages, mode of payment, weekly off, maintenance of records and settlement of claims etc. were requested from all States/UTS.

The response received from some of the states was examined in the Commission. Not satisfied with these responses, the Commission decided to hold Zonal Conferences on Minimum Wages.

On 14.10.2011, the Commission in collaboration with the Government of Meghalaya had organized a workshop on the fixation, review, revision and enforcement of the Minimum Wages Act for in-depth review of the minimum wages scenario in the Northeastern States of the country.

Further, a National Level Seminar at New Delhi was organized on 30.09.2011 by the Commission for a thorough familiarization and sensitization of senior functionaries of the Central/State Governments with the constitutional and legal provision, judgments of the Supreme Court and international treaty provisions relating to the elimination of forced/bonded labour.

The Commission had sent certain recommendations that emerged during the Seminar and requested State Governments and all concerned to take necessary action and send an action taken report to the Commission.

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**Justice Shri B C Patel, Member**

The Action Taken Report (ATR) on bonded labour, submitted by the Government of Assam is replete with contradictions and cannot be accepted. It states for instance, that inspections were carried out on over 36,000 occasions. This seems like an exaggerated figure which is hard to believe. The state must ensure that a proper report is submitted to the Commission.

**State Government**

The State Government informed that there is not a single case of bonded labour in the State of Assam.

**Justice Shri B C Patel, Member**

That is an unacceptable claim/argument. Almost every state in the country insists or claims that there are no cases of bonded labour in their respective states, but the reality always proves otherwise.

**Shri P C Sharma, Member**

If the State Government is insistent that there are in fact, no cases of bonded labour in Assam, can the Government say with complete certainty, given the claim of the state that it has conducted thousands of spot investigations at various work sites, that employers maintain a proper record of the documents mandated by the Minimum Wages Act?

**Justice Shri B C Patel, Member**

The Parliament has conferred powers on the District Magistrate and Sub-Divisional Magistrate and not labour officers to conduct such enquiries and site investigations.

## **State Government**

The 36,628 inspections mentioned in the ATR relate to minimum wages.

## **Registrar (Law), NHRC**

The procedure for identifying bonded labour is given in the Act. This is to be done by the District Magistrate. The ATR submitted by the State Government however, states that no response was received from the Vigilance Committee. This implies that the Vigilance Committee is non-functional. The question therefore is, who has inspected these sites to identify bonded labour?

### **SUMMARY/OVERVIEW**

*The Commission expressed its sharp disappointment at the ATR provided by the State Government on labour issues, which it pointed out was replete with contradictions and seemingly exaggerated figures. It also described the State Government's claim that there were no cases of bonded or forced labour in Assam as implausible and hence, unacceptable.*

*The Commission has directed the State Government to submit to it a revised ATR which reflects the actual position in the state on labour issues including the site inspections conducted by state officials.*

## **(F) CHILD MARRIAGE, PRE-NATAL SEX SELECTION AND PCPNDT ACT**

### Background:

The Commission Vide DO Letter No. 8/3/1995-PRP&P dated 04 May 2012 had requested the Chief Secretaries of all States and UTs to send an ATR on the recommendations of the report from Shri Shivraj V Patil, Chairman, Core Committee for the Prevention of Child Marriage in the State of Karnataka, which are relevant to all States and UTs.

The Commission had also communicated to the Chief Secretaries of all State and UTS to take action on the recommendations of the Conference on

'Prenatal Sex Selection in India: Issues, Concerns and Actions', organized by the NHRC on 12 October 2012 at New Delhi.

The main objectives of the Conference had been to critically analyze the problem of pre-natal sex selection and the declining number of girl children in India; create awareness about related issues, concerns and actions among key stakeholders; share findings of the study titled "Research and Review of Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act's Implementation Across Key States", jointly undertaken by the NHRC and UNFPA; and discuss strategies for strengthening the implementation of the PCPNDT Act.

In order to achieve the objectives of the Conference, all States/UTs had been requested to issue necessary instructions to the concerned authorities for implementation of these recommendations, and also send an ATR to the Commission at the earliest.

Further, the Commission in collaboration with the UNFPA had undertaken a joint research project entitled “Research and Review of Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act’s Implementation across Key States”. The main objective of the study was to identify the impediments in the implementation of the PCPNDT Act in the States, and a copy of the National Report containing specific recommendations had also been sent to all States/UTs for action on the recommendations. The States and UTs had been requested to send an ATR to the Commission at the earliest.

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**Justice Shri KG Balakrishnan, Chairperson**

The Action Taken Report (ATR) on the recommendations of the report from the Chairman, Core Committee for the Prevention of Child Marriage in the State of Karnataka, relevant to all States and UTs, is awaited from the State of Assam. The Government of Assam is requested to send its ATR to the Commission at the earliest.

The Action Taken Report (ATR) on the recommendations of the Conference on '*Prenatal Sex Selection in India: Issues, Concerns and Actions*', organized by the NHRC on 12 October 2012 at New Delhi is awaited from the State of Assam. The Government of Assam is requested to send its ATR to the Commission at the earliest.

The Action Taken Report (ATR) on the specific recommendations of the research study entitled "*Research and Review of Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act's Implementation across Key States*", is awaited from the State of Assam. The Government of Assam is requested to send its ATR to the Commission at the earliest.

### **SUMMARY/OVERVIEW**

***The Commission has directed the State Government to send an ATR on the implementation of the recommendations of the report from the Chairman, Core Committee for the Prevention of Child Marriage, to the Commission at the earliest.***

*The State Government has also been asked to send to the Commission an ATR on the implementation of the recommendations of the Conference on “Prenatal Sex Selection in India: Issues, Concerns and Actions”, organized by the NHRC on 12 October 2012 at New Delhi.*

*Further, the State Government has been directed to send to the Commission an ATR on the implementation of the specific recommendations of the research study entitled “Research and Review of Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act’s Implementation across Key States”.*

## **(G) POPULATION POLICY**

### Background:

The NHRC has been deeply concerned about the Population Policy framed by State Governments. It has been observed that some of the State Governments had adopted the method of incentives/disincentives for adopting small family norms, which is a gross violation of human rights particularly women’s reproductive rights. Further, being a signatory to the

1994 International Conference on Population and Development, it was mandatory for India to abandon targets and come up with a policy that moved away from the 'incentive/disincentive' approach. As a result, the National Population Policy, 2000 replaced the targeted approach with a target-free regime with focus on smaller families.

To examine the issue and chalk out a strategy in this regard, the Commission had constituted a Working Group which finally devised a Reporting Format to collect the information from all States/UTs in 2007. In the meantime, the new Census had been carried out in 2011, which revealed that the child sex ratio (0-6 age group) had decreased from 927/1000 in 2001 to 914/1000 in 2011 which was a matter of grave concern.

Besides, during a span of over four years, a number of developments might have taken place related to population issues in the States/UTs. Accordingly, the Commission requested all States/UTs to send required information as per the Reporting Format devised by the Commission to assess the present scenario relating to these important issues. The requisite

information was requested to be sent to the Commission by 31 May 2012 vide DO Letter No. 3/1/2012-PRP&P dated 12 April 2012.

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**Justice Shri KG Balakrishnan, Chairperson**

The required information as per the Reporting Format devised by the Commission to assess the present scenario relating to these important issues from the State of Assam, is awaited. The Government of Assam is requested to send the requisite information to the Commission at the earliest.

**SUMMARY/OVERVIEW**

*The State Government has been directed to send to the Commission the required information as per the Reporting Format devised by the Commission to assess the present scenario relating to the Population Policy in the State.*

**RECORD OF THE DISCUSSION OF THE NHRC WITH NGOs AND MEMBERS**

**OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

**29 MAY 2012 – GUWAHATI, ASSAM**

The interaction began with the Chairperson Justice Shri K G Balakrishnan welcoming representatives of NGOs and members of civil society to the interaction and encouraging them to raise any issues of concern regarding human rights vis-à-vis the state of Assam. The Chairperson requested the participants to focus particularly on vital issues such as manual scavenging, bonded and child labour, the state Public Distribution System (PDS), mid-day meal scheme, and other pressing human rights concerns in the state. The Chairperson also invited the members of the NGOs to submit complaints in writing, if any, to the NHRC officers present at the interaction.

**Mr Arman Ali (Director, *Shishu Sarothi*: Centre for Rehabilitation & Training for Multiple Disability)**

Children with disabilities are being denied access to health, to built environment and education. What can civil society do in cases where children have been denied admission by regular schools because of their disability? Can the NHRC undertake a campaign in partnership with NGOs and members of civil society on the rights of children with disabilities?

**Justice Shri KG Balakrishnan, Chairperson**

As per the provisions of the Right to Education Act, no child can be denied his/her right to receive an education. There are however, special schools designed to cater to the specific needs of children with disabilities. However, there are also several instances wherein children with disabilities have been and continue to be admitted to regular schools.

The concerned NGO, if it believes that there is discrimination at the heart of the denial of admission to children with disabilities to regular schools, can forward a complaint giving all relevant details to the National Human Rights Commission and/or the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights.

**Shri P C Sharma, Member**

The issue of the rights of the disabled is a priority area for the Commission. The NHRC had a Special Rapporteur on Disability who visited the state of Assam recently to study the problem of the lack of access to education of disabled children, and other related matters. The report has been finalized and has been sent to the Assam State Government for taking necessary action.

**NGO [Mr. Akshay Das, Project Manager, Rural Multimedia Publicity and Promotion]**

Why is the role of the NHRC marginal on the issue of environmental human rights? While the Supreme Court has been pro-active in this regard, one does not see the NHRC playing an active role in providing relief in the event of the violation of the environmental rights of communities.

**Shri Satyabrata Pal, Member**

The relief that the NHRC awards in various cases, which are also mentioned in its newsletters, are cases registered with the Commission. These are either complaints received by NHRC or matters of which the Commission has taken suo motu cognizance.

If the Commission has not given as much obvious relief on the violation of environmental rights vis-à-vis other issues, it is because not many complaints have been registered in this regard with the Commission. Thus, the question of giving relief in the absence of any specific complaint does not arise.

However, the Commission has chosen 28 districts across various states of the country, where the Commission monitors a host of human rights issues, including environmental protection. In the case of large development and other projects, the Commission pays special attention to environmental problems and their impact on human rights. Therefore, environmental rights are very much on the monitoring radar of the Commission.

**Justice Shri G P Mathur, Member**

As far as granting relief in the case of violation of environmental rights is concerned, it cannot be awarded to a single person or individuals, since the entire community is affected by environmental degradation. Clearly identifying the victims for granting relief in such cases therefore, becomes difficult.

**Shri P C Sharma, Member**

As a result of the intervention of the NHRC, certain factories and other units such as slaughter houses which were causing health problems for the people living in the vicinity, were ordered shut and forced to re-locate. The Commission also took cognizance of the contamination of water in Punjab as also the lack of potable water in Bundelkhand and a series of other important issues with severe environmental ramifications. Therefore, it would be incorrect to surmise that the NHRC is not paying attention to the issue of environmental rights.

**NGO (Mr. Mukul C. Goswamy, Aashadeep)**

After the interventions by the NHRC and SHRC, while some visible improvements have come about in the facilities and care available to the mentally ill, there has hardly been any concrete and sustainable long-term change. The Government is now preparing a policy on the issue of the protection of the mentally ill/challenged. During the last visit of the NHRC to the state, the Director of VIMHANS had given an assurance that medical care would be provided to mentally ill patients, but this has not been done so far. The NHRC's monitoring is thus, required.

**Justice Shri KG Balakrishnan, Chairperson**

During the meeting with the Chief Secretary and other state officials, the NHRC was given assurance that the Government would take concrete measures for the protection and care of the mentally ill/challenged. However, the Commission will again take up the issue with the State Government.

**NGO (Mr. Rajeeb Sharma, General Secretary, Global Organization for Life Development)**

Human trafficking is a major problem in the Northeast. There is an urgent need for the state to devise an economic plan to provide compensation and rehabilitation to the survivors of human trafficking.

At the shelter homes being run by the NGO, we are imparting training to nearly 500 girl survivors of trafficking. Another area of concern is the fact that victims of cross border trafficking from countries such as Myanmar are also received at our shelter homes; presently there are 2 such girl children from Myanmar at the NGO's shelter home. The mothers of these girls had come to India to take them back. However, because of legal and technical issues, they could not be sent back; nothing has been done by the government in this regard either despite repeated requests.

This problem has become acute in recent years and there is need for a sustainable plan and active partnership between the state, NGOs and civil

society and institutions such as the NHRC to take collective action for the rehabilitation of the survivors of human trafficking.

### **Justice Shri KG Balakrishnan, Chairperson**

The Commission has received a detailed report on human trafficking titled “Trafficking Women and Children for Sexual Exploitation” authored by Dr. P M Nair, which is under consideration of the Commission. The Commission also receives individual complaints regarding trafficking of women and children, wherein the Commission has granted monetary relief to the victims. Human trafficking is beyond doubt a matter of grave concern and a problem which needs to be addressed jointly by the State and Civil Society.

### **NGO (Indian Council for Child Welfare)**

There is an acute lack of awareness among the police and media regarding the adoption of abandoned children. The police personnel are not even aware of the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) Guidelines regarding adoption. In *thanas*, our NGO workers train police officers, but sooner or later they are transferred out, bringing all our efforts to naught.

The NGO is also running a 24-hour child line to enable children in distress to reach out for help and assistance. The other problem being faced by our NGO is that when we get information regarding child workers and we set out to rescue such children, we invariably need a task force to accompany us. Getting a task force however, is a cumbersome process. One is required to call the Labour Department, Doctors, Magistrate and coordinate individually with them; this process entails considerable procedural delays.

### **Justice Shri B C Patel, Member**

Henceforth, the NGO must speak or write directly to the Commissioner of Police requesting him/her to provide it with a task force, who will definitely provide all assistance in this regard.

### **NGO (Snehalaya)**

Another area of concern is the lack of human rights awareness in the state. The role of the NHRC is vital in this regard, especially in introducing human rights education into the school and university curricula. Unfortunately, generating human rights awareness is not seen by the

government departments as a core role or function, but as something over and above their core responsibility. Most times the Government is only engaged in fire fighting, crisis intervention rather than crisis prevention.

### **Justice Shri K G Balakrishnan, Chairperson**

Human rights awareness programmes are being conducted by the NHRC in collaboration with universities and NGOs. The Commission is trying to address these issues as best as it can. In some states such as Maharashtra, human rights as a subject, has already become a part of the education curriculum. Further, the NHRC is in talks with the NCERT to introduce a human rights component at the school level; the Commission hopes this will be done shortly.

### **Justice Shri B C Patel, Member**

A human rights culture needs to be cultivated within civil society and public officials.

## **NGO (UTSAH)**

There are 19 notified slums within Assam with nearly 1,70,000 inhabitants. These people have no access to any basic services, whether water supply, electricity, or sanitation facilities. They are forced to live in make-shift houses and deal with the perpetual threat of eviction – an insecurity of tenure (especially where slums have been built on railway land). Has the NHRC made any efforts in this regard? Can the Commission work with the Railways to ensure that it acts more benevolently towards these people?

## **Justice Shri KG Balakrishnan, Chairperson**

In most cities slums have been built on government or railway land. Legally, such slum dwellers are encroachers. But equally important is to ensure that in the event of an eviction, these people are properly rehabilitated.

## **Shri P C Sharma, Member**

In the shifting of slums from one place to another, there should not be any human rights violations. However, one can also not justify encroachment.

### **Shri Satyabrata Pal, Member**

The State must take care to ensure that in the process of rehabilitating slum dwellers their rights are not violated.

### **Justice Shri B C Patel, Member**

Slum dwellers are often unwilling to move because their places of work are close to where they live, and shifting would mean a disruption of their livelihoods.

### **NGO (Sishu Sarathi)**

It has been observed that children with disabilities are more likely to be abandoned by their families owing to family pressures and the social stigma attached to disability. Moreover, there are no rehabilitation services being provided by the government specifically for these children. One needs qualified professionals to cater to children with disabilities especially those who have been abandoned by their families. Can the NHRC take up the issue with the state?

## **Justice Shri K G Balakrishnan, Chairperson**

Even though the Government may not have any special care centres for disabled children abandoned by their families, there are numerous NGOs who are doing excellent work in this area. These NGOs have started special schools, care centres etc. for disabled children. However, the state also has a responsibility towards such children and must make efforts in this regard.

## **Shri P C Sharma, Member**

The concerned NGOs must get in touch with the Commissioner, Disability, Government of India, Mr Pincha, who is a former Special Rapporteur on Disability of the NHRC. He is working very actively in the area and will be of great help in addressing the various problems being faced by those with disabilities, including children in the state.

## **NGO**

Legally, there is no agreement on the age of the 'child'. There are variations in the age criteria across different legislations in India for the purpose of determining who might be considered a child. This ambiguity

allows many people guilty of employing child workers to get away on mere technicalities. What is the NHRC's view on the need for unanimity across legislations on the age of the child?

**Justice Shri KG Balakrishnan, Chairperson**

The objective of various statutes is different. Therefore, the age of the child in all these Acts varies.

**NGO (Asian Centre for Human Rights)**

There was the infamous case of the forced eviction of nearly 6000 *adivasis* pending with the NHRC. What decision has been taken on the matter?

**Justice Shri B C Patel, Member**

The state government has offered to rehabilitate some evictees, not all, since some are believed to be in possession of land elsewhere.

## **Registrar (Law)**

The government intends to rehabilitate these evictees on the outskirts of the forests. The Commission has asked the State Government to send it an ATR on the case.

## **NGO**

There were 15 reported cases of death of workers of the Bhuvan Valley Tea Estate. However, this is just one case. Several such deaths have occurred across the State owing to the apathy of tea garden owners and the unresponsive and ineffective state machinery. If no immediate, preventive action is taken, more such deaths are bound to occur. Can the NHRC devise certain preventive measures and direct the State Government to take urgent action in this regard?

## **Shri Satyabrata Pal, Member**

The Commission had raised these issues with the state government and it was informed of the steps being taken by the Government in this regard. There are certain mechanisms in place to prevent malnutrition and/or

starvation. There are for instance, *anganwadi* centres which work to ensure that children do not go without food. Similarly, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) exists so that when tea plantations shut shop, the workers still have wages with which to support themselves.

## **NGO**

Many people are not sure of how to file FIRs under different Acts. The problem is that most times police officers posted in the *thanas* are not sure themselves.

## **Justice Shri KG Balakrishnan, Chairperson**

There exist Taluk and High Court Legal Aid Committees, which can be approached to provide training to the police officials especially field officers on various Acts.

## **NGO**

What is the NHRC, India's stand on the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act [AFSPA]?

### **Justice Shri KG Balakrishnan, Chairperson**

The Supreme Court has given its decision on the AFSPA. The AFSPA is a matter of policy decision of the Central Government and it is for the Government to decide on the issue.

The Chairperson, NHRC, thanked all NGO representatives and members of civil society for their participation. He further requested them to send their complaints to the NHRC. He also informed the participants that the Commission had already had detailed discussions with state government officials regarding all pending human rights cases of the state of Assam.

## **INTERACTION OF THE NHRC WITH THE MEDIA (PRINT & ELECTRONIC)**

29 MAY 2012 –GUWAHATI, ASSAM

Following the Camp Sitting, the Commission held a Press Conference. Addressing the press conference Justice Shri K G Balakrishnan, Chairperson, NHRC described the camp sitting as very fruitful. He said that the role of the NHRC was to ensure that the state provides good governance to the people, by pointing out shortcomings, if any, in the functioning of the public authorities. The Members of the NHRC, Justice Shri G P Mathur, Justice Shri B C Patel, Shri Satyabrata Pal and Shri P C Sharma also addressed the media.

The Chairperson welcomed the media to the press briefing and invited media persons to field questions and other concerns regarding human rights in the State. A host of issues were discussed during the Press briefing including the eviction of six thousand *adivasis* from forest land, rehabilitation of slum dwellers, death of tea garden workers in the Bhuvan Valley Tea Garden due to starvation, the state's Public Distribution System (PDS), and

witch hunting, which the media argued had assumed serious proportions in recent times.

The media also enquired from the Commission regarding the State government's response to some of these issues, which the Commission briefly outlined.

The Chairperson thanked the media persons for their time and participation, and encouraged them to continue bringing to the Commission's notice issues of human rights violations and concern from within the State.