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HUMAN RIGHTS

Newsletter

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Consultation

Rethinking Beggary: Bridging Gaps between Policy, Practice and Dignity

Measures to Curb Spurious Medicine in India

Articles

Building a Supportive Mental Health Ecosystem

Suicide Prevention and Mental Health



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National Human Rights Commission, India

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► Former President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind flanked by NHRC, India Chairperson, Justice V. Ramasubramanian and Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal in the 3-day National Conference on 'Suicide Prevention, Mental Health Awareness and Compassionate Care,' organised by SNEHA in Chennai, Tamil Nadu

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Monthly Recap

From the desk of the Secretary General & Chief Executive

India possesses a strong constitutional and legal framework that guarantees dignity and rights for all. Yet the true test of these guarantees lies beyond statutes and policy documents. Rights must move from paper to practice and be visible in the everyday lives of people. Public institutions must measure their strength not only by the laws they uphold but by the lives they transform.

In February 2026, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India organised two open house discussions on the themes 'Rethinking Beggary: Bridging Gaps between Policy, Practice and Dignity' and 'Measures to Curb Spurious Medicines in India.' These consultations examined pressing concerns affecting vulnerable communities and public health, while seeking practical solutions that connect policy with real change. The message emerging from both discussions was clear: in an inclusive India, no individual should be left behind. This edition of the Newsletter carries reports on these important deliberations.

The discussion on beggary highlighted the need for a humane and constructive approach. Poverty, homelessness and social vulnerability cannot be treated as crimes; they are manifestations of deeper socio-economic challenges. Addressing them requires coordinated efforts that go beyond enforcement. Government initiatives must be complemented by the active involvement of civil society organisations, voluntary groups and community networks.

The issue demands sustained attention in campaign mode. Outreach efforts must be strengthened to identify vulnerable individuals and connect them with social protection systems. Facilitating access to Aadhaar cards and improving identification processes were identified as essential steps, as many individuals engaged in begging remain outside formal welfare structures. Linking them with existing social security schemes, providing rehabilitation support and focusing interventions on known hotspots can help restore dignity and create pathways towards inclusion. Above all, every initiative must recognise that dignity is central to any meaningful response.

Equally important was the second consultation on the growing concern over spurious and substandard medicines. Drug safety is often viewed primarily as a regulatory issue, but the discussion underscored that it is fundamentally a

human rights concern. Citizens consume medicines with the trust that public institutions will safeguard their health and well-being. When medicines are counterfeit or substandard, that trust is seriously compromised.

Participants observed that the circulation of spurious medicines reflects gaps in quality control mechanisms and sometimes involves organised criminal networks. Addressing this threat requires stronger surveillance, coordinated regulatory enforcement and rigorous investigation. Ensuring the safety and reliability of medicines is integral to protecting the right to health and the right to life. Medicines must heal and restore health; when they harm instead, the consequences undermine public confidence in healthcare systems.

While institutional action remains critical, the advancement of human rights also depends on the awareness and engagement of younger generations. The Commission's Online Short-Term Internship (OSTI) Programme brought together students from across the country, providing them with an opportunity to understand human rights beyond legal texts and court judgments. Through lectures, discussions and interactive sessions, the interns were encouraged to reflect on how rights are protected, how violations occur and how individuals and institutions can work together to uphold them. By nurturing empathy, integrity and a sense of responsibility, such initiatives strengthen the foundation for a more aware and engaged citizenry.

The Commission also continued its engagement with academic institutions and civil society organisations to promote dialogue on emerging human rights challenges. In this context, it supported the three-day National Conference on 'Suicide Prevention, Mental Health Awareness and Compassionate Care' organised by SNEHA in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. The conference brought together national and international experts to deliberate on mental health concerns and strategies for suicide prevention.

Former President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind inaugurated the conference on 26th February 2026 and emphasised the need to develop a holistic mental healthcare ecosystem capable of addressing loneliness, distress and emotional vulnerability. NHRC, India Chairperson, Justice V. Ramasubramanian delivered a thought-provoking address

highlighting the evolving legal framework relating to mental health and suicide. The discussions reinforced the importance of addressing suicide prevention through a multi-dimensional perspective that includes social influences, psychological factors, the role of technology and the needs of vulnerable groups. Two articles based on their insightful speeches have been included in this edition of the Newsletter.

Education also remained central to several engagements supported by the Commission during the month. Interactions with universities further reinforced these ideas. Platforms such as moot courts and academic discussions demonstrate how human rights principles continue to shape contemporary debates. In Ahmedabad, law students examined questions relating to environmental law and human rights, including the growing challenge of climate change. The conversation highlighted how environmental degradation disproportionately affects vulnerable communities and why environmental protection must be viewed as an issue of justice. At Karnavati University, discussions traced the philosophical roots of human rights to India's civilisational traditions, illustrating how ancient ethical principles continue to resonate within modern constitutional frameworks.

Several national forums also highlighted the close relationship between human rights and public welfare. I had the opportunity to participate in a high-level round table that reviewed five years of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, focusing on the need to strengthen inclusive and future-ready learning systems. The deliberations explored how Indian educational values can be aligned with global best practices, reaffirming that education plays a vital role in preparing citizens who are both informed and socially responsible.

Conferences such as Elevate and the National Conference on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) emphasised that access to safe water and sanitation is fundamental to health, dignity and equality. Women and marginalised communities benefit the most when these basic services are strengthened. Initiatives such as Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) – Har Ghar Jal and Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) demonstrate how

community-centred governance can translate policy commitments into meaningful improvements in daily life.

The Commission's international engagements during the month further reflected India's commitment to constructive global dialogue on human rights issues. Discussions with international representatives explored themes such as sustainable development, climate action, prison reforms and institutional cooperation in grievance redressal. These interactions underline the value of shared learning and collaborative approaches in addressing complex challenges that affect societies across the world.

Ultimately, the strength of the human rights movement lies not only in institutions but also in the values embraced by citizens. Across the many discussions, conferences and outreach initiatives of the past month, one message stands out clearly: human rights come alive through everyday actions. Protecting the vulnerable, preserving the environment and promoting justice are shared responsibilities.

This edition of the Newsletter also carries accounts of field visits undertaken by NHRC, India Member, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani and the Commission's Special Rapporteurs and Special Monitors. Their visits to schools, hostels, jails, observation homes and shelter homes provide valuable insights into the human rights situation on the ground. The contributions of State Human Rights Commissions in strengthening institutional responses are also highlighted.

The journey from awareness to action continues. Rights must not only be recognised but actively protected and practised. When development, liberty and justice move forward together, the promise of human dignity becomes a lived reality. It is hoped that the reports and reflections in this edition will offer readers both insight and inspiration, while reaffirming the shared responsibility of building a more inclusive and compassionate India.



[Bharat Lal]
Secretary General &
Chief Executive Officer

Consultation

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India has constituted several core groups on various thematic issues related to human rights to hold discussions with domain experts, academicians and senior government functionaries representing ministries concerned. Besides the core group meetings, the Commission also organises Open House Discussions with diverse stakeholders on various human rights issues. The Commission, from time to time, also holds national conferences to address the obstacles in the existing framework and suggests possible solutions. In February 2026, the Commission organised two Open House Discussions on 'Rethinking Beggary: Bridging Gaps between Policy, Practice and Dignity' on 24th February 2026 and 'Measures to Curb Spurious Medicines in India' on 25th February 2026.

Rethinking Beggary: Bridging Gaps between Policy, Practice and Dignity

Beggary in India continues to present a complex intersection of poverty, homelessness, disability, migration and social exclusion, raising serious concerns relating to dignity, livelihood and access to basic rights. While historically addressed through punitive frameworks under various state-level prevention of begging laws, recent discourse has increasingly shifted toward a rights-based and rehabilitative approach. Courts across jurisdictions have questioned the criminalisation of begging, emphasising that poverty cannot be treated as an offence and underscoring the state's obligation to ensure social protection and welfare.

Governments at the union and state levels have undertaken initiatives including identification drives, shelter and rehabilitation schemes, skill development programmes and convergence with social security measures aimed at addressing the root causes of destitution. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India has played a pivotal role by issuing advisories advocating decriminalisation, humane rehabilitation, creation of reliable databases and inter-departmental coordination to safeguard vulnerable individuals. Civil society organisations and grassroots actors have further contributed through outreach, legal advocacy, community-based rehabilitation and livelihood reintegration efforts. Against this backdrop, the consultation assumes importance in advancing informed, coordinated and rights-consistent solutions.

Chairing the discussion, NHRC, India Member, Justice (Dr.) Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi said that begging is a social evil and continues to remain a serious social concern in the country. He remarked that the persistence of begging, even in a nation that is today among the world's largest economies, reflects a deeper structural and social challenge that requires urgent and sustained attention. He described begging as not merely an economic issue but a social malaise that affects the dignity and constitutional rights of vulnerable sections of society.

He emphasised that the Constitutional promise of the Right to Equality before law under Article 14 must be meaningfully realised for all citizens, including those engaged in begging. He said that every individual is entitled to live a safe, secure and dignified life. He noted that several states have enacted legislation addressing beggary. However, mere existence of legal provisions is insufficient unless there is an assessment of the actual outcome of such legislations, particularly in terms of rehabilitation, reintegration and measurable improvements on the ground.

Justice Sarangi stressed the need to examine whether the intended objectives of the NHRC Advisory (2024) concerning the protection and rehabilitation of impoverished, uneducated children, women and differently-abled persons engaged in begging and



► NHRC, India Member, Justice (Dr.) Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi flanked by Member, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani; Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal; senior officers and experts in the Open House Discussion on Rethinking Beggary: Bridging Gaps between Policy, Practice and Dignity in New Delhi



► The Open House Discussion in progress

SMILE-B Scheme (Support for Marginalised Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise) of the Government of India have translated into meaningful change. He emphasised the review of the progress of these measures and identifying gaps in execution. He said that reducing and eventually eliminating begging requires a rights-based, rehabilitation-oriented strategy grounded in constitutional values of equality, dignity and social protection.

NHRC, India Member, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani emphasised the urgent need for a coordinated national strategy with clear timelines and accountability mechanisms to address issues related to women, children and labour in the context of beggary. She stressed the importance of developing a national portal and conducting a comprehensive data survey, stating that without reliable data, effective policymaking is not possible. She also called for strict action against beggary mafias and trafficking networks and underlined that long-term rehabilitation must be prioritised over short-term, temporary measures.

In his address, NHRC, India Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal emphasised that India is known for its strong legal framework and Constitutional values, which provide a robust foundation for ensuring dignity and rights for all

citizens. However, he underlined that government officials alone cannot achieve this objective and they must work in close collaboration with NGOs and civil society organisations. He further observed that while the government often operates through sectoral programmes, there is a need to adopt a bottom-up approach - addressing issues one sector at a time while keeping the larger objective of social inclusion in focus.

Shri Lal stressed that the issue should be taken up in a campaign mode. He said that in an inclusive India, no one should be left behind. He said that authorities should proactively reach out to people to issue Aadhaar cards, rather than expecting them to approach government offices. He emphasised the need to ramp up identification efforts and subsequently link identified individuals engaged in begging with welfare schemes. He also underscored the importance of identifying and focusing on hotspots.

Smt. Yogita Swaroop, Senior Economic Advisor, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment highlighted the 2011 Census data on persons engaged in begging and outlined key initiatives, including the SMILE Scheme, aimed at their rehabilitation, education and skill development. She also apprised the

gathering of the Government's compliance with the directions of the Supreme Court in cases related to beggary and reiterated the vision of a 'Begging-Free India,' focused on dignity and sustainable reintegration.

Shri Shailendra Singh, Deputy Director General, Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), highlighted UIDAI's initiatives to provide Aadhaar to destitute persons, particularly children and persons with disabilities, enabling them to access government welfare schemes. He informed the participants about two Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) issued in consultation with the Ministry of Women and Child Development and the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to streamline enrolment. He emphasised the need for wider dissemination of these procedures, along with UIDAI's outreach camps in shelter homes.

Mohd. Tarique, Founder of Koshish Trust said that there needs to be a change in the perspective of state authorities in dealing with beggars. He stressed the importance of training and capacity-building of officials to ensure a more sensitive and effective approach.

Before this, setting the agenda for the meeting, NHRC, India Joint Secretary, Smt. Saideepui Chhakhuak provided an overview of the three technical sessions including 'Addressing the Scope and Challenges of Beggary,' 'Data, Documentation and Ground Realities' and 'Rehabilitation, Employment and Long-Term Solutions.'

The other participants in the discussions included NHRC, India DG (I), Smt. Anupama Nilekar Chandra; Registrar (Law), Shri Joginder Singh; Joint Secretary, Shri Samir Kumar; Shri Ajay Chaudhary, Special Commissioner of Police, Delhi; Shri Shailendra Singh, Dy. DG UIDAI; Shri Snehil Kumar Singh, District Collector, Kozhikode, Government of Kerala; Col. Nikhil Sinha, Director UIDAI; Dr. R. Giri Raj Dy.

Director (T&B) NISD; Reena Sharma, Additional Director, Social Welfare, Govt. of Rajasthan; Smt. Sunita Yadav, Dy. Director, Department of Social Welfare, Govt. of Uttar Pradesh; Shri Zakir Hussain, Superintendent, Social Defence; Rahul More, Joint Commissioner, WCD, Maharashtra; Fauzan Alvi, Advocate; Prof. Vijay Raghavan, Tata Institute of Social Sciences; Shri Chandra Mishra, Director, Beggars Corporation; Mohd. Tarique, Founder, Koshish Trust; Shri Ram Kishore, Founder, Gramin Evam Nagar Vikas Parishad.; Shri Naveen Kumar, Director, Atchayam Trust; Shri Sharad Patel, Founder, Badlaav and Ms. Shweta Sehgal, Consultant, NISD.

Some of the other suggestions that emanated from the discussions were as follows:

- Shift from penal provisions to decriminalisation and social protection-based interventions;
- Conduct periodic impact assessments of existing legislation and schemes;
- Develop a National Strategy on Beggary with defined timelines, roles, inter-ministerial convergence and measurable outcomes;
- Establish a National Portal on Beggary integrating identification, service delivery, tracking and rehabilitation outcomes;
- Undertake a nationwide survey and hotspot mapping exercise to generate disaggregated, real-time data (gender, age, disability, region);
- Accelerate Aadhaar enrolment through camp-based outreach in shelters and hotspots, ensuring inclusion of children and persons with disabilities;
- Link identified individuals with welfare databases through secure digital convergence;
- Implement the strategy in campaign mode with time-bound targets;
- Strengthen implementation of SMILE-B (Support for Marginalised Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise) with clear rehabilitation pathways;
- Initiate strict action against organised beggary rackets and trafficking networks;
- Institutionalise training and capacity-building programmes for police, municipal authorities, social welfare officers and shelter staff to promote attitudinal change from a punitive to a dignity-centric approach; and
- Formalise partnerships with NGOs for identification, outreach, counselling and last-mile delivery.

Measures to Curb Spurious Medicine in India

The issue of spurious, substandard and falsified medicines represents a serious challenge to public health and patient safety in India, with far-reaching implications for the protection of the right to life and the right to health. The circulation of unsafe and ineffective drugs not only compromises treatment outcomes but also erodes public confidence in healthcare systems and regulatory institutions. Given India's position as one of the world's largest pharmaceutical producers and consumers, ensuring drug quality, safety and efficacy assume critical importance, particularly for vulnerable populations who may lack the resources to verify or challenge the medicines they consume.

Judicial pronouncements in India have consistently highlighted that access to safe and quality medicines form an

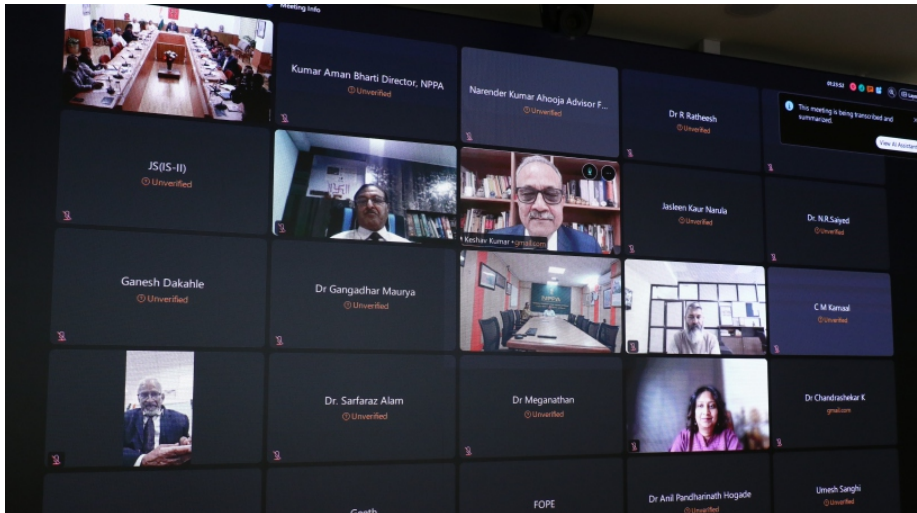


► NHRC, India Member, Justice (Dr.) Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi chairing the Open House Discussion

integral component of the constitutional guarantee under Article 21. Courts have emphasised the State's obligation to strengthen regulatory oversight, prevent the manufacture and

distribution of counterfeit drugs and enforce accountability for violations affecting public health.

In response, the Government of India and State Drug Regulatory Authorities



► The discussion in progress

have undertaken multiple measures, including strengthening licensing and inspection mechanisms, enhancing pharmacovigilance programmes, expanding market surveillance, promoting digital track-and-trace systems and prescribing stringent penalties under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India has actively engaged with the issue through advisories, stakeholder consultations and policy recommendations advocating a rights-based regulatory framework, victim-centric remedies and improved inter-agency coordination.

Civil society organisations, consumer rights groups and professional bodies have complemented these efforts through awareness initiatives, independent monitoring and advocacy for transparency and accountability. Despite these interventions, data and field assessments indicate persistent gaps in detection, reporting, enforcement and consumer awareness. Against this backdrop, the consultation was convened to examine existing challenges and identify actionable measures to curb the menace of spurious medicines in India.

Chairing the discussion, NHRC, India Member, Justice (Dr.) Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi said that in a country as vast and diverse as India, even isolated regula-

tory challenges can translate into large-scale human distress if not addressed decisively and systematically. He said that the growing threat posed by spurious, substandard and falsified medicines and its direct implications on the right to life and health demands coordinated, multi-sectoral action to address this grave issue of human rights violation.

NHRC, India Member, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani reflected on the human cost of substandard treatment. She recalled how a member of her family suffered permanent loss of eyesight due to improper treatment and the use of poor-quality medicines. She said that the issue needs to be urgently addressed by placing in place strengthened oversight and accountability mechanisms in the pharmaceutical ecosystem.

Former NHRC, India Member, Shri Rajiv Jain emphasised that to strengthen enforcement and deterrence, there is a need for establishing special drug courts for expeditious trial of the accused; real-time drug testing mechanisms; mandatory QR codes and track-and-trace systems, including blockchain-based supply chain authentication. He also stressed upon compulsory use of NABL-accredited laboratories; AI-based anomaly detection in distribution patterns; surprise inspections; strengthened whistle-blower protec-

tion; digital case tracking; creation of a centralised national database on spurious drug cases; improved public helplines and examination of regulatory safeguards concerning e-prescriptions.

Before this, setting the tone for deliberations, NHRC, India Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal underscored that the discussion is focused on spurious drugs but both spurious and substandard medicines impact the right to life and health, calling for coordinated institutional action to combat the menace. He emphasised that citizens consume medicines in good faith, trusting the state's obligation to safeguard life and dignity and cautioned that any breach may result in violation of human rights of the victims. Stressing that 'medicines must heal, not harm,' he also highlighted the clear distinction between 'spurious drugs' in different manifestations defined under Section 17-B of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and 'substandard drugs' (out-of-specification authorised products failing quality standards/ specifications). Citing the National Survey on Drugs, he noted that about 10% of government samples were found substandard.

Shri Lal further said that spurious drugs are produced and distributed as part of criminal activity with no clearly identifiable manufacturer, which requires criminal investigation, whereas manufacturers of substandard drugs can be traced. He said that the NHRC has been very proactive in taking *suo motu* cognizance of such reported incidents of rights violations due to the alleged consumption of spurious medicines. In this context, he referred to its one of the recent notices sent in October 2025 to the Governments of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh and to the Union health and regulatory authorities following media reports of children allegedly succumbing after consuming contaminated cough syrups. The Commission directed a comprehensive supply-chain investigation and mandated state laboratories to submit

sample test reports, underscoring the urgency of coordinated regulatory action.

Dr. Keshav Kumar, Special Rapporteur, NHRC, who has undertaken extensive research on the subject, proposed enhanced monitoring, creation of central and state-level task forces, strengthening of regulatory compliance, improved inter-agency coordination, training of law enforcement and judicial officers, victim compensation mechanisms and collaboration with international bodies. He highlighted trends, including low conviction rates in spurious drug cases, significant delays in investigation and adjudication as well as higher prevalence of substandard samples in certain procurement channels. He emphasised that there is a need to clearly distinguish between 'spurious drugs' - counterfeit, fake or deliberately mislabelled products and 'substandard drugs' – genuine products that fail to meet prescribed quality standards.

Ms. Nishtha Tiwari, Joint Secretary, MHA, highlighted key interventions by the Ministry to combat the scourge of spurious drugs. She also underscored the critical importance of addressing this issue. Shri Chandrashekhar Ranga, Joint Drugs Controller (DCGI), highlighted the steps already undertaken by the drug regulatory authorities, including coordinated inspections, strengthening of surveillance systems and enhanced training of drug inspectors. He emphasised the need for continued capacity building to address emerging challenges. Shri Prashant Reddy T., author of *The Truth Pill*, underscored the importance of rigorous quality assurance and transparency. He also highlighted regulatory and bioequivalence concerns, observing that not all generic formulations necessarily behave identically to the innovator drug.

The discussion also examined recent enforcement trends, including coordinated inter-state investigations,

invocation of organised crime provisions in counterfeit drug cases and the evolving jurisprudence of the Supreme Court and High Courts relating to prosecution, police jurisdiction, victim rights and trial procedures. The participants were invited to submit further detailed suggestions to the Commission to enable NHRC to finalise its recommendations.

The other multi-stakeholder participants included NHRC, India Director General (Investigation), Smt. Anupama Nilekar Chandra; Registrar (Law), Shri Joginder Singh; Joint Secretaries, Shri Samir Kumar, Smt. Saidingpuii Chhakchhuak; Ms. Anupama James, AIG, National Investigation Agency; Shri P. Krishnamurthy, Chairman, NPPA; Ms. Sai Ahlladini Panda, Member Secretary, NPPA; Dr. Keshav Kumar, IPS(Retd.), Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance; Shri Om Prakash Sadhwani, Joint Commissioner (Retd.), FDA; Dr. N.R. Saiyad, Deputy Commissioner, Food and Drug Controller Administration (FDCA); Dr. Bhoomika Patel, Dean, School of Pharmacy, NFSU; Dr. P.K. Sharma, Professor and Head, Department of Pharmacology, SLB Medical College; Prof (Dr.) Yogendra Kumar Gupta, President, AIIMS Kalyani; Shri Ankit Gupta, President, ASPA; Shri Harish K. Jain, National President, Federation of Pharma Entrepreneurs (FOPE); Shri Narendra Ahooja, Regulatory Advisor, FOPE; Shri Sandeep Sikaria, FOPE; Dr. Ilyas K.P.A., Deputy Director Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) and Shri Dube Patil, FDA Commissioner, Maharashtra.

Some of the other suggestions that emanated from the discussions were as follows:

- There is a need to establish a comprehensive, centralised databank on spurious and sub-standard medicines, integrating inputs from enforcement agencies, regulators and states;
- Technological interventions should be made to facilitate predictive

analytics, pattern recognition, supply-chain mapping and early risk detection;

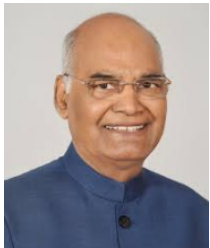
- Capacity-building of Drug Inspectors through structured and periodic training programmes should be institutionalised;
- A formal feedback mechanism may be introduced to document field-level investigative processes adopted by trained officers, including evidence collection, prosecution strategy and inter-agency coordination to serve as a model protocol for nationwide adoption;
- A sustained and intelligence-driven vigilance framework is essential. Preventive surveillance, market sampling and coordinated inspections should be strengthened, with emphasis on identifying repeat offenders and vulnerable supply-chain nodes;
- Best practices from states demonstrating effective regulatory performance should be systematically documented, benchmarked and replicated across jurisdictions through inter-state coordination platforms;
- Consideration may be given to establishing a coordinated centre–state joint enforcement mechanism dedicated to monitoring and combating spurious and sub-standard drugs; and
- Take appropriate steps to ensure that pending cases currently before Judicial Magistrate First Class (JMFC) courts or other subordinate courts are transferred to the competent Sessions Courts considering the Supreme Court judgment that offences under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act are triable exclusively by Sessions Courts.

Article

Building a Supportive Mental Health Ecosystem

- Shri Ram Nath Kovind
Former President of India

(Excerpts from the speech of Former President of India in the National Conference on Suicide Prevention and Mental Health organised by SNEHA with NHRC's support in Chennai, Tamil Nadu on 26th February 2026.)



Our civilisational wisdom reminds us that mental anguish is not new. In the *'Dyuta Parva'* of the Mahabharata, after the *'Rajasuya Yagna'*, King Yudhishtira was overwhelmed by despair. It was Arjuna who counselled him: **'Do not yield to depression**

which destroys reason.' Even in ancient times, emotional suffering was acknowledged and met with counsel, not condemnation.

Similarly, Mahatma Gandhi reminded us: **'The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.'** Philosophy behind service is not charity; it is solidarity. Yet, despite such efforts, let us confront the stark reality before us that suicide driven by mental stress due to various reasons remains a major preventable public health crisis in India, exacting an immense toll on human lives, families and our country. According to the data from the National Crime Records Bureau for the year 2023, there were more than one lakh, seventy-one thousand reported suicides.

In the broader context, mental health issues affect a huge population, yet stigma prevents many from seeking help. This is not just a health challenge; it is a national imperative tied to our constitutional right to life under Article 21. Therefore, suicide prevention should become a national priority.

For India to realise its aspirations as a global powerhouse, we must address the systemic gaps, inequalities, lack of empathy, rapid urbanisation and social isolation that fuel this crisis. Preventing suicides saves lives, alleviates familial burdens and fosters resilience among the vulnerable, creating ripple effects for societal progress.

A landmark reform in this direction is the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, particularly Section 115, which decriminalises suicide attempts by presuming severe stress and eliminating punishments under IPC 309. This Act prioritises care, rehabilitation and prevention, ensuring

affordable access, informed consent, advance directives, protection from cruelty and confidentiality.

Recent advancements, including Supreme Court judgments, reinforce this shift. In 2025, the Court recognised mental health as a constitutional right under Article 21, moving from stigma to inclusion. Earlier rulings led to the establishment of a National Task Force on student suicides, mandating counsellors in educational institutions. These steps mark a profound change, from viewing suicide as a crime to respecting individual autonomy and promoting inclusive support. Yet challenges persist – Implementation gaps and inadequate infrastructure demand our urgent attention.

Among students, exam pressures and academic stress have led to heartbreaking losses. Tragically, student suicides have surged by 65% from 2013 to 2023, reaching a record high of more than 13.5 thousand cases in 2023 alone. I think of a young student, overwhelmed by exam despair, uncertainties of life and prospects, might have been saved with a single act of compassion.

Young professionals, such as engineers and doctors, grapple with intense competition, burnout and unrelenting demands. The elderly suffer from loneliness, isolation and health concerns. Refugees and prison inmates are increasingly vulnerable especially due to the lingering aftermath of COVID-19. Married women face a particularly grim reality, with over 45,000 cases in 2021, nearly half among housewives, driven by domestic violence, societal expectations and gender disparities. These are not mere statistics. They represent lost lives, shattered families and untapped potential.

Suicide prevention is not the responsibility of psychiatrists alone; it is the responsibility of society. A few decades back, suicides among farmers were very high amid economic hardships. We all came together. The government took many steps to improve the lives of farmers and address their distress. As a result, this crisis has been largely addressed. This shows the way that if we all come together and start working collectively, we can overcome the insurmountable challenges.

We must expand services like helplines and counselling centres while reducing stigma through open, honest conversations. By creating safe spaces for dialogue, awareness and support, such initiatives help foster acceptance of help-seeking, reduce stigma and strengthen community networks.

At the heart of effective prevention lies compassionate care, early intervention and robust community support. Compassionate care begins with non-judgmental listening, turning isolation into connection – as exemplified by the 'Link with Life' model of a Tamil Nadu-based NGO Social Need Education and Human Awareness (SNEHA). Founded in the 1980s, SNEHA is working across different social causes, from coastal community welfare to women's empowerment and suicide prevention. It has become a vital support system for marginalised groups, especially fisherfolk, women and individuals in psychological distress, offering sustainable livelihood programmes, skill-building initiatives and mental health support through its 24/7 suicide prevention helpline. Its holistic approach reflects a commitment to dignity, equality and resilience, making it a cornerstone of social development in Tamil Nadu.

Over four decades, this volunteer-driven movement has reached more than 1.5 million individuals in distress through its helpline, email, chat and in-person services - available every single day, without a holiday. That is not merely service delivery; that is devotion. This model demonstrates that empathetic listening reduces immediate risk and restores a sense of connection. Early intervention requires us to recognise warning signs – withdrawal, sudden mood changes, expressions of hopelessness, or increased substance use. Responding with empathy can make all the difference. Community support is equally vital. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommended gatekeeper training empowers teachers, families and colleagues to identify and assist those in need.

The pivotal role of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India in safeguarding the rights and dignity of those facing mental health challenges is also commendable. The NHRC's 2023 Advisory on preventing self-harm among prisoners emphasises suicide watch protocols, gatekeeper training, expert referrals and comprehensive prevention programmes. It underscores that every life, even in custodial settings, deserves compassionate intervention.

Building on this, the Commission's 2020 advisory during COVID-19 and its 2023 comprehensive guidelines advocate for insurance inclusion under **Ayushman Bharat**, CSR initiatives, legal aid, specialised infrastructure for children and the elderly and halfway homes.

It is learnt that NHRC inspected all Mental Health Institutions in India and brought out its seminal report titled **Status of Implementation of the Mental Healthcare Act 2017**, advocating the need to focus on implementation and improve these institutions. Their publication – **Mental Health: Concern for All** – released in 2023, addresses stigma, workplace wellness and more, reinforcing the NHRC's commitment to human rights in mental health.

The Government of India has stepped up with vital policies and initiatives. Through awareness campaigns and integration into public health systems, programmes like the **National Mental Health Programme** promote accessibility and community participation. **Tele-MANAS** offers 24/7 toll-free support in over 20 languages, providing immediate help to those in crisis.

While significant progress has been made in the recent past, we must acknowledge that much more remains to be done. The scale of the challenge demands sustained public engagement and stronger coordination across government, civil society, institutions, workplaces, families and communities.

We must recognise the signs of distress and respond with empathy. We should promote gatekeeper training widely and expand services to include 24/7 helplines, school and workplace programmes and support for the elderly. We should work to reduce stigma by normalising conversations about mental health. We should foster collaborations to integrate prevention into primary care, education and policy frameworks.

Further, we should work to encourage open dialogues in our families. Our educators should implement counselling services. Our healthcare workers should be trained to prioritise early referrals. Corporates should invest in wellness programmes and the media should be sensitised to report responsibly and highlight stories of hope and recovery.

We all should strive to be the friend who notices, the parent who listens and the colleague who checks in as sometimes, saving a life does not require extraordinary power. It just requires human empathy. Together, we can build a resilient India where every individual feels valued and supported in the spirit of our ancient wisdom: **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam** – the world is one family where no one should face despair alone. This is the true spirit of our **constitutional morality**, of the concept of **fraternity**, which along with **equality, liberty and justice**, forms the soul of our Constitution. Let us build an India where hope is stronger than despair, where compassion overcomes stigma and where every life is valued.

Suicide Prevention and Mental Health

- Justice V. Ramasubramanian
Chairperson, NHRC

(Excerpts from the speech of Justice V. Ramasubramanian in the National Conference on Suicide Prevention and Mental Health organised by SNEHA with NHRC's support in Chennai, Tamil Nadu on 26th February 2026)



Traditionally, societies and religions across the world have consistently condemned suicide as a sin. Ancient Hindu scriptures reflect this view with clarity. The Isha Upanishad (verse 3) condemns those who “kill the self,” consigning them to dark, demonic

realms. Similarly, the Garuda Purana describes death by suicide whether by hanging or poison as leading to a “ghostly” existence, where the soul remains trapped in a subtle body until its destined time of death. Thus, religion has historically discouraged suicide by framing it as both a moral transgression and a spiritual consequence enforced by divine punishment.

While religion has maintained a largely consistent stance, the views of lawmakers and courts have fluctuated from one extreme to another over time throughout the world. James M. Kerr, the American Attorney who wrote authoritative treatises on criminal law in the late 19th century, says in his “Treatise on the Law of Homicide” as follows:

“By the common law of England, suicide was considered as a crime both against the laws of God and man: the 'one spiritual in evading the prerogative of the Almighty and rushing into His immediate presence uncalled for; the other temporal, against the King, who hath an interest in the preservation of all his subjects; and the law has therefore ranked this among the highest crimes.”

Under English common law, suicide was treated as one of the gravest offences. Those who died by suicide were denied burial in consecrated grounds and were instead buried at crossroads, often with a stake driven through the body. This cruel practice was eventually abolished by the Burial of Suicides Act 1823, commonly referred to as the Right to Burial Act, 1823. Although this law permitted burial in consecrated grounds, it imposed restrictions that such burials were to occur between 9 p.m. and midnight and without the Christian rites.

Subsequently, the Interments (felo de se) Act 1882 marked further reform by allowing individuals who died by suicide (legally termed *felo de se*) to be buried in churchyards with full religious rites at any hour. However, suicide itself remained a criminal offence in England until the enactment of the Suicide Act 1961, which decriminalised the act of suicide but retained criminal liability for “complicity in suicide” or assisted suicide.

Although lawmakers were slow to recognise that suicidal behaviour cannot be viewed in isolation, courts both in India and elsewhere began to adopt a more nuanced understanding. In the early case of *Connecticut Mutual Life Insurance Company v. Groom*, the court observed:

“Self-destruction, under insane impulses so strong as to be beyond the control and restraint of the will, is a result produced by disease, for which the victim of it is no more morally responsible than he would be for any other of the maladies of which men die.”

In India, the colonial Indian Penal Code 1860 criminalised suicide through Section 309, which prescribed punishment for an attempt to commit suicide with simple imprisonment up to one year, a fine, or both. This provision created a peculiar legal paradox. Criminal law rests on the premise that prosecution abates upon the death of the accused. Thus, a person who succeeds in committing suicide cannot be prosecuted, while one who fails may face punishment.

This contradiction led to a constitutional challenge in *P. Rathinam vs Union of India* (1994), where Section 309 was questioned in light of Article 21 of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to life. Justice B. L. Hansaria, in his opinion, articulated the paradox poignantly:

“If the decision be to die and the same is implemented to its fructification resulting in death, that is the end of the matter. The dead are relieved of the agony, pain and suffering and no evil consequences known to our law follow. But if the person concerned be unfortunate to

survive, the attempt to commit suicide may see him behind bars, as the same is punishable under Section 309 of our Penal Code.”

However, this position was short-lived. Within 2 years, in *Gian Kaur vs State of Punjab*, a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court overruled the decision in Rathinam's case and upheld the validity of Section 309 IPC. The reason why a larger Bench was forced to reverse the view in Rathinam's case was that a couple convicted by the trial court and the High Court for abetting the suicide of their daughter-in-law argued before the Court that Section 306 IPC (abetment of suicide) is also unconstitutional by the same logic. Thus, the reversal was prompted in part by arguments that, if Section 309 were unconstitutional, then Section 306 IPC (abetment of suicide) would also fail on similar grounds. To preserve the legal framework addressing abetment, the Court reinstated the criminality of attempted suicide.

However, in 2017, the Parliament set right this anomaly, to some extent, by incorporating Section 115 in the Mental HealthCare Act, 2017. Section 115(1) of this Act introduced a humane presumption: any person attempting suicide is

presumed, unless proven otherwise, to be under severe stress and shall not be tried or punished under the IPC. Notably, this provision begins with a non-obstante clause - “notwithstanding anything contained in Section 309 of IPC” - thereby effectively diluting the earlier criminal provision.

A small window was opened under the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 towards decriminalisation of suicide. This gradual movement toward decriminalisation was further advanced with the introduction of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) 2023. The BNS removes the general provision punishing attempt to suicide. However, it retains a narrow exception: under Section 224, an attempt to commit suicide with the intent to prevent a public servant from discharging official duties remains punishable.

Taken together, these developments indicate that courts, policymakers and lawmakers are moving in the right direction in addressing the issue of suicide. Yet, legal reform alone is not sufficient. The more pressing need lies in strengthening mental healthcare systems and promoting widespread awareness about mental health, ensuring that individuals in distress receive support rather than punishment.

Important intervention

Misuse of NHRC name and logo by NGOs

(Case No. 117/10/34/2026)

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India has been receiving complaints from individual complainants as well as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) across the country alleging violation of human rights. While examining these complaints, the Commission has observed that several NGOs have registered themselves under names deceptively similar to that of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

Recently, the Commission came across an NGO registered as “National Human Rights Council (NHRC)”, reportedly registered with the Government of NCT of Delhi in 2022. Its publicity material claims, “Registered by Govt. of NITI Aayog”, “Registered by Ministry of Corporate Affairs, India”, “Registered under Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India” and association with “Andhra Pradesh Human Rights Council Association”. A visiting card apparently related to the said organisation also bears the inscription “Venkatesh, State Chairman, Karnataka”.

Considering the gravity of the matter, it has taken suo motu cognizance of the matter. It has observed that the name adopted and the designation “Chairman” is misleading and creates confusion. Deceptive nomenclature misleads the public into believing that these organisations are either part of the National Human Rights Commission or recognised/authorised by it to deal with human rights issues.

The Commission is of the view that continuation of such illusory names may erode public trust, lead to misuse of mandate, possible misappropriation of funds and create confusion for public authorities in distinguishing between a statutory body like NHRC and NGOs.

The Commission had earlier expressed concern through various platforms regarding the misuse of its name and logo and informed the authorities concerned to act against the people behind such dubious organisations. However, violations continue to come to its notice.

Therefore, the Commission has issued notices to the Chief Secretaries and Director Generals of Police of all the States/UTs to identify such NGOs/ individuals misusing the name of

the National Human Rights Commission or using names deceptively similar to it and take immediate legal action within two weeks, including cancellation of registrations obtained in violation of norms. They have also been asked to sensitise registering authorities to remain vigilant and take necessary action against defaulters.

Additionally, in the instant matter of National Human Rights Council (NHRC), the Chief Secretary and the Director General of Police, Karnataka and the Chief Secretary and the Commissioner of Police, Delhi have been further directed to submit reports regarding the action taken against the NGO, having its office in Karnataka and registered in Delhi.

Suo motu cognizance

Media reports have been a very useful instrument for the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India to know about the incidents of human rights violations. Over the years, it has taken *suo motu* cognizance of many such issues and brought succour to the victims. In February 2026, the Commission took *suo motu* cognizance of many cases of alleged human rights violations reported by the media and issued notices to the concerned authorities to send action taken reports. Summaries of some of these cases are as follows:

Stranded Indian migrant workers

(Case No. 23/99/4/2026)

On 3rd February 2026, the media reported that at least 14 migrant workers from the Giridih, Hazaribagh and Bokaro districts of Jharkhand were stranded in Dubai. Reportedly, a company engaged in transmission line work had employed them and seized their passports to block their journey back home. Their wages were also unpaid. The workers appealed to the Government of Jharkhand to facilitate their safe return to India.

The Commission has issued notices to the state Chief Secretary and the Head of the State Migrant Workers Control Room (MWCR), calling for a detailed report on the matter. According to the media report, one of the stranded labourers informed over the telephone that the company deducted most of their salary to recover the amount incurred initially to purchase their air tickets from India to Dubai. Reportedly, the company is charging for their accommodation and even the workers do not have money to purchase their food.

Missing people

(Case No. 448/30/0/2026-WC)

On 5th February 2026, the media reported that 807 people went missing in the national capital during the first two weeks of January 2026, as per the Delhi Police data. They included 191 minors and 616 adults. The Police traced 235 people and

572 remained untraced. The Commission has observed that the contents of the news report, if true, raise serious issues of violation of human rights. Therefore, it has issued notices to the Chief Secretary, Government of NCT of Delhi and the Commissioner of Police, Delhi, calling for a detailed report on the matter.

According to the media report, a total of 24,508 people were reported missing in Delhi in 2025. Among them, sixty per cent were women. The police could trace 15,421 missing people while 9,087 cases are still unresolved. The data has also highlighted the risk being faced by teenagers as more than 5,000 teenagers, of which about 3500 were girls, had gone missing every year since 2016.

Death of 18 workers after blast at an illegal coal mine

(Case No. 4/15/3/2026)

The media reported that 18 workers died after a blast at an illegal coal mine in Thangskai area of East Jaintia Hills, Meghalaya on 5th February 2026. Reportedly, the incident has left several others trapped at unspecified depths. The Commission has issued notices to the Chief Secretary and the Director General of Police, Meghalaya, calling for a detailed report on the matter. The report is expected to include the status of the rescue operation, compensation to the aggrieved families and police investigation as well as steps taken by the authorities to ensure that such incidents do not recur.

Sexual assault and torture of minors in captivity

(Case No. 241/7/5/2026)

On 5th February 2026, the media reported that 5 children, aged between 11 to 14 years, were held captive for 18 hours at an under-construction building in DLF Phase 3 area of Gurugram in Haryana.

Reportedly, the children were detained by the contractor and his four workers on suspicion that they were attempting to steal some construction material. The victims were reportedly stripped, sexually assaulted and tortured. The perpetrators also allegedly poured petrol over them.

The Commission has issued a notice to the Commissioner of Police, calling for a detailed report on the matter. According to the media report, on reaching the spot, the children's mothers were also made to sit along with them and subjected to humiliation by the perpetrators. The incident came to light when the mother of one of the victims approached the police to register a complaint on 3rd February 2026.

Physical and sexual assault on a journalist

(Case No. 565/30/0/2026-WC)

On 14th February 2026, the media reported that a woman journalist was subjected to physical and sexual assault by a mob while she was on a professional assignment to cover a students' protest against the UGC regulations in the North Campus of Delhi University on 13th February 2026. Reportedly, the protesters, after identifying the journalist's caste, began assaulting her and some also threatened to parade her naked before she lost consciousness.

The Commission has issued a notice to the Delhi Police Commissioner, calling for a detailed report on the matter. According to the media report, the victim journalist has alleged that she was specifically targeted because of her caste. She escaped her ordeal with the help of some faculty and women police personnel.

Death due to a blast at a chemical plant

(Case No. 116/10/14/2026)

On 16th February 2026, the media reported that two persons died and four others sustained grievous injuries in a blast at a chemical plant in Basaralu area of Mandya district in Karnataka on 15th February 2026. Reportedly, the locals said that the blast was caused due to negligence as the safety norms were not being followed.

The Commission has issued notices to the state Chief Secretary and the Superintendent of Police, Mandya, calling for a detailed report on the matter. The report is expected to include the status of health and compensation, if any, paid to the next of kin of the deceased and the injured persons. According to the media report, the incident happened while a chemical storage tank was being dismantled to relocate the unit.

Indian workers held in captivity by their employer

(Case No. 32/99/4/2026)

On 19th February 2026, the media reported that at least six persons from Kendrapara district of Odisha were held captive by their employer for the last six months in an area near Bangkok in Thailand. Reportedly, the incident came to light on 17th February 2026 when the victims posted a video describing their plight. They were confined inside the factory and being subjected to physical as well as mental torture by their employer. The Commission has sought the comments of the Ministry of External Affairs on whether they could render any assistance to the families of the victims.

Reportedly, the victims had gone to Thailand in the month of August last year through a labour contractor, who had promised them a good job with a handsome salary. However, they were forced to work for 12 hours a day in a plywood factory without any salary and proper food. Reportedly, their employer has also confiscated their passports. They have appealed to the government agencies in India to facilitate their return.

Recommendations for relief

One of the primary responsibilities of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India is to address cases of human rights violations, listen to the grievances of victims and recommend appropriate relief in such instances. It regularly takes up various cases and gives directions and recommendations to the concerned authorities for relief to the victims. In February 2026, an amount of Rs 86.5 lakh was recommended for the victims or their next of kin (NoK) in 16 cases, wherein it was found that public servants had either violated human rights or been negligent in protecting them. The specific details of these cases can be downloaded from the NHRC, India website by logging in with the case number given in the table below:

S. No.	Case Number	Nature of complaint	Amount (Rs in lakh)	Authority
1.	3788/4/26/2018-JCD	Death in judicial custody	5.00	Govt. of Bihar
2.	323/33/28/2024-JCD	Death in judicial custody	5.00	Govt. of Chhattisgarh
3.	884/33/16/2022-JCD	Death in judicial custody	5.00	Govt. of Chhattisgarh
4.	91/30/2/2024-JCD	Death in judicial custody	5.00	Govt. of NCT of Delhi
5.	1740/6/21/2022-JCD	Death in judicial custody	5.00	Govt. of Gujarat
6.	606/7/10/2024-JCD	Death in judicial custody	5.00	Govt. of Haryana
7.	1992/34/20/2021-JCD	Death in judicial custody	5.00	Govt. of Jharkhand
8.	806/19/9/2023-JCD	Death in judicial custody	10.00	Govt. of Punjab
9.	590/36/2/2024-JCD	Death in judicial custody	5.00	Govt. of Telangana
10.	25846/24/64/2023-JCD	Death in judicial custody	10.00	Govt. of Uttar Pradesh
11.	3829/24/78/2023-JCD	Death in judicial custody	5.00	Govt. of Uttar Pradesh
12.	1248/13/24/2022-PCD	Death in police custody	5.00	Govt. of Maharashtra
13.	1277/18/25/2024	Harassment of prisoners	1.00	Govt. of Odisha
14.	3715/30/0/2020	Police inaction and atrocity in a case of a false complaint of theft	0.50	Govt. of NCT of Delhi
15.	14633/24/57/2022	Death due to the negligence of the police	5.00	Govt. of Uttar Pradesh
16.	142/9/13/2022-AFE	Alleged fake encounters	10.00	Govt. of Jammu & Kashmir

Payment of relief to the victims

In February 2026, the Commission closed 07 cases, either on receipt of compliance reports and proof of payment from public authorities or by giving other observations/ directions. An amount of more than Rs 35.5 lakh was paid to the victims or their next of kin (NoK) on the recommendations of the Commission. The specific details of these cases can be downloaded from the NHRC, India website by logging in with the case number given in the table below:

S. No.	Case Number	Nature of complaint	Amount (Rs in lakh)	Authority
1.	4154/18/3/2021-JCD	Death in judicial custody	5.00	Govt. of Odisha
2.	6/20/21/2024-JCD	Death in judicial custody	7.50	Govt. of Rajasthan
3.	10065/24/48/2022-JCD	Death in judicial custody	5.00	Govt. of Uttar Pradesh
4.	17137/24/56/2023-JCD	Death in judicial custody	5.00	Govt. of Uttar Pradesh
5.	13/14/4/2020-AD	Death in police custody	5.00	Govt. of Manipur
6.	4329/22/45/2022-PCD	Death in police custody	7.50	Govt. of Tamil Nadu
7.	406/34/12/2023	Odd-hour entry to a house in a drunken state and assaulting complainant's husband	0.50	Govt. of Bihar

Case studies

In many cases, the Commission found that contrary to the claims of the state authorities, human rights of the victims were violated due to their unlawful action, inaction or omission. Therefore, on a case-to-case basis, the Commission issued notices to them to show cause why monetary relief should not be recommended to be paid to these victims or their next of kin (NoK) and why action should not be taken against the erring/ negligent officials. The merits of the states' approach to responding to show cause notices prompted the Commission to recommend monetary relief to the victims of human rights violations or their next of kin. The Commission also received reports of compliance with recommendations by the respective state authorities. Summaries of such cases are as follows:

Suicide by an under-trial prisoner

(Case No. 852/19/19/2023-JCD)

The matter pertained to the suicide of a 22-year-old under-trial prisoner in Central Jail, Shri Goindwal Sahib, Punjab in 2023. Based on the material received from the concerned authorities in response to its notices, the Commission found that the victim had drug addiction and used to take Outpatient Opioid Assisted Treatment (OOAT) medicine at the time of admission to jail. He tried to commit suicide in the prison bathroom and died while he was under treatment. The Commission held that there was a lack of proper supervision of prisoners and that the state is responsible for their safety. Therefore, it recommended that the Government of Punjab pay Rs 5 lakh as relief to the next of kin of the victim, which was paid.

Suicide by a convict in prison

(Case No. 10065/24/48/2022-jcd)

The matter pertained to the custodial death of a convict prisoner at Adarsh Kaaragar (Model Prison) in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh in 2022. Based on the material received from the concerned authorities in response to its notices, the Commission found that the prisoner committed suicide by hanging himself in the prison premises. Therefore, it held that since the prisoner was in the care and custody of the state, it was the absolute duty of the state to ensure that he could not cause any harm to himself or anybody else. Accordingly, it recommended that the Government of Uttar Pradesh pay Rs 5 lakh as relief to the NoK, which was paid.

Suicide inside Jail

(Case No. 4154/18/3/2021-JCD)

The matter pertained to the suicide of a 43-year-old man in custody at Circle Jail, Cuttack at Choudwar, Odisha in 2021. Based on the material received from the concerned authorities in response to its notices, the Commission found that the victim died due to asphyxia and venous congestion due to ante-mortem hanging. The Commission held that the state was vicariously liable for the acts of negligence of its employees in failing to provide safety and security to the inmate.

Therefore, it recommended that the Government of Odisha pay Rs 5 lakh as relief to the NoK of the victim, which was paid.

Suicide by an under-trial prisoner

(Case No. 1781/4/4/2019-AD)

The matter pertained to the suicide of an under-trial prisoner in the judicial custody of Begusarai District Jail, Bihar in 2019. Based on the material received from the concerned authorities in response to its notices, the Commission found that the victim developed some health issues after consuming toilet cleaner in jail and died in judicial custody. The Commission held that the state is vicariously liable for the fault and negligence of its officials. Therefore, it recommended that the Government of Bihar pay Rs 5 lakh as relief to the NoK of the victim, which was paid.

Death due to medical negligence in jail

(Case No. 1238/4/32/2019-JCD)

The matter pertained to the death of a convict prisoner lodged in Circle Jail, Chhapra, Bihar while he was being treated at Patna Medical College and Hospital in Patna, Bihar in 2019. Based on the material received from the concerned authorities in response to its notices, the Commission found that the victim was lodged in Jail in 2016. It was also found that his diagnosis of chronic diabetes was delayed and the treatment was also irregular. The Commission held that Jail authorities failed to take proper care of the victim, which resulted in his death. Thus, state is vicariously liable for omission on the part of its officials. Therefore, it recommended that the Government of Bihar pay Rs 5 lakh to the NoK of the victim, which was paid.

Assault by police personnel

(Case No. 406/34/12/2023)

The matter pertained to the incident of police officials trespassing into the complainant's residence in a drunken state in the midnight on 11th January 2023 and brutally assaulting her husband, resulting in a fracture on his right leg in Koderma district, Jharkhand. Based on the material received from the concerned authorities in response to its

notices, the Commission found that the action of the Bihar Police was also unlawful, as the SP, Koderma, Jharkhand stated that the Bihar Police had not informed the local Police Station of Jharkhand before raiding the Jharakhi Vishupur village or arresting the accused persons. Therefore, it recommended that the Government of Bihar pay Rs 50,000 as relief to the victim, which was paid.

Suicide in police custody

(Case No. 13/14/4/2020-ad)

The matter pertained to the suicide of a Kuki Revolutionary Army member in Kangpokpi Police Station in Imphal, Manipur in 2023. Reportedly, he was arrested by the troops of 38 Assam Rifles and handed over to the Police Station, where he committed suicide. Based on the material received from the concerned authorities in response to its notices, the Commission held that the state was vicariously liable for the death of the man in its custody. Therefore, it recommended that the Government of Manipur pay Rs 5 lakh as relief to the NoK of the victim, which was paid.

Death in police custody

(Case No. 14/23/8/2019-JCD)

The matter pertained to the death of a 50-year-old Bangladeshi national under trial prisoner while in custody of Sonamura Sub-Jail, District Sepahijala, Tripura in 2019. Based on the material received from the concerned authorities in response to its notices, the Commission found that the victim was apprehended by the BSF while trespassing into the Indo-Bangla International border. He was medically fit and was

handed over to the police at Kalamchoura Police Station and a case was registered against him. Next day, the victim was produced before the court and was taken to the Sonamura Community Health Centre by the police, where he died within an hour during treatment due to multiple unexplained internal and external grievous injuries. Therefore, the Commission held that the wellness and security of the prisoner is the responsibility of the authorities. For any omission or commission on the part of jail authorities, the state is vicariously responsible. Therefore, it recommended that the Government of Tripura pay Rs 5 lakh as relief to the NoK of the victim, which was paid. It was also informed that departmental action was taken against the errant Jail officials.

Death due to torture at a mental rehabilitation centre

(Case No. 4329/22/45/2022-pcd)

The matter pertained to the death of a 32-year-old man in Annai Illam Home Mental Rehabilitation Centre, Ramanujapuram during treatment at Government Hospital, Aruppukottai, Tamil Nadu in 2022. Based on the material received from the concerned authorities in response to its notices, the Commission found that the victim died due to custodial torture and had several external injuries on the upper back, arms, elbow, shoulder, forearms and waist. The Commission found that the victim died due to the atrocities of the staff and negligence of the police personnel who was there to keep a watch. Therefore, it recommended that the Government of Tamil Nadu pay Rs 7.5 lakh as relief to the NoK, which was paid.

Spot enquiries

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India deutes its own team of Investigation Officers from time to time to conduct spot enquiries into cases of human rights violations.

Case No. 197/25/5/2026

From 2nd to 6th February 2026, a spot enquiry was conducted into the alleged negligence by Fire Services, Labour Department, Urban Planning authorities and local administration after a deadly fire at the "WOW!" Momo warehouse-factory in Kolkata, West Bengal on 26th January 2026. Allegedly, at least 20 workers died and several remained missing among those who were sleeping inside the premises.

Case No. 2209/30/0/2025

From 10th to 12th February 2026, a spot enquiry was conducted into the allegation that an 84-year-old woman is being

harassed by some officers of the Delhi Police, as well as Judicial Officers of Patiala House court. She also alleged that some unauthorised construction is currently going on adjacent to her house and the labourers were also harassing and assaulting her.

Case No. 234/1/3/2026

From 16th to 20th February 2026, a spot enquiry was conducted into the allegation of unfair police investigation into an FIR on the victim's ostracisation by the villagers obstructing entry to her agricultural land and brick kiln in Kamma Palli village, Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh.

Case No. 418/22/48/2025

From 23rd to 28th February 2026, a spot enquiry was conducted into the allegation of police atrocity in Andhra Pradesh against Kuravan tribal families of Krishnagiri district in Tamil Nadu. Entire families, including women and children, were allegedly detained in a case of jewellery theft in Chittoor and subjected to brutal torture and sexual assault in Puthalapattu.

Field visits

The Chairperson, Members and senior officers of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India visit various places in the country from time to time to assess the human rights situation and status of implementation of the Commission's advisories, guidelines and recommendations by state governments and their concerned authorities. They also visit shelters, prisons and observation homes to raise awareness among government officials and to encourage them to take necessary actions to improve human rights conditions. During these visits, the importance of state authorities submitting timely reports is also highlighted to the officials, as it aids the Commission in promptly resolving human rights violation cases.

Visits by NHRC, India Member

On 10th February 2026, NHRC, India Member, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani visited Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya and Girls Hostel, Mudigubba in Sri Sathya Sai District, Andhra Pradesh to assess facilities and human rights situation. She noted that these teachers, like Anganwadi workers, also get low salaries without a pension and do not get the benefits of some welfare schemes for being on the government pay rolls. The Member also visited Mandal Revenue Office (MRO) in the district. She found delays at the MRO office requiring people to make repeated visits to get their work done. She emphasised the need for a more responsive administration so that public concerns are addressed efficiently.



► NHRC, India Member, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani at the Mandal Revenue Office in Sri Sathya Sai District, Andhra Pradesh

On 12th February 2026, she visited the Government Hospital in Kadiri, Sri Sathya Sai District, Andhra Pradesh to assess various facilities and the human rights situation. She inter-

acted with doctors, nursing, security and sanitation staff to understand hospital functioning and heard their grievances.



► NHRC, India Member, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani inspecting the Anantapur District Jail, Andhra Pradesh

On 13th February 2026, the Member visited the Arunachala Girivalam (Giri Pradakshina) path in Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu. She brought to the notice of the concerned authorities the issue of encroachment of the Girivalam route by various vendors, making it difficult for people's movement.

On 14th February 2026, she visited the Anganwadi Centre operating within the Urban Primary School premises at Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh. She found that the Centre is functioning in an organised and satisfactory manner and the classroom environment is child friendly. But she noticed the need for sufficient child-friendly toilet facilities, installation/arrangement of safe and adequate drinking water facilities and strengthening of hygiene and sanitation maintenance protocols to safeguard the health, safety and well-being of children.

Special Rapporteurs and Special Monitors

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India has designated 15 Special Rapporteurs to monitor human rights conditions across various regions of the country. They conduct visits to shelter homes, prisons, observation homes and similar institutions, write reports for the Commission that detail their observations and suggestions for future action. Additionally, the Commission has appointed 18 Special Monitors tasked with overseeing specific thematic human rights issues and reporting their findings to the Commission.

Special Rapporteurs

- From 11th to 14th February 2026, Shri K. Padmakumar visited Madurai and Theni districts of Tamil Nadu and held meetings with District Collectors and Superintendents of Police. He also visited areas affected by caste-related issues and concerned institutions to assess the human rights situation.



▶ NHRC, India Special Rapporteur, Shri K. Padmakumar holding a meeting with various Department officials at Theni Collectorate

- From 16th to 21st February 2026, Ms. Shomita Biswas visited Dehradun and Haridwar in Uttarakhand and held meetings with senior officers of the social welfare and home departments, shelter homes/ nari nicketans and central jail to review institutional functioning and assess the human rights situation.
- From 16th to 21st February 2026, Shri Subhash Chandra visited Bhopal, Narmadapuram, Betul and Chhindwara districts of Madhya Pradesh and held meetings with senior authorities in women and child development, social justice and tribal welfare departments. He also undertook extensive field visits to prisons/ detention centres, Anganwadi centres, shelter homes for women, orphanages and facilities for persons with disabilities, transgender persons and elderly persons, mental health institutions, community forest rights sites and hostels/ institutions for Scheduled Tribe students.
- From 17th to 21st February 2026, Shri Mohammad Jamshed visited Panaji, Goa and held meetings with senior officers of the state government. He also visited Central Jail,

Institute of Psychiatry and Human Behaviour, observation home and old age home.

- From 17th to 21st February 2026, Shri Sayeed Ahmed Baba visited Aizawl, Mizoram and held meetings with senior officers of the state government. He visited central and district jails, Zoram Medical College and Hospital (ZMC&H), Blind School and Mental Health Hospital and interacted with concerned authorities to assess the state of institutional facilities, particularly the living conditions and human rights situation.



▶ NHRC, India Special Rapporteur, Shri Sayeed Ahmed Baba visiting Central Jail, Aizawl in Mizoram

- From 26th to 28th February 2026, Shri K. Padmakumar visited Palakkad district, Kerala and held meetings with the District Collector and Superintendent of Police. He also undertook field visits to Attappadi tribal areas to understand their human rights concerns.

Special Monitors

- From 9th to 12th February 2026, Dr. Poonam Malakondaiah visited Mirzapur district, Uttar Pradesh and assessed facilities in elementary schools, interacted with students, parents and teachers. She also held meetings with the Education Officer and the Sub-Divisional Magistrate to understand the status of elementary education and literacy-related issues in the district.

- From 16th to 21st February 2026, Dr. Pradeepta Kumar Nayak visited Hyderabad, Rangareddy and Medchal-Malkajgiri districts in Telangana and held review meetings with state, district and municipal-level officers of health, leprosy, mental health and other concerned departments. He also visited District Hospitals, Community Health Centres, Primary Health Centres, Urban Primary Health Centres and colonies of leprosy-affected people to assess healthcare delivery systems.



► NHRC, India Special Monitor, Dr. Pradeepta Nayak interacting with District Hospital officials

- From 16th to 20th February 2026, Shri Dhananjay Tingal visited Lucknow, Shravasti, Balrampur, Siddharthnagar and Bahraich districts in Uttar Pradesh to examine the status of implementation of the provisions of the prohibition of bonded and child labour-related laws, victims' condition and identify steps required for effective prevention of bonded labour and child labour.
- From 23rd to 27th February 2026, Shri Vidya Bhushan Kumar visited Gurugram, Gautam Budh Nagar and Ghaziabad in the National Capital Region of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh to review the status of the implementation of pollution control schemes, National Clean Air Programme, industrial pollution control measures, waste management systems and pollution monitoring mechanisms. He paid special attention to the steps taken in environmentally vulnerable areas.
- From 23rd to 28th February 2026, Shri R. Hemanth Kumar visited Paderu in Alluri Sitharama Raju and



► NHRC, India Special Monitor, Shri R. Hemanth Kumar interacting with villagers in Maddirathigudem, Polavaram district in Andhra Pradesh

Visakhapatnam districts of Andhra Pradesh to examine the functioning of Community Forest Rights governance, identify gaps in policy implementation and assess the balance between community rights and ecological integrity.

- From 23rd to 28th February 2026, Shri Devendra Singh Dhapola visited Indore and Bhedaghat (Jabalpur) districts in Madhya Pradesh to assess implementation of NHRC advisories on mechanisation of sewer and septic tank cleaning, beggary, silicosis and related issues on the ground. He also held meetings with state and district authorities and interacted with other stakeholders.
- From 24th to 28th February 2026, Shri Balkrishan Goel visited observation homes, Anganwadi Centres, District Jails, District Hospitals, Community Health Centres, Primary Health Centres and old age homes in Bhubaneswar, Khordha, Puri and Cuttack districts of Odisha to assess the human rights situation. He also held review meetings with District Magistrates and other concerned district-level officers to assess the implementation of child rights and welfare measures for elderly citizens.



► NHRC, India Special Monitor, Shri Balkrishan Goel inspecting facilities at a District Hospital



► NHRC, India Special Monitor, Shri Balkrishan Goel inspecting food at a Jail

- From 24th to 27th February 2026, Dr. Poonam Malakondaiah visited elementary schools, interacted with students, parents and teachers in Mihijam and Jamtara Districts of Jharkhand. She held meetings with the District Magistrates, Education Officers, Sub-Divisional Magistrate and District Education Officers.
- From 24th to 28th February 2026, Shri Umakant visited rural and suburban areas of Nagpur district in Maharashtra and held meetings with senior state and district-level officers. He also interacted with Gram Sabha office bearers, locals and Panchayat representatives at village, block and district levels, noted their grievances and sensitised them on human rights issues.

Capacity Building

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India is mandated to promote, protect and build awareness about human rights. For this purpose, it has been organising internship programmes, collaborative training and various other activities, including moot courts, to expand its outreach and human rights sensitisation of especially university-level students. Internships are conducted in-person as well as online. The two-month-long in-person internships in winter and summer and six Online Short-Term Internship (OSTI) Programmes are organised at its premises in New Delhi. The OSTIs help students from remote areas join them without incurring any expenses for their travel and stay in Delhi.

Online Short-Term Internship

In 2026, the first two-week Online Short-Term Internship (OSTI) Programme was organised from 2nd to 13th February 2026. 71 university-level students from 18 states and union territories successfully completed it. Inaugurating the programme, NHRC, India Chairperson, Justice V. Ramasubramanian said that the OSTI aims to provide college/ university students with a comprehensive understanding of promotion and protection of human rights in line with the mandate of the Commission under the Protection of Human Rights Act. Quoting hymns from ancient Indian scriptures like the *Rigveda*, he highlighted that compassion and forgiveness have been the hallmark of age-old Indian traditions and customs.

He encouraged the interns to make the best use of exposure to various aspects of human rights during their internship with the Commission. He urged them to evolve as better human beings by developing a sense of compassion towards others' suffering before becoming better professionals.

Before this, NHRC, India Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal emphasised that the internship programme also aims at sensitising youth to evolve as defenders and ambassadors of human rights. He expressed the hope that the interns would imbibe the values and knowledge from



- ▶ NHRC, India Chairperson, Justice V. Ramasubramanian says OSTI aims to provide college/ university students with a comprehensive understanding of promotion and protection of human rights in line with the mandate of the Commission under the PHR Act



- ▶ The interns attending the inaugural function



► NHRC, India Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal urges the interns to internalise what they learnt during the internship to develop sensitivity and responsiveness and evolve as model citizens who are aware of their rights and duties

the eminent speakers during the OSTI Programme. Later, in his valedictory address, Shri Lal congratulated the interns on the completion of their internship. He urged them to internalise what they learnt during the internship to develop sensitivity and responsiveness and evolve as model citizens who are aware of their rights and duties. He emphasised the importance of self-introspection and reflection on one's own actions to become a catalyst for change. He said that the responsibility to protect and promote human rights also lies with citizens and not just the government.

He said that justice, liberty, equality and fraternity are pillars of the Constitutional framework, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect,

dignity and equality. Often, vulnerable people are those who are victims of their circumstances. Beggars, transgender persons, persons with disabilities, among other vulnerable segments of society, often face serious violations of their rights and dignity. They need to be helped to get their rightful dues. He also advised the interns to visit schools and spread awareness among students about hygiene, sanitation, sexual offences and other such issues which may impact people's human rights. He said that such small efforts can make a meaningful contribution to society.

NHRC, India Joint Secretary, Smt. Saidingpuii Chhakchhuak presented the internship report. She said that the students were given exposure to various aspects of human rights during the interactive sessions with eminent speakers, including NHRC Chairperson, Members, Secretary General, senior officers and government functionaries besides experts from civil society. She also announced the winners of various competitions which were held during the internship programme to strengthen the human rights understanding of the interns. These included book review competition, group research project presentation and declamation competition.

Training programmes

The following are the training programmes addressed by the Chairperson, Members, Secretary General and senior officers of the NHRC, India. These were organised by different institutions with the support of the Commission.

- On 3rd February 2026, NHRC, India Joint Secretary, Shri Samir Kumar addressed as the Chief Guest the training programme on 'Empowering Youth for Human Rights: Awareness and Sensitisation on the Concerns of Marginalised Groups' organised by Carmel College of



Arts, Science and Commerce for Women, Goa. He highlighted the importance of human rights awareness among youth. About 100 participants attended the programme.

- On 13th February 2026, A.V.C. College of Engineering, Mannampandal in Mayiladuthurai, Tamil Nadu organised a workshop on 'Ensuring Women's Right to Safety and Mental Health: Legal Awareness and Reporting Mechanisms for Sexual Harassment and Cyber Exploitation.' Shri Muktesh Chander, Special Monitor, NHRC addressed as the Chief Guest and spoke about national helpline numbers and digital complaint mechanisms available to ensure women's safety and digital dignity. About 100 participants attended.



- On 26th February 2026, Former President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind addressed as the Chief Guest the 3-day National Conference on 'Suicide Prevention, Mental Health Awareness and Compassionate Care' organised by SNEHA in Chennai, Tamil. NHRC, India Chairperson, Justice V. Ramasubramanian and Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal also addressed the conference attended by national and international experts. They spoke on suicide prevention, covering social media impact, neuro-psychological aspects, vulnerable groups and intervention priorities. The Conference, coinciding with SNEHA's 40th year of service, served as an important platform for dialogue, knowledge-sharing and strengthening collaborative efforts towards suicide prevention and promotion of mental health. Excerpts of the speeches of Former President, Shri Ram Nath Kovind and Justice V. Ramasubramanian have also been carried in the previous pages of this Newsletter.



Exposure visits

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India invites college-level students and their faculties to visit the Commission to have an exposure to the human rights protection mechanism and its functioning in accordance with the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993. They are briefed by senior officers. A total of 207 students and 9 faculty members of the following institutions visited the Commission in February 2026:



A batch of 25 students and 2 faculty members from SRM Institute of Science and Technology in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.



A batch of 26 students and 2 faculty members from SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Chengalpattu District, Chennai, Tamil Nadu.



A batch of 40 students and a faculty member from Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.



A batch of 30 students and a faculty member from Siddarth Law College in Mumbai, Maharashtra.



A batch of 42 students and 2 faculty members from Techno India University, Kolkata, West Bengal.



A batch of 44 students and a faculty member from Law Centre-I, Faculty of Law, University of Delhi.

Moot court

- On 6th February 2026, NHRC, India Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal addressed as Chief Guest the inaugural session of the 3-day ILNU–NHRC Moot Court Competition on 'Environmental Law and Human Rights' organised in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. He highlighted India's civilisational ethos and Constitutional values and duty to protect human rights, nature and environment. He spoke on recent approaches in balancing development and conservation.



- From 20th to 22nd February 2026, Presidency School of Law, Bengaluru, Karnataka organised '1st International Moot Court Competition 2026' on the theme 'Illegal Detention of Prisoners.'



NHRC in the International arena

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India continues to engage with various international programmes to foster the exchange of ideas on various aspects of human rights. Several foreign institutional delegates visit the Commission and meet the Chairperson, Members and senior officers to understand its functioning for promoting and protecting human rights. The Commission's Chairperson, Members and other senior officers also visit various international forums to share their thoughts on the Commission's achievements, interact with other NHRIs and discuss the challenges to human rights in the fast-evolving world.

Delegation visits

- On 4th February 2026, Mr. Stefan Priesner, United Nations Resident Coordinator in India, along with Ms. Radhika Kaul Batra, Chief of Staff at the Resident Coordinator's Office visited NHRC, India and met Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal. The discussions covered key dimensions of the United Nations' work, particularly in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) while addressing climate challenges and promoting sustainable development.



► Mr. Stefan Priesner, United Nations Resident Coordinator in India and Ms. Radhika Kaul Batra, Chief of Staff at the Resident Coordinator's Office with NHRC, India Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal and Joint Secretary, Shri Samir Kumar

NHRC, India's wide-ranging mandate and initiatives to protect and promote human rights across the country, as well as India's steadfast support to the Global South, rooted in its rich civilisational ethos and commitment to inclusive development were also discussed. NHRC, India Joint Secretary, Shri Samir Kumar was also present.



▶ Visiting UN delegation

- On 17th February 2026, Ms. Anna Fitzpatrick, Deputy Head of the Prisoner Policy and Human Rights Team, Ms. Heather Wilkie, His Majesty's Consul and Ms. Sakshi Malhotra, Consular Officer, British High Commission visited NHRC, India and met Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal. The delegation was briefed about NHRC's recent initiatives on prison reforms; National Conference on Prison inmates; core group on Criminal Justice Reforms; advisory on prevention of prisoner suicide and self-harm and guidelines on protecting human rights in prisons.



▶ Ms. Anna Fitzpatrick, Deputy Head of the Prisoner Policy and Human Rights Team, Ms. Heather Wilkie, His Majesty's Consul and Ms. Sakshi Malhotra, Consular Officer, British High Commission with Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal and Joint Secretary, Shri Samir Kumar

They were briefed about various aspects of NHRC's functioning in promoting and protecting human rights. The possibility of cooperation was also discussed in

handling prisoner welfare complaints from British nationals in India. NHRC, India Joint Secretary, Shri Samir Kumar was also present.

- On 18th February 2026, Mr. Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights visited NHRC, India and met Chairperson, Justice V. Ramasubramanian and Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal. He was accompanied by OHCHR Spokesperson, Ms. Ravina Shamdasani and Human Rights Officer, Ms. Aida Martirous-Nejad. They were briefed about NHRC's functioning, complaints redressal, investigative mechanisms and various initiatives.



▶ Mr. Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, OHCHR Spokesperson, Ms. Ravina Shamdasani and Human Rights Officer, Ms. Aida Martirous-Nejad with NHRC, India Chairperson, Justice V. Ramasubramanian, Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal and Joint Secretary, Shri Samir Kumar

The role of SHRCs, Constitutional Courts and sectoral commissions like National Women Commission was also discussed. Perspectives on South-South cooperation, particularly NHRC, India's capacity-building and experience-sharing initiatives for NHRIs across the Global South were highlighted. The UN High Commissioner appreciated the scale, operations, depth and impact of NHRC, India's work, reaffirming the importance of sustained dialogue, constructive engagement and global solidarity in advancing human dignity, justice and the rule of law. NHRC, India Joint Secretary, Shri Samir Kumar was also present.



▶ Visiting UN Delegation

Other engagement

- On 2nd February 2026, NHRC, India Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal, Joint Secretary, Shri Samir Kumar, Director, Lt. Col. Virender Singh, Consultant (Research), Ms. Varsha Apte and Research Assistant, Ms. Radhika Goel attended a bilateral online meeting with the National Human Rights Institution (Defensoría del Pueblo de Paraguay) of Paraguay.

News from the State Human Rights Commissions

Given ever-expanding dimensions of human life and related challenges, promoting and protecting human rights always remains a work in progress. In India, democratically elected governments are committed to ensuring people's welfare and protecting human rights with the help of executive machinery. Additionally, there are institutions such as the legislature and the judiciary. The country also has a vibrant media. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and State Human Rights Commissions (SHRCs) play important roles in protecting and promoting human rights in the country. Other national commissions are assisted by state-level commissions at the regional level. These institutions work as watchdogs for rights and welfare measures. They focus on various segments of society. This column intends to highlight the exceptional activities of SHRCs undertaken to protect and promote human rights.

Haryana State Human Rights Commission

The Haryana State Human Rights Commission (HSHRC) organised awareness camp at the Surajkund International Crafts Mela, Faridabad, where skits for human rights awareness highlighted issues such as corporal punishment, police excesses and the protection of human dignity. An awareness stall functioned from 31st January to 15th February 2026, facilitating public interaction and dissemination of information, education and communication material.



► HSHRC awareness camp at Surajkund International Crafts Mela, Faridabad

The Commission conducted an inspection of District Jail, Jind reviewing medical facilities and inmate welfare and advised corrective measures. It also visited MDD Bal Bhawan and focused on strengthening childcare and protection systems.

Further, in a significant direction, the HSHRC has asked the state Chief Secretary to frame a comprehensive compensation policy for victims of human rights violations

in police custody. The SHRC's direction came after it found an inadequate penalty imposed on a Sub Inspector in a case of illegal custody and assault on an 18-year-old boy picked up in Pinjore. The Commission has further sought a detailed report from the DGP on the proposed institutional reforms and safeguards to prevent recurrence of such incidents.

The Commission took *suo motu* cognizance of several reported incidents having a bearing on human rights. These included transportation of a deceased woman's body on a cart in Faridabad, calling for action taken report and policy recommendations for free body transport; Surajkund Mela swing crash calling for mandatory third-party safety audits; and the death of a basketball player in Rohtak, calling for a high-powered probe and state-wide safety audits of sports facilities. The HSHRC also took *suo motu* cognizance of an incident of corporal punishment in Karnal and called for reports from the concerned authorities. Further, in a case of three children's death due to drowning in an unfenced pond in Bhiwani, the HSHRC has issued



► HSHRC Chairperson, Justice Lalit Batra accompanied by senior officers inspecting District Jail, Jind

Telangana State Human Rights Commission

The Telangana State Human Rights Commission (TSHRC) has taken *suo motu* cognizance of two incidents of human rights violations in February 2026. These included allegations of school students being forced to do sweeping and garbage disposal work in Hyderabad and an assault on a three-year-old child by an Anganwadi teacher in Rajanna Sircilla district.

The TSHRC also issued notices to the concerned authorities based on complaints in three alleged incidents of human rights violations. These included attempts to forceful termination of pregnancy in Kurnool district, police inaction to prevent the murder of a woman advocate despite complaints of death threats to her in Moinabad and disconnection of water and electricity supply to the 30 Scheduled Caste residents of Cherabanda Raju Nagar, Hanumakonda.

notices to the concerned authorities, calling for taking action to put in place immediate safety measures, conduct a fair inquiry and fix responsibility on erring officials.

The HSHRC also summoned the investigating officer and sought reports on the death of a medical student from Alwar, Rajasthan who suffered 80% burn injuries in a fire incident at Chaudhary Charan Singh Haryana Agricultural University, Hisar. The Commission has asked the in-charge of Special Investigation Team to appear in person with all original records and cautioned that any negligence or bias in the investigation will invite strict legal action/implication.

Karnataka State Human Rights Commission

From 18th to 19th February 2026, the Karnataka State Human Rights Commission (KSHRC) Acting Chairperson, Dr. T. Sham Bhatt and Member, Shri S. K. Vantigodi visited Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts and held full bench sittings to dispose of previous complaints in the presence of the victims and concerned authorities and also accept fresh complaints of alleged human rights violations at the taluk and district level. In Udupi, the KSHRC received 11 fresh complaints and the Acting Chairperson urged the authorities to take prompt action to address the grievances.



► KSHRC Acting Chairperson, Dr. T. Sham Bhatt and Member, Shri S. K. Vantigodi holding full bench sitting in Udupi



► KSHRC visiting the Dakshina Kannada Prison in Mangaluru

The KSHRC also sensitised the state and district-level public functionaries, as well as various groups of society in both districts on human rights. The KSHRC also visited District Jails, government hostels for students from SC/ ST and backward communities, police stations, district government hospitals and other government institutions to have an assessment of the human rights situation.

During the visit to Udupi District Jail, the Acting Chairperson and Member observed that the damped prison walls may affect prisoners' health and asked the Superintendent of Prisons to get them repaired and painted on priority.

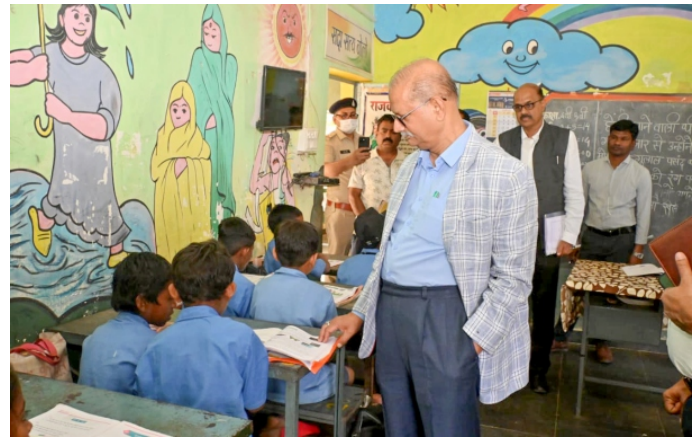
Arunachal Pradesh State Human Rights Commission

From 24th to 25th February 2026, the Arunachal Pradesh State Human Rights Commission (APSHRC) organised a two - day Outreach Awareness cum Advocacy Programme on Human Rights on the theme 'Human Rights, Our Daily Essentials' at Lazu in Tirap district and Pongchau in Longding district. APSHRC Acting Chairperson, Shri Bamang Tago highlighted the relevance of constitutional and statutory safeguards in protecting the rights of vulnerable sections of society. He said that awareness at the grassroots level is the first line of defence against human rights violations. He urged community leaders and public officials to act promptly and responsibly in matters affecting life, liberty and dignity of people.

Chhattisgarh State Human Rights Commission

In February 2026, the Chhattisgarh State Human Rights Commission (CSHRC) Acting Chairperson, Shri Giridhari Nayak, accompanied by the Commission's team, visited jails, hospitals, police stations, government schools and hostels in Gariaband, Bijapur and Kondagaon districts in the state. The

CSHRC gathered information regarding the welfare schemes for surrendered Naxalites. In the presence of district-level officers, the CSHRC Acting Chairperson also interacted with the surrendered Naxalites in 2025-26 and informed them about the various public welfare schemes of the government for their education, rehabilitation and upliftment. He also asked the officers to find out the children who lost their parents during Naxal operations and were inducted by the Naxalites into their cadre. He urged them to set up proper shelter homes for them and provide for their education so that they do not fall into the trap of anti-social and anti-national activities.



► CSHRC Acting Chairperson, Shri Giridhari Nayak inspecting a government school

Himachal Pradesh State Human Rights Commission

The Himachal Pradesh State Human Rights Commission (HSHRC) registered 56 cases concerning various issues of human rights violations in the state during the months of January and February 2026. Out of these, it has disposed of three cases while the rest are at various stages of processing and seeking reports from the concerned authorities.



► APSHRC with the participants of the 2-day Outreach Awareness cum Advocacy Programme on Human Rights

Victims' response to NHRC intervention

Over the years since its inception on 12th October 1993, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India has brought succour to various victims of human rights violations or their next of kin through its interventions. This column carries a brief extract on the voices of such victims who have been beneficiaries of the NHRC's recommendations implemented by the various government authorities.

Pending dues of fish seed farmers cleared

(Case No. 717/36/0/2024)

The Commission has received a letter from fishermen community expressing their gratitude for its intervention in the long-pending payment of their dues by the Government of Telangana. The Commission had taken cognizance of the matter based on a complaint by them. Reportedly, small farmers of Andhra Pradesh engaged in fish seed production for their livelihood have been supplying fish seeds to the Government of Telangana for the last 6-7 years.

In 2023-24, they were awarded the contract to supply fish seeds, which they fulfilled. However, their bills amounting to Rs 75 crore were not paid by the Government of Telangana despite repeated reminders. Following the Commission's intervention in the matter, their bills were eventually cleared by the state government.

Rebuilding of Anganwadi centres

(Case No. 696/1/29/2025)

The Commission took cognizance of a complaint by an Adivasi Association alleging that there were no proper buildings for Anganwadi centres in six villages, including Lottupalem, Devarapalli, Pothavaram, Chinnari Gandhi and Yerrametla in the Devipatnam Mandal as well as the district headquarters in Rampachodavaram, Andhra Pradesh. The lack of infrastructure was causing hardships to their young children and pregnant women. The Commission asked the Integrated Child Development Services Department in Rampachodavaram to submit proposals to the state government and secure quick approvals for the construction of these buildings. Following the Commission's intervention, efforts have begun to rebuild dilapidated Anganwadi buildings in Rampachodavaram and other surrounding villages, which have been widely acknowledged across the local media.



News in brief

- On 4th February 2026, NHRC, India Member, Justice (Dr.) Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi, addressed as the Chief Guest the inaugural ceremony of the literacy activities of All India Sanskrit Students University, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh. He stressed the role of the Sanskrit language in preserving and conveying the ancient civilisational ethos of promoting and protecting human rights and harmony. He lauded the National Sanskrit University for its efforts to promulgate ancient knowledge and wisdom in Sanskrit literature and scriptures for posterity.



- On 5th February 2026, NHRC, India Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal presided over a roundtable seminar on 'National Education Policy: Implementation and Way Forward' in New Delhi. The discussion focused on reflecting upon the journey so far and charting a clear, purposeful roadmap for the future to realise the transformative vision of NEP 2020. It brought together an exceptional gathering of eminent educationists, domain experts, Members of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council, senior officials from the Government of India, UGC, AICTE, leading think tanks and civil society.



- On 6th February 2026, NHRC, India Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal, addressed the Legal Eagle session on 'India's Human Rights Discourse: Universal Values through the Civilisation' organised by Unitedworld School of Law, Karnavati University in Gandhinagar, Gujarat. He traced the global evolution of human rights and highlighted India's civilisational values and contributions to the discourse. He stressed that human rights are collective responsibilities grounded in the Constitution and engrained in individual conduct and conscience.



- On 7th February 2026, NHRC, India Member, Justice (Dr.) Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi visited Cuttack and Bhubaneswar (Khurda), Odisha and attended the Institutional Ethics Committee and the Medical Education Unit meetings.

- On 8th February 2026, NHRC, India Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal delivered a keynote address at the annual conference 'Elevate' organised by the Princeton Foundation for Peace and Learning at India International Centre, New Delhi. He congratulated the scholarship and fellowship awardees and highlighted education as the most powerful tool for personal and social transformation. He said that education is not merely about getting degrees or careers; it is also about living with



courage and dignity to question injustice for building a humane and inclusive society. Every educated girl represents a quiet yet profound victory for our Constitution and human rights.

Shri Lal said that India's civilisational ethos has long affirmed equality and dignity. Today, these legacies find expression in governance, with women constituting over 46% of representatives in local self-governments and leading community institutions such as Pani Samitis. Reforms, including the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and Nari Shakti Vandan Adhinyam, are further opening doors for them from classrooms to Parliament. In India, more than 43% Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) graduates are girls. He urged the scholars to pursue excellence with integrity, lead with empathy, mentor others and defend human dignity in daily practice. He exhorted them to carry forward Gargi's fearless questioning, Savitribai's courage, Gandhi's moral strength and Ambedkar's unwavering faith in education and the Constitution.

- On 12th February 2026, NHRC, India Member, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani addressed as the Chief Guest the anniversary function of Madhava Gurukulam, Andhra Pradesh.



- On 14th February 2026, NHRC, India Member, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani met contract labourers from Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, who visited the Commission in New Delhi. They highlighted their grievances relating to job insecurity, retirement at 50, pension, low wages and access to welfare schemes.
- On 16th February 2026, NHRC, India Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal inaugurated the National Conference on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene organised by Dr. SPM National Institute of Water and Sanitation (SPM - NIWAS), Kolkata, West Bengal. The objective of the conference was to provide a national platform to researchers, students and academics, as well as startups to present their research findings and innovations in the WASH sector for the larger benefit of society.

Shri Lal highlighted the significance of water, sanitation and hygiene in ensuring improved quality of life, especially dignity and ease of living for girls and women. He spoke about the transformation brought by Jal Jeevan Mission and Swachh Bharat



Mission in the lives of people. He stressed that in India, sanitation is a pre-requisite to collecting rainwater cleanly and storing for use throughout the year. To ensure accountability, water supply and sanitation services need to be monitored using Internet of Things (IoT) solutions.

Shri Lal said that the time has come to ensure that Gram Panchayats function as public utilities and provide services to people as envisaged under the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution. He said that to make India a developed country through such initiatives, SPM - NIWAS has to play a key role by imparting education, research, training, outreach and guidance to government departments and water utilities.

- On 21st February 2026, NHRC, India Member, Justice (Dr.) Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi addressed as the Chief Guest the Odisha Ability Summit 2026 organised by WE4YOU Charitable Trust in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.
- On 24th February 2026, NHRC, India Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal delivered a special address in the inaugural session of USISPF – Tourism Leadership Summit at USISPF Offices, IILM Sanatan Centre for Arts and Ideas, New Delhi. The Summit was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Vice President of India, Shri C. P. Radhakrishnan in the presence of the Union Minister for Culture and Tourism, Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat. The occasion also marked the release of the 'State of Tourism in India 2026 report,' offering a forward-looking vision for the sector.

Shri Lal underscored a fundamental truth that culture is the soul of a nation and tourism is the pathway to experience that soul. India's 5,000-year-old civilisation is not merely a chapter in history; it is a living and breathing continuum. He said that every few hundred kilometres, one comes across a distinct language, cuisine, architecture, tradition and worldview. This unparalleled diversity creates boundless opportunities for cultural, spiritual, heritage, religious and eco-tourism.

He said that those who immerse themselves in India's civilisational ethos often discover something far deeper than monuments or landscapes - they encounter transformation. From ancient seekers to modern travellers, countless visitors have found renewed purpose, clarity and inspiration on this sacred soil. India does not just host tourists; it touches lives and



reshapes perspectives. For millions of people, travel and tourism in India is about finding the purpose of their life and is not limited to pleasure. As India's economy continues its remarkable ascent, tourism can become a powerful force for inclusion, employment generation, cross-cultural dialogue and global understanding. It reflects the spirit of a confident, modern India - rooted in heritage, yet boldly embracing growth and innovation.

Shri Lal said that exploring India's cultural and natural heritage is not merely a journey across geography; it is a journey within. Tourism should not be seen only as an economic driver, but as a bridge of understanding, harmony, spiritual journey and shared human values.

- On 28th February 2026, NHRC, India Chairperson, Justice V. Ramasubramanian addressed as the Chief Guest the 10th convocation of the Arunachal Pradesh University of Studies, Namsai, Arunachal Pradesh.



Forthcoming events

- 9th-20th March 2026** NHRC, India will organise its second two-week Online Short-Term Internship (OSTI) Programme.
- 16th March 2026** NHRC, India will organise an Open House Discussions on 'Access to Social Media by Children' in hybrid mode at its premises.
- 11th March 2026** NHRC, India will organise a training programme on 'Cybersecurity Basics' for its staff.
- 13th March 2026** NHRC, India will organise a lecture cum demonstration on 'Handling Medical Emergency Situations' for its employees.
- 17th March 2026** NHRC, India will organise a Gender Sensitisation Training Programme 'From Awareness to Action: Gender Sensitisation under POSH' for the officers and staff of the Commission.

The NHRC, India will organise several Moot Court Competitions in collaboration with different law colleges and universities in March 2026.

Complaints in February 2026

Number of fresh complaints received	2,967
Number of cases disposed of including old cases	5,185
Number of cases under consideration of the Commission	43,129

