

Volume 33 | Number 5 | May 2026



HUMAN RIGHTS

Newsletter

A monthly publication of the National Human Rights Commission, India

Consultation

Tackling Food Adulteration in India

Article

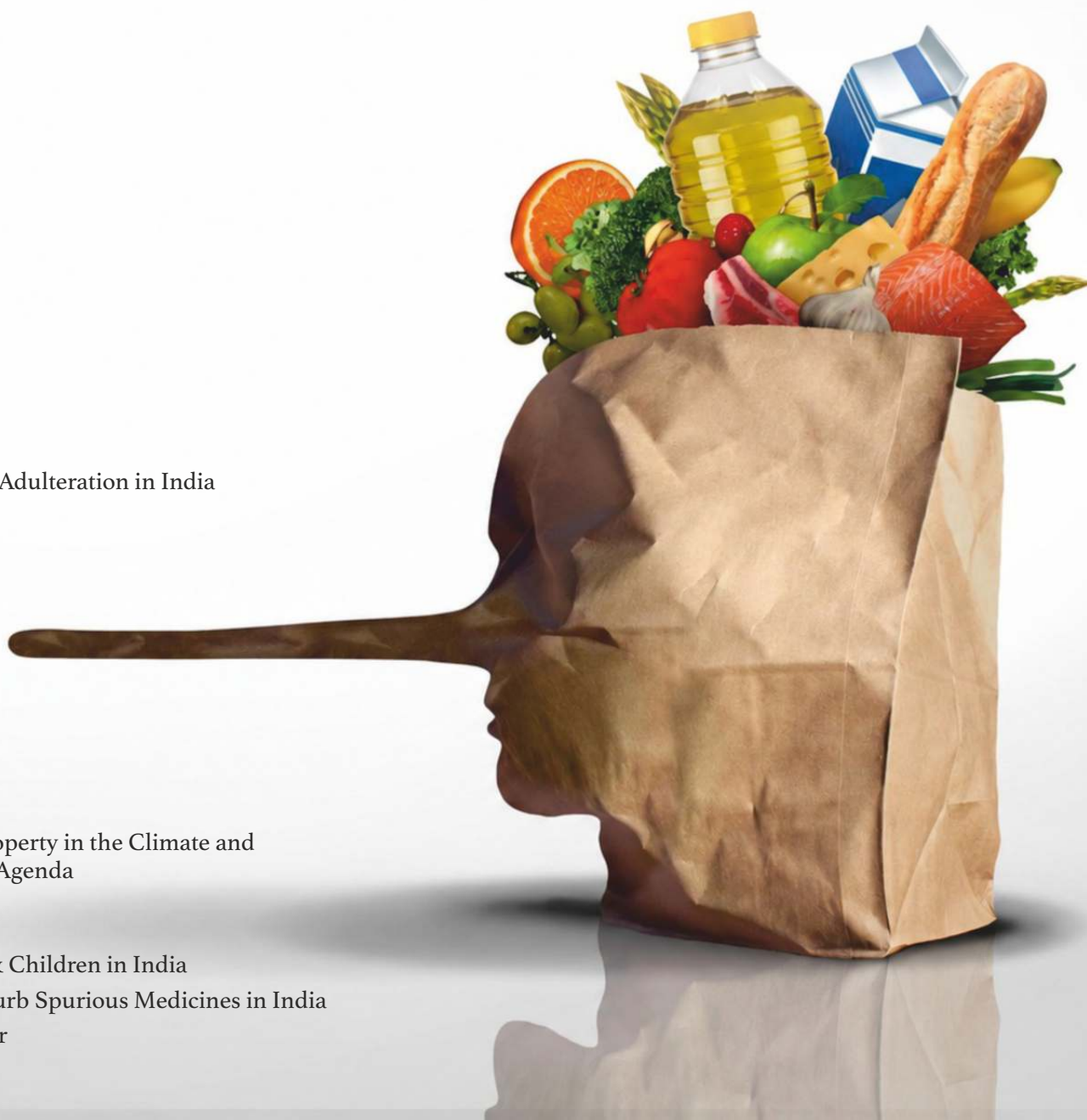
Intellectual Property in the Climate and Sustainability Agenda

Spotlight

Social Media & Children in India

Measures to Curb Spurious Medicines in India

Bonded Labour



HUMAN RIGHTS

Newsletter

Volume 33 | Number 5 | May 2026

National Human Rights Commission

Chairperson

Justice V. Ramasubramanian

Members

Justice (Dr.) Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi
Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani
Shri Priyank Kanoongo

Secretary General & CEO

Shri Bharat Lal

Editor

Shri Jaimini Kumar Srivastava
Dy. Director (M&C), NHRC

The Newsletter is also available on the Commission's website www.nhrc.nic.in. NGOs and other organisations are welcome to reproduce material of the Newsletter and disseminate it widely acknowledging the NHRC, India.



► NHRC, India Chairperson, Justice V. Ramasubramanian flanked presenting the first prize to Ms. Sarika Jain for her short film 'Rani' in the Commission's 11th Human Rights Short Film Competition

Contents

Monthly recap

03 From the desk of the Secretary General & Chief Executive

Consultations

05 Tackling Food Adulteration in India

Article

08 Intellectual Property in the Climate and Sustainability Agenda

Spotlight

10 Social Media & Children in India
13 Measures to Curb Spurious Medicines in India
15 Bonded Labour

Important interventions

17 *Suo motu* cognizance
20 Recommendations for relief
20 Payment of relief to the victims
21 Case studies
22 Spot enquiries

Field visits

23 Visits by NHRC, India Member
24 Special Rapporteurs and Special Monitors

Capacity Building

27 Training Programmes
27 Exposure visits

Awards

29 NHRC, India presents Short Film Awards-2025
31 Applications invited for 12th annual human rights Short Film Competition 2026
32 NHRC in the International arena
32 News from State Human Rights Commissions
35 News in brief
39 Forthcoming events
39 Complaints in April 2026



► NHRC, India Chairperson, Justice V. Ramasubramanian presiding over the inaugural session of the International conference on 'Intellectual Property in the Climate and Sustainability Agenda,' organised by the Presidency University, Bengaluru, Karnataka

Monthly Recap

From the desk of Secretary General and Chief Executive

**When consumers
are informed
and vigilant,
they can influence
market practices
and demand
higher standards.
In this sense,
food safety
becomes a
shared responsibility
between
institutions and
citizens**

April 2026 offers an important reminder that human rights are not just about laws written on paper but about how those laws work in everyday life. The real challenge today is not only to create strong policies but also to ensure that they are implemented well and deliver meaningful outcomes. One of the key highlights of the month was a Core Group meeting on Food Adulteration, held by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India under the broader theme of the Right to Food and Nutrition. Food adulteration is often treated as a technical or regulatory issue, but its impact goes far beyond that and directly affects health, safety and quality of life. A detailed report of this consultation, along with its suggestions, is included in this edition of the Newsletter.

The discussions brought out a simple but important point. India already has a strong legal framework to deal with food safety, yet the problem continues. This reflects a gap between rules and their enforcement. There are several reasons for this gap. Delays in testing and prosecution weaken the system, while food testing facilities are not always used effectively. Monitoring across the supply chain, from farms to markets, remains inconsistent and coordination between different agencies is often limited. At the same time, many consumers are not fully aware of food safety standards or how to respond when they encounter unsafe products. As a result, enforcement tends to be reactive and steps in only after damage is already done.

What is needed, therefore, is a shift towards prevention. This means strengthening checks at every stage of the food chain, improving traceability and making better use of technology for early detection of adulteration. It also requires greater transparency so that consumers have access to information about food quality and safety. Public awareness plays a crucial role here. When consumers are informed and vigilant, they can influence market practices and demand higher standards. In this sense, food safety becomes a shared responsibility between institutions and citizens.

The Consultation also pointed to deeper structural concerns, such as the excessive use of pesticides, gaps in infrastructure and the need for better training and capacity building across stakeholders. Addressing these issues calls for long-term reforms, including improved laboratory networks, stronger coordination between agencies and greater investment in awareness and education.

Importantly, the discussion reflects a broader shift in thinking, one that sees access to safe and nutritious food not just as a policy goal but as a basic human right that must be ensured through effective systems.

This broader approach is also visible in other interventions during the month. The review of a large number of bonded labour cases in Uttar Pradesh highlights how implementation gaps can continue to affect vulnerable populations despite the presence of clear legal safeguards. Laws to abolish bonded labour have existed for decades, yet cases persist, largely due to delays, weak enforcement and lack of accountability at the local level. When authorities fail to act in time, workers are denied not only their rights but also the opportunity for rescue and rehabilitation. This underlines an important reality. Rights can be undermined not only by direct violations but also by inaction.

Environmental risks, particularly those linked to extreme heat, formed another important area of focus. The increasing frequency and intensity of heat waves have serious implications for public health, especially for those who are most vulnerable, including outdoor workers, the elderly, children and people without adequate shelter. The emphasis on advance planning and preparedness reflects the need to act before crises occur. Measures such as early warning systems, access to drinking water, shaded spaces and coordinated local responses can significantly reduce the impact of extreme heat and prevent loss of life.

April also carries global significance as it is marked by the observance of World Health Day (7th April) and Earth Day (22th April), reminding us of the inseparable link between human health, environmental sustainability and the protection of life on the planet. In this broader context, this edition of the Newsletter carries an insightful article by the Chairperson of the NHRC, India on climate, sustainability and intellectual property. It underscores the need to balance rights, responsibilities and environmental protection in an increasingly interconnected world.

Across these different areas, including food safety, labour rights and environmental challenges, a

common pattern becomes clear. The focus is on building systems that can prevent problems before they arise affecting individuals. While traditional tools such as enquiries, hearings and recommendations remain important, they are most effective when they lead to broader improvements in governance. That is why the Commission from time to time has been emphasising in its communications to the public authorities to make efforts for better coordination between departments, stronger monitoring mechanisms and a greater emphasis on accountability at all levels.

Equally important is the role of engagement and awareness. Field visits, training programmes and outreach initiatives of the Commission help bring attention to real-world challenges and ensure that policies are informed by ground conditions. Efforts to involve students, professionals and communities contribute to building a wider understanding of rights and responsibilities. Such initiatives help create a culture where human rights are not seen as abstract ideas but as everyday concerns that affect everyone.

Taken together, the developments of April 2026 point towards a larger shift in approach. The emphasis is increasingly on prevention, participation and responsibility. Whether it is ensuring safe food, protecting workers or preparing for climate risks, the goal is to make systems more responsive, inclusive and effective. This requires not only strong institutions but also active public involvement and sustained commitment across sectors.

This edition of the Newsletter brings together these developments and reflections, offering a broader perspective on how human rights are being shaped through everyday governance. It is hoped that it will make for engaging and meaningful reading while encouraging continued dialogue on strengthening systems that uphold dignity, safety and justice for all.



[Bharat Lal]
Secretary General &
Chief Executive Officer

Consultation

Tackling Food Adulteration in India

Understanding the Scale, Challenges and Reforms

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 concerned ministries. Besides the core group meetings, the Commission also organises Open House Discussions with different stakeholders on various human rights issues. From time to time, it also convenes national conferences to address gaps in the existing framework and suggest practical reforms and solutions.

Recognising food adulteration as a grave human rights concern affecting the rights to life, health and dignity, the NHRC, India organised a Core Group meeting on 'Tackling Food Adulteration in India: Understanding the Scale, Challenges and Reforms'. The discussion focused on assessing the magnitude of the problem, identifying regulatory and enforcement gaps and exploring measures necessary to ensure safe and nutritious food for all.

NHRC Chairperson, Justice V. Ramasubramanian chaired the meeting, which was attended by Members, Justice (Dr.)

Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani; Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal; Director General (Investigation), Smt. Anupama Nilekar Chandra; Registrar (Law), Shri Joginder Singh; Joint Secretaries, Shri Samir Kumar, Smt. Saindingpuii Chhakchhuak; along with senior government functionaries from the centre and state governments, statutory bodies, human rights defenders, members of academia, civil society and domain experts.

In his address, Justice V. Ramasubramanian provided a comprehensive overview of India's legal framework to combat food adulteration, tracing its evolution from the Madras Prevention of Adulteration Act 1918 to the Food Safety and Standards Act 2006. He underscored that consistent efforts have been made over the decades to curb adulteration at multiple levels. He said that while life expectancy has increased over the years, it must also lead to a better quality of life, as envisioned under the Constitution. Emphasising the right of every individual to live a healthy and disease-free life, he urged all stakeholders to look beyond statistics and recognise the wider human impact of adulterated food on people and families.



► NHRC, India Chairperson, Justice V. Ramasubramanian chairing the meeting flanked by Members, Justice (Dr.) Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani, Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal and senior officers

Referring to the idea that ‘food should be medicine,’ he remarked that this principle has eroded over time. He also expressed concern that some food adulteration cases under the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954 continued to be brought before the court even today, often based on reports as old as 15 years, which render the evidence obsolete and the prosecution weak. While noting the rise in food production and the existence of testing infrastructure, including mobile labs, he raised concerns about their effectiveness and maintenance. Highlighting consumer indifference as a key issue, he urged participants to propose concrete, actionable recommendations for government intervention.

NHRC, India Member, Justice (Dr.) Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi stressed the need for widespread awareness on food safety. He raised concerns over excessive pesticide use in food production, calling for urgent measures to prevent adulteration. He also highlighted the importance of educating farmers at the grassroots to promote safer practices and ensure better quality food grains.

NHRC Member, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani called for a multi-level special task force to curb food adulteration. She

advocated mobile food testing in schools and public places alongside monthly checks. Emphasising strict enforcement, she urged fines for violators, 24/7 helplines, inclusion of food adulteration in school curriculum, timely victim compensation and fast-track grievance redressal systems.

Earlier, NHRC, India Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal highlighted the serious threat posed by food adulteration, particularly to vulnerable groups such as children, pregnant women and the elderly. He said that food adulteration is a global issue affecting both formal and informal sectors despite existing laws, regulations and guidelines. Stressing the scale of the challenge, he noted that it is nearly impossible to trace or recall adulterated products once they enter the supply chain. Even a single failed sample can impact hundreds. The NHRC has received several complaints related to mid-day meals and other adulterations and has taken cognizance of such matters to ensure accountability. He emphasised the urgent need to guarantee safe and nutritious food for all. Shri Lal also urged the participants to go beyond diagnosis of the problem and focus on collectively working towards identifying actionable and implementable solutions.



► NHRC, India Chairperson, Justice V. Ramasubramanian says, while life expectancy has increased over the years, it must also lead to a better quality of life, as envisioned under the Constitution

Shri Rajit Punhani, CEO, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), highlighted the efforts being made by FSSAI to promote safer food practices through continuous awareness and simplified registration drives for food vendors. He noted that state governments also play an important role by issuing licences to vendors. Stressing the need for stronger monitoring systems, he called upon the concerned state governments to fill vacant posts at various levels so that adulterated food products can be checked more effectively and public health can be better protected. Ms. Anusree Raha, Deputy Secretary, Department of School Education and Literacy, called for greater involvement of communities and Self-Help Groups in tackling food adulteration. She said that capacity-building programmes are being organised to raise awareness and suggested using school laboratories to test food samples, helping familiarise students and youth with the issue.

Dr. Richa Kumar, IIT Delhi, called for farm-level monitoring. She flagged the issue of chemical adulteration; hazardous pesticide uses and their health risks. She urged a comprehensive systemic ban of hazardous chemicals. Prof. Bejon Mishra, an international consumer policy expert, said that product standards must be ensured through stakeholder consultations. He called for transparency and accountability in food testing, a 24/7 consumer helpline, proper use of the Consumer Welfare Fund, stronger vigilance mechanisms as well as public awareness on adulteration. Ms. Pushpa Girimaji, consumer rights activist and senior journalist, emphasised the need for a national and comprehensive study to identify areas and materials prone to adulteration.

The participants included Shri Satyen Kumar Panda, Advisor (Quality Assurance), FSSAI; Dr. Alka Rao, Advisor (Quality Assurance), FSSAI; Dr. Bharati Kulkarni, Director, ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), Hyderabad; Dr. Shweta Khandelwal, Senior Advisor, Jhpiego; Dr. Monalisha Sahu, Associate Professor, All India Institute of Hygiene Public Health; Ms. Vandana Singh, CEO, Food Security Foundation India, India Food Banking Network; Ms. Monika Singh, Director, Ministry of Women and Child Development; Shri Rajesh Sharma, Deputy Secretary, Department of Food and Public Distribution; Dr. Giridhar Parvatam, Director, CSIR, Central Food Technological Research Institute; Dr. Mamoni Das, Principal, Department of Food Science & Nutrition, Assam Agricultural University; Shri N. Venkateswaran, Chief Executive, National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL), among others.

Some of the suggestions that emanated from the discussion included:

- Adopt a system-wide reform approach, involving mapping of the entire lifecycle of food products,

identification of contamination points at each stage and integration of scientific monitoring, including biomonitoring, into regulatory frameworks;

- Encourage citizen participation to ensure transparency and accountability in food safety systems;
- Undertake public awareness campaigns to address misconceptions regarding food safety, reduce wastage driven by cosmetic preferences and educate consumers on scientifically valid indicators of safe food;
- Encourage vendors not to use colours to enhance the appearance of fruits and vegetables;
- Strengthen training and capacity-building initiatives across all stakeholders, including integration of food safety education at the school level, promotion of behavioural change and use of mobile and digital technologies for grievance redressal and reporting of violations;
- Extend support for testing food adulteration at the school and college laboratories, including the development of a simplified handbook;
- Develop cost-effective AI tools to enable real-time monitoring of food quality and ensure traceability through tamper-proof records;
- Ensure greater transparency by making food safety data, inspection reports and vendor compliance status publicly accessible to build consumer trust;
- Strengthen testing facilities and promote greater transparency in food testing processes, along with the establishment of a dedicated consumer helpline;
- Connect FSSAI and concerned authorities in the States with the laboratories;
- Create a central coordinating body to align efforts across stakeholders, with the primary objective of preventing food adulteration;
- Need for strict implementation of the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013;
- Demystify technical terminologies related to food adulteration, particularly for those involved in food preparation;
- Set up standards for public and private food storage godowns;
- Develop a multi-sectoral surveillance system and a robust framework to investigate food samples in a time-bound manner.

The Commission will further deliberate upon various suggestions from different stakeholders before finalising its recommendations. ■

World Earth Day Special

Intellectual Property in the Climate and Sustainability Agenda

Justice V. Ramasubramanian
Chairperson, NHRC, India

(Based on his inaugural address at an International Conference on 'Intellectual Property in the Climate and Sustainability Agenda' at Presidency University Bangalore on 24th April 2026, held on the backdrop of Earth Day on 22nd April)



On 22nd April we celebrated Earth Day. It was on this day in 1970 that about 20 million people took to the streets across the United States to protest environmental destruction. It happened immediately after the world witnessed the impacts of the Santa Barbara oil spill and the first photographs of the Earth taken by astronauts were released. The beauty of the earth pictured from space contrasted bleakly with what people saw on ground. It was a wake-up call. Some historians say that the largest environmental movement in history was born on 22nd April and this is how it was named Earth Day.

Interestingly, centuries before Earth Day was conceived in the West, the Indian culture taught its countrymen that the earth is worthy of worship like a mother. According to Indian tradition, every human being has five

mothers who are worthy of worship. They are deha mata (biological mother), desa mata (motherland), bhu mata (Mother Earth), gau mata (mother cow) and veda mata (Vedic mother).

Another interesting facet of our culture is that the Vedic prayers have always been not merely for the well-being of human beings, but also for the well-being of the plant and animal kingdoms.

“तच्चम्यो रवरुणीमहे गतुं यज्ञाय गतुं यज्ञपतये ।

दैवी स्वस्तिरस्तु नः स्वस्तिर्मानुषेभ्यः ।

ऊर्ध्वा जिगातु भेषजम् ।

शं नो अस्तु द्विपदे शं चतुष्पदे ।

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥”

“Tachchamyō ravarunīmahe gatum yajñāya gatum yajñapataye.

Daivī swasti-rastu naḥ

swastir mānuṣebhyaḥ.

Ūrdhvā jigātu bheṣajam.

Śaṁ no astu dvipade

śaṁ ca tuṣpade.

Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ.”

“We worship and pray to the Supreme Lord for the welfare of all beings. May all miseries and shortcomings leave us forever so that we may always sing the glory of the Lord during fire ceremonies. May all plants and herbs grow in plenty.

May all the bipeds (two-legged creatures) be happy. May all the quadrupeds (four-legged creatures) be happy. Let there be peace, peace, peace everywhere.”

It is a Vedic Shanti Mantra from the Shukla Yajurveda tradition, used in ritual recitations for universal peace and well-being. But we have left all these ideals behind and adopted a materialistic way of life, which encourages consumerism where human greed has replaced human need. This has had a direct impact on climate, creating complications for humankind.

It is interesting that the theme of this conference brought together three key ideas—intellectual property, climate and the sustainability agenda—which often work in fields that stand in conflict with one another. Intellectual property is about protecting the rights of individuals for their creative work and ideas, while climate and sustainability focus more on the responsibilities we all share towards society and the environment. In simple terms, one is about recognising individual rights today, while the other two are about protecting the rights of future generations and the planet. Intellectual property mainly deals with human creations, whereas climate and sustainability are concerned with the well-being of nature and Earth itself. This difference between protecting individual rights and fulfilling collective responsibilities is what makes this subject both challenging and very important in today's world.

If we look at the history of the evolution of human rights, the first set of rights were civil and political rights, often

called first-generation rights. Then came social, economic and cultural rights as second-generation rights. When the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948, the focus was on the individual. The UDHR guaranteed a wide range of rights, including the right to life, liberty and security of person; freedom from slavery; protection from torture; equality before the law; the right to a fair trial; the right to privacy; freedom of movement; the right to asylum; the right to nationality; the right to education; the right to work; the right to rest and leisure; and the right to an adequate standard of living, including food, clothing, housing and medical care. It also included the right to social security and participation in cultural life.

We may note that the UDHR also takes care of intellectual property. Article 27.2 states: “Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.” Thus, intellectual property rights were also taken care of in the UDHR. But unfortunately, the UDHR, when it was adopted in December 1948, did not address or even envisage the right of human beings to a clean and healthy environment.

It was only after a quarter of a century that the first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment was held in Stockholm in 1972, examining the link between economic growth, environmental pollution and human well-being, leading to the creation of UNEP. Thereafter followed major global milestones: the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 1988, the Rio de Janeiro Conference in 1992, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002), the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (2012), the UN Sustainable Development Summit (2015), COP21 or the Paris Climate Change Conference (2015) and the UN Climate Action Summit (2019).

If we ask whether these conferences over the past 54 years have produced the desired results, the answer may not be palatable. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), climate change is directly contributing to humanitarian emergencies from heatwaves, floods, wildfires, storms and hurricanes, increasing in scale, frequency and intensity. It estimates that 3.6 billion people already live in highly climate-vulnerable areas and between 2030 and 2050, climate change may cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths annually. The direct health damage costs could reach USD 2–4 billion per year by 2030, with developing countries being the most vulnerable.

However, increasing awareness and judicial intervention across the globe are beginning to make an impact. The Global Climate Litigation Report: 2025 Status Review released by UNEP shows that as of 30th June 2025, 3,099 climate-related cases have been filed across 55 national jurisdictions and 24 international or regional courts and tribunals, including the ICJ and Inter-American Court of Human Rights. These include 1,936 cases in the United States and 1,113 in other jurisdictions, including 611 in the Global North and 305 in the Global South, including 14 from India.

Interestingly, while these cases view climate through the prism of human rights, none directly engage with intellectual property. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) has, however, acknowledged that addressing climate change depends on economic growth that works with, rather than against, the environment. Innovative green technologies-alternative energy, energy efficiency, sustainable transport, agriculture and forestry-can help achieve more with less.

WIPO broadly identifies three key issues: transparency; balancing patent policy at pre-grant and post-grant stages, including access and licensing;

and linking patents with technology transfer, innovation economics and ethical considerations. Yet industries have become increasingly sophisticated. Greenwashing is now a major concern, where misleading claims of zero emissions or carbon neutrality are made. There are also backlash cases where industries challenge government action as excessive. Environmental activists too face litigation globally. In *Vatican Prosecutor v. Ultima Generazione Activists and Renovate Switzerland Activists*, penalties were imposed for the disruption of public order. In the U.S., *Energy Transfer LP v. Greenpeace International* imposed massive damages on Greenpeace entities, showing how litigation can deter activism, while anti-SLAPP cases continue elsewhere.

Another complexity is the conflict between competing rights. In trade-off cases, climate action may conflict with biodiversity protection or labour rights. Courts balance these competing interests. In *Coolglass Windfarm Ltd. v. An Bord Pleanála*, the Irish High Court supported wind energy development aligned with climate goals. In *M.K. Ranjitsinh v. Union of India*, the Supreme Court of India balanced renewable energy expansion with protection of endangered species.

In *M.K. Ranjitsinh v. Union of India* (2024), the Supreme Court for the first time explicitly recognised that the right to be free from adverse effects of climate change is a fundamental right under Articles 21 and 14 of the Constitution. It held that climate change threatens survival, health, dignity and intergenerational equity, thereby elevating climate protection into a constitutional mandate.

Thus, as we reflect on intellectual property, climate and sustainability, we are confronted with deep structural tensions but also evolving legal, ethical and technological responses shaping the future of humanity and the planet. ■

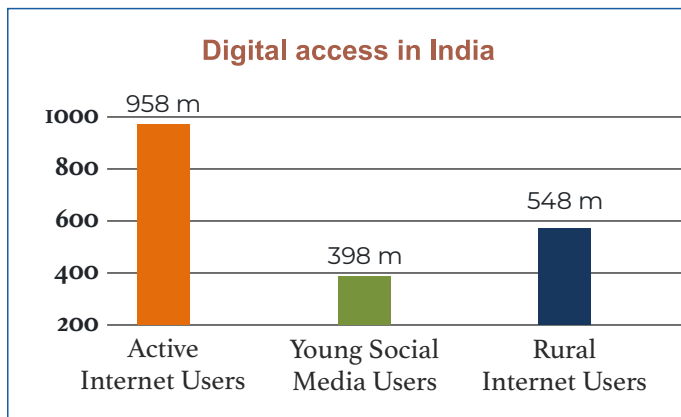
Spotlight

Social Media & Children in India Opportunities, Risks & Regulation

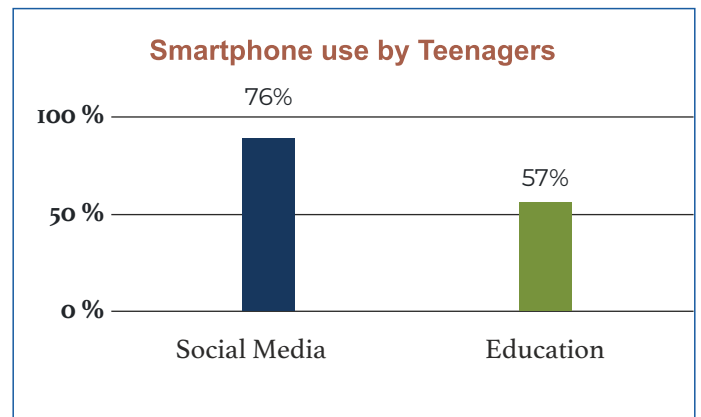
Background

In the digital age, social media has become deeply embedded in the everyday lives of children and adolescents. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, X and Facebook are now central to communication, entertainment, learning and self-expression. In India, this trend has accelerated significantly following the COVID-19 pandemic,

which expanded the role of digital platforms in education and social interaction. According to the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and Kantar Report 2025, the country now has nearly 958 million internet users, including an estimated 398 million young users, highlighting the substantial presence of children in the digital ecosystem.



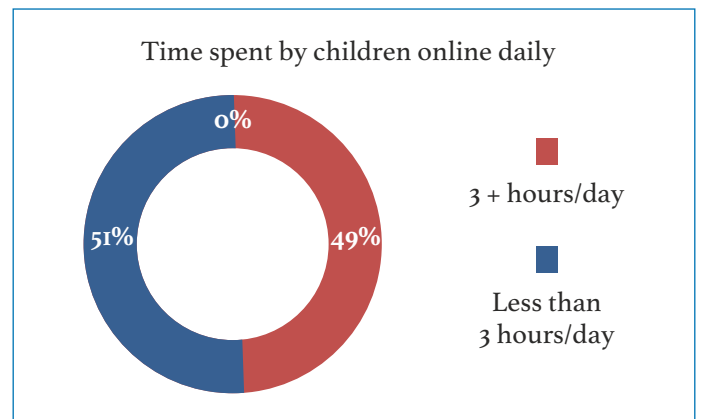
Graph showing the status of digital access in India, based on the 2025 report by the Internet and Mobile Association of India and Kantar



Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024

Surveys such as ASER 2024 indicate that 76% of children aged 14 to 16 use smartphones for social media, reflecting the scale and depth of engagement.

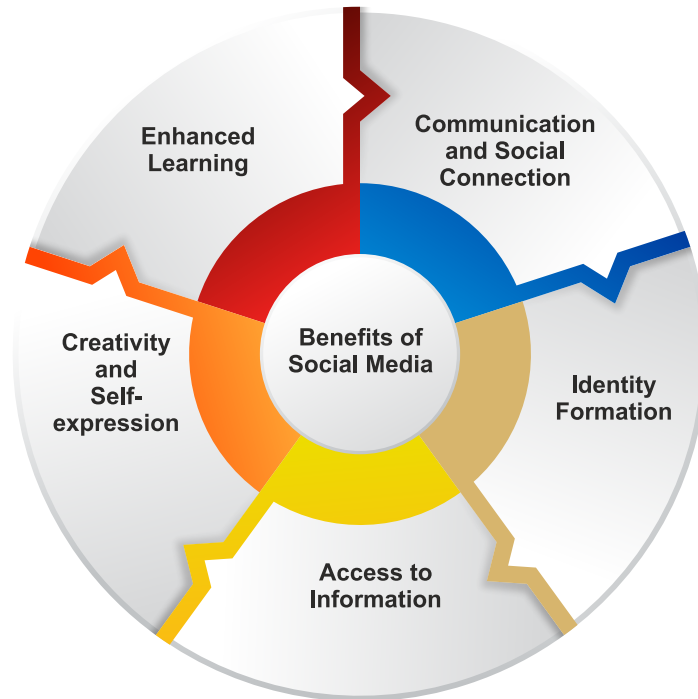
A new nationwide survey by LocalCircles, covering over 57,000 parents across 302 urban districts, shows that 49% of children aged 9-17 spend three hours or more every day online, with many parents linking excessive screen time to aggression, impatience, hyperactivity and depression.



Benefits

Social media offers several tangible benefits for children when used appropriately. It enhances access to educational content and digital learning tools, enabling learning beyond traditional classrooms. It also fosters communication and social connection, particularly during times of disruption such as the pandemic. Additionally, social media encourages

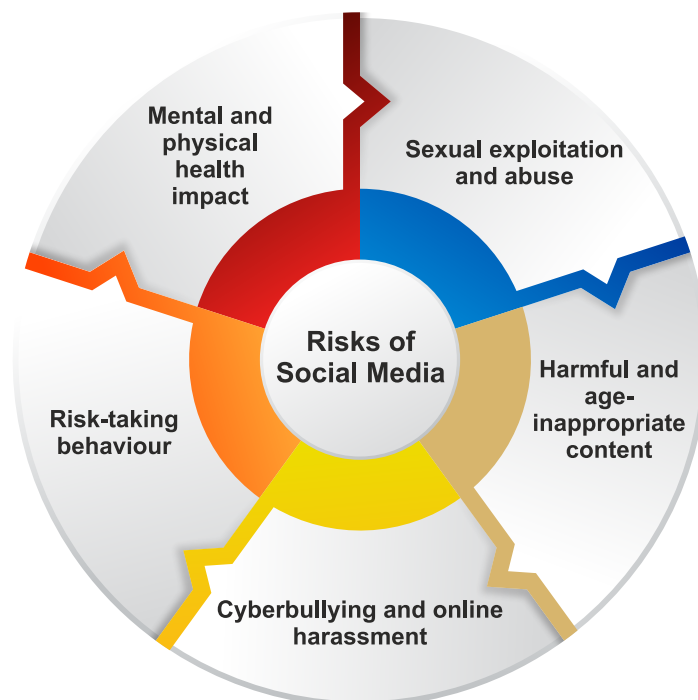
creativity, self-expression and identity formation among young users. It can also serve as an important source of information, including awareness about health, safety and social issues, especially for children in remote or marginalised communities.



Risks

However, alongside the many benefits of digital connectivity, the risks associated with social media use among children and adolescents are substantial and increasingly evident, particularly in India where adequate youth protections remain limited. Studies and national reports, including India’s Economic Survey 2025-26, have highlighted growing concerns around digital addiction among young users, linking excessive screen time to anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, reduced productivity and impaired social development. Given the brain’s heightened plasticity until around the age of 16, prolonged social media exposure can

trigger dopamine responses similar to addictive behaviour, potentially affecting cognition, emotional regulation, attention span and empathy. Children are also increasingly vulnerable to cyberbullying, online sexual exploitation, grooming and exposure to child sexual abuse material, with adolescent girls facing disproportionate risks. In addition, social media platforms frequently expose young users to harmful or age-inappropriate content, including violence, misinformation and dangerous viral “challenge” trends that have, in some cases, resulted in severe injuries or fatalities.



Global Response

Globally, governments are increasingly responding to these concerns through stricter regulations. Countries such as Australia have introduced a minimum age requirement of 16 for social media access, enforced through robust age verification systems and penalties for non-compliant platforms. Other nations, including Malaysia and Singapore, have focused on strengthening platform accountability and ensuring proactive measures to curb harmful content. In Europe, countries like France and Denmark are considering or implementing age-based restrictions, often combined with parental consent mechanisms. These developments reflect a broader global shift toward holding technology platforms more accountable while attempting to safeguard children online.

India's Approach

In contrast, India has adopted a more balanced and multi-layered regulatory approach rather than imposing a blanket ban. Existing legal frameworks, including the Information Technology Act, the IT Rules 2021, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023 and the POCSO Act 2012 collectively address issues such as harmful content, data protection, cyber offences and child sexual exploitation. Notably, the DPDP Act requires parental consent for processing the personal data of minors, thereby indirectly regulating children's access to digital platforms. In addition, institutional mechanisms such as the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal, the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre and CERT-In provide avenues for reporting and addressing online harms, supported by nationwide awareness campaigns.

| Law/ Framework | Main role for social media and children | Key relevance |
|--|---|---|
| Information Technology Act, 2000 | Core cyber law governing online offences, intermediary liability and unlawful digital activity. | Provides the base legal framework for harmful online content, cyber offences and platform responsibility. |
| IT Rules, 2021 | Sets obligations for intermediaries and platforms to act on harmful or unlawful content. | Helps address unsafe content, takedown duties, grievance redressal and accountability of platforms. |
| Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 | Regulates processing of personal data and strengthens privacy safeguards. | Important for children because it requires stronger protection for minors' data and supports privacy in digital spaces. |
| Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 | Replaces the old penal framework for several criminal offences, including cyber-enabled harm. | Relevant for addressing online abuse, obscenity, misinformation and other digital crimes that affect children. |
| POCSO Act, 2012 | Special law for protecting children from sexual offences. | Crucial for addressing grooming, child sexual exploitation, CSAM and other forms of online sexual abuse. |

The Indian judiciary has also engaged with the issue, though it has largely refrained from mandating specific restrictions. The Supreme Court has clarified that decisions regarding age limits for social media access fall within the legislative domain. At the same time, certain High Courts have expressed concern about the impact of social media on

children, with suggestions ranging from adopting stricter regulations similar to Australia's to even recommending higher minimum age thresholds. These observations underline the seriousness of the issue while reinforcing the need for carefully considered policy action.

Key Challenges

Despite the existing frameworks, several challenges complicate effective regulation. Age verification remains a key hurdle, as current technologies whether AI-based estimation or document-based verification raise concerns about accuracy, privacy and data security. Even where restrictions are imposed, children may bypass them using virtual private networks (VPNs) or migrate to less regulated platforms such as messaging apps or online games. Enforcement gaps, limited transparency from technology companies and the cross-border nature of digital platforms further weaken regulatory effectiveness.

Way Forward: Shared Responsibility

A more effective approach lies in recognising social media governance as a shared responsibility. Parents and guardians play a crucial role in guiding children's online behaviour and setting boundaries for healthy usage. Schools and educational institutions must integrate digital literacy and cyber safety into their curricula. Technology companies need to design safer platforms by minimising addictive features,

strengthening content moderation and ensuring transparency in algorithms. Meanwhile, the government must focus on strengthening enforcement, enhancing child-friendly grievance redressal mechanisms and supporting research to inform evidence-based policymaking.

Going forward, India would benefit from a balanced, rights-based approach that prioritises the best interests of the child. This could include calibrated age restrictions combined with robust safeguards, improved age assurance systems that respect privacy and stronger accountability for platforms. Equally important is expanding awareness among children, parents and educators about safe online practices. Rather than excluding children from the digital ecosystem, the goal should be to create a safer and more empowering online environment.

Social media is neither inherently harmful nor entirely beneficial for children. Its impact depends on how it is used, regulated and experienced. The challenge for policymakers is not simply to restrict access but to shape a digital ecosystem that maximises opportunities while minimising risks. A thoughtful, inclusive and multi-stakeholder approach will be essential to ensure that children can safely navigate and benefit from the digital world.■

Measures to Curb Spurious Medicine in India

Ensuring access to safe, effective and affordable medicines is integral to the realisation of the right to health. While India has made notable progress in healthcare delivery and pharmaceutical manufacturing, the persistence of spurious, counterfeit and substandard medicines continues to pose a serious challenge to patient safety and public health. Strengthened regulatory oversight, supply chain transparency and public awareness remain critical in addressing this issue.¹

Globally, nearly 10% of medical products in low- and middle-income countries are substandard or falsified. These medicines contribute to treatment failure, antimicrobial resistance and even mortality, while eroding trust in healthcare systems, particularly affecting vulnerable populations reliant on affordable medicines.

Right to Health and Human Rights Framework- The Right to Life under Article 21 of the Constitution of India has been interpreted to include the right to health, encompassing access to safe medicines and quality healthcare. India's

obligations under international instruments such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) further reinforce this commitment.

The circulation of spurious medicines directly violates these rights by exposing individuals to ineffective or harmful treatments. Limited affordability of genuine medicines may also push economically weaker populations toward informal markets, increasing their exposure to counterfeit



¹ WHO, 2017

² WHO, 2017

² World Customs Organization (2022), Counterfeit pharmaceuticals: Trafficking and trends.

drugs.

Magnitude and Emerging Threats- The counterfeit and substandard medicines market is estimated to be worth billions of dollars annually and continues to pose a major global public health challenge, according to the World Health Organization and the World Customs Organization.² India, often referred to as the “pharmacy of the world”, exports pharmaceutical products to more than 200 countries and accounts for around 60% of global vaccine production. This extensive global presence also underscores the importance of maintaining strong quality standards and regulatory oversight across the pharmaceutical supply chain.³

Recent enforcement actions demonstrate both vulnerabilities and regulatory responsiveness. In Telangana, illegal practitioners stocking unlicensed medicines were identified, while in Kolkata, counterfeit drugs worth approximately Rs 6.6 crore were seized.⁴ These incidents highlight the need for sustained vigilance and enforcement.

Public Health and Systemic Implications- Spurious medicines lead to treatment failure, drug resistance, adverse reactions and increased morbidity and mortality, undermining public trust in healthcare systems. They also pose economic risks by affecting India’s pharmaceutical exports—valued at over Rs 2.04 lakh crore in 2022-23 and increasing scrutiny from global regulators.⁵

According to the regulatory framework established under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and measures implemented by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, India has introduced several reforms to strengthen drug quality regulation and enforcement through special courts and stricter penalties. Recent measures include risk-based inspections, QR code-enabled traceability and strengthened Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP).

Government of India Initiatives

- Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY, covering over 50 crore

beneficiaries (NHA)

- Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP), offering medicines at 50–90% lower prices
- Affordable Medicines and Reliable Implants for Treatment (AMRIT), reducing out-of-pocket expenditure
- National Biopharma Mission and NIPERs, promoting innovation and research
- Pharmaceuticals Purchase Policy (PPP)

However, concerns have been raised by researchers and policy experts that regulatory gaps in the oversight of online pharmacies may increase the risk of circulation of spurious or substandard medicines through poorly monitored supply chains.⁶

Recent Incidents and Systemic Gaps- Recent cases, including child deaths in Madhya Pradesh linked to contaminated cough syrups, highlight vulnerabilities in quality control and pharmacovigilance. The World Health Organization has issued alerts on contaminated cough syrups and oral liquid medicines associated with Indian manufacturers, highlighting severe risks to children and urging stronger surveillance and regulatory vigilance.⁷

Despite testing over 1 lakh drug samples annually, enforcement challenges persist due to fragmented coordination and partial implementation of recommendations such as those of the Mashelkar Committee (2013).

Focus Areas

- Evaluation of the Current Regulatory Framework
- Public Health Risks and Consequences of Spurious and Counterfeit Medicines
- Leveraging Technology to Enhance Transparency in Regulatory Processes
- Enhancing Regulatory Frameworks and Enforcement
- Implementing Best Practices for Robust and Effective Oversight

³ PIB, 2023; Invest India

⁴ Drugs Control Administration, Telangana. (2024, November 26). Press Note No. 16/11/DCA/2024: Raids on Clinics Operated by Quacks – Seizure of Illegally Stocked Medicines in Suryapet and Ranga Reddy Districts. Government of Telangana.

⁵ PIB, 2023; IBEF

⁶ Over-the-counter Drug Development in Developing Countries,” Indian Journal of Pharmacology, Vol. 57, No. 4 (2025): 207–211, doi:10.4103/ijp.ijp_550_25

⁷ World Health Organization, “Medical Product Alert N°5/2025: Substandard (contaminated) oral liquid medicines,” WHO Newsroom, 13 October 2025

Bonded Labour

Bonded labour or debt bondage, remains one of the most prevalent forms of modern slavery. It occurs when individuals are compelled to work to repay loans, often for little or no wages. Despite constitutional guarantees and statutory protections, the practice continues in both rural and urban sectors, disproportionately affecting marginalised communities.

Constitutional and Legal Safeguards

Article 17: Abolition of untouchability

Article 21: Protection of life and liberty

Article 23: Prohibition of forced and bonded labour

Article 35: Enforcement of fundamental rights

Key statutes include the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, relevant provisions of the Indian Penal Code (Sections 370–374) and the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

Supreme Court Interventions

Landmark rulings such as *People’s Union for Democratic Rights v. Union of India* (1982), *Neeraja Chaudhary v. State of Madhya Pradesh* (1984) and *Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India* (1984) expanded the definition of “forced labour.” The Court held that compulsion arising from poverty, hunger or payment below minimum wages constitutes forced labour under Article 23, placing responsibility on the state to identify, release and rehabilitate victims.

Role of District Authorities

District Magistrates are central to enforcement, tasked with constituting vigilance committees, ensuring identification

and release of bonded labourers and implementing rehabilitation schemes tailored to victims’ needs.

NHRC Initiatives

The NHRC, India oversees implementation of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, as directed by the Supreme Court in “*Public Union for Civil Liberties v. State of Tamil Nadu & Others.*”

The Commission monitors implementation of the 1976 Act, investigates complaints, conducts spot enquiries, organises seminars and issues advisories. Since inception, it has registered over 18,000 cases. However, challenges persist:

- Poor enforcement of laws and directives
- Delays in rehabilitation and social welfare benefits
- Lack of awareness among officials and victims
- Inadequate follow up after initial monetary assistance

Recent NHRC enquiries into brick kilns in Uttar Pradesh revealed systemic failures, including reliance on employers’ oral denials, absence of statutory record checks and disregard for Supreme Court mandated presumptions of bondage.

Conclusion

Fifty years after the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, bonded labour remains entrenched due to weak implementation and lack of sustained rehabilitation. Effective eradication requires simultaneous identification, release and rehabilitation, coupled with sensitisation of officials and strict accountability mechanisms. ■

Important interventions

Online hearing of 216 cases of alleged bonded labour in brick kilns of Uttar Pradesh

Bonded labour continues to remain one of the most persistent and deeply concerning human rights challenges, particularly in sectors where vulnerability and exploitation intersect. Ensuring accountability and rehabilitation in

such cases requires sustained institutional vigilance and coordinated administrative response.

On 17th April 2026, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India heard online 216 cases of alleged bonded labour in the brick kilns across various districts of Uttar Pradesh. Chairperson, Justice V. Ramasubramanian presided over the virtual hearing in the presence of Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal, Registrar (Law), Shri



► NHRC, India Chairperson, Justice V. Ramasubramanian flanked by Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal and Registrar (Law), Shri Joginder Singh presiding over the online hearing of bonded labour cases in Uttar Pradesh

Joginder Singh and senior officers. The hearing saw the active participation of senior functionaries of the state government, including the Labour Commissioner, District Magistrates (DMs) and Additional District Magistrates, among others.

Justice Ramasubramanian appreciated their presence but said that such a hearing may not have been necessary if the officers performed their duties diligently. Despite reports highlighting non-production of records and non-

compliance with minimum wage norms, among other violations, the authorities have failed to address the issue of bonded labour. He said that such omissions deny the labourers their rightful claim of rescue, release and rehabilitation under the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 and the Central Sector Scheme.

NHRC, India Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal underscored the gaps in the implementation of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 and the rehabilitation



► The online hearing in progress

of bonded labourers. He urged the district functionaries to address the plight of the labourers and give them a dignified life by implementing the law. He emphasised that any omission or inaction on the part of the authorities leaves these labourers in penury and they become victims of exploitation.

The Commission reviewed action taken reports (ATRs) submitted by the DMs on the complaints under its

consideration. The State Labour Commissioner assured that all the 216 cases will be reviewed, following which the requisite information and reports will be submitted to the Commission within three weeks. The authorities also assured that they would ensure full compliance with the Supreme Court directives and applicable laws for immediate remedial actions to address the issue of bonded labour. ■

21 states and NCT Delhi urged to take advance measures to protect vulnerable populations from heatwaves

Rising temperatures and increasingly frequent heat waves have emerged as a serious public health and human rights concern, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations such as outdoor workers, children, the elderly and the homeless. In this context, preventive preparedness and timely intervention are critical to saving lives and reducing avoidable hardship.

The National Human Rights Commission has asked 21 states and the NCT of Delhi to take advance action and implement relief measures to protect vulnerable populations during heat waves in the country. The States include Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

The Commission has observed that the rise in the frequency, duration and intensity of heat waves disproportionately affects the marginalised, economically weaker sections, outdoor workers and the homeless due to the lack of adequate shelter and resources. The elderly, children, infants and newborns are especially susceptible to the health impacts of extreme heat. Additionally, heat waves can lead to the loss of livelihoods and an increased risk of fire accidents.

Therefore, the Commission, in a letter to the Chief Secretaries of these states and the union territory of Delhi, has emphasised the urgent need for integrated and inclusive measures. Highlighting the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data about the reported death of 3,712 people in India due to heat or sunstroke between 2019-2023, the Commission has urged them to plan and facilitate seamless implementation of relief measures as per their existing Standard Operating Procedures or guidelines issued by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) to mitigate the impact of heat waves and prevent casualties. The Commission has called for consolidated action taken reports from the districts at the state/ union territory level. ■

Suo motu cognizance

The 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. During April 2026, the Commission took *suo motu* cognizance in 12 cases of alleged human rights violations reported by the media and issued notices to the concerned authorities to send action taken reports. Summaries of these cases are as follows:

Girls ill after consuming hostel food

(Case No. 268/6/1/2026)

On 5th April 2026, the media reported that around 57 girls fell ill after consuming food at a hostel in the Memnagar

area of Ahmedabad district, Gujarat. They complained of abdominal pain, diarrhoea and vomiting and were taken to a hospital for treatment. Therefore, the Commission has issued notices to the state Chief Secretary and Ahmedabad Police Commissioner, calling for a detailed report on the matter. The report is expected to include the status of the health of the victims as well as the investigation of the case. According to the media report, about 18 girls were admitted to the hospital, while the remaining were kept under medical observation.

Death and injuries in an explosion at a private steel plant

(Case No. 254/34/23/2026)

On 6th April 2026, the media reported that one person died and seven others sustained serious injuries after an

explosion at a private steel plant in the Hesla area of the Ramgarh district, Jharkhand on 6th April 2026. The incident occurred in the morning while work was in progress. The explosion reportedly occurred due to excessive furnace temperature caused by a technical malfunction or failure to comply with prescribed safety standards. Therefore, the Commission has issued notices to the Chief Secretary and Director General of Police, Jharkhand, calling for a detailed report on the matter. It is expected to include the status of the injured persons' health, investigation and compensation, if any, provided to the next of kin (NoK) of the deceased worker and the seven injured. According to the media report, the injured persons were initially taken to nearby medical centres and later referred to a Ranchi hospital for advanced treatment, where one of the injured workers died during the course of treatment.

Storage of illicit liquor at a school premises

(Case No.700/4/4/2026)

On 8th April 2026, the media reported that on 6th April 2026, a IV standard student accidentally consumed illicit liquor mistaking it to be a soft drink. It was stored in a huge quantity of bottles at a dilapidated toilet of his school in the Siswa area of Begusarai district of Bihar. He returned home in an intoxicated condition. The family members of the student informed the school authorities about the incident and the matter was brought to the notice of the police. Reportedly, the police seized a total of 23 cartons containing about 204 litres of illicit liquor from the toilet. Therefore, the Commission has issued notices to the Chief Secretary and the Director General of Police, Bihar, calling for a detailed report on the matter. It is expected to include the status of the child's health and the investigation. According to the media report, the incident occurred amid a ban on the manufacture, sale and consumption of liquor imposed since 5th April 2016, when Bihar was declared a dry state.

One student died and several fell ill after consuming stale food at a school hostel

(Case No. 351/18/9/2026)

On 15th April 2026, the media reported that a 12-year-old boy died and more than 100 others fell ill after consuming stale food at the hostel of the Kakabandh Ashram School in the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha on 14th April 2026. Reportedly, the victim was a 5th standard student of the school run by the ST and SC Welfare Department of the State Government. Therefore, the Commission has

issued notices to the Chief Secretary, Government of Odisha and the Superintendent of Police, Mayurbhanj, calling for a detailed report on the matter. It is expected to include the status of the investigation as well as the health of the victim students. Reportedly, the condition of about 67 students was serious and they were shifted to the Baripada Medical College and Hospital. 41 others were admitted to a Community Health Centre.

Explosion at a thermal power plant

(Case No.170/33/33/2026)

On 15th April 2026, the media reported that at least 13 workers died and 20 others were injured due to a boiler tube explosion at a thermal power plant in the Sakti district of Chhattisgarh on 14th April 2026. Reportedly, the explosion released extremely hot steam, engulfing the workers. Therefore, the Commission has issued notices to the Chief Secretary and the Director General of Police, calling for a detailed report on the matter. It is expected to include the status of the disbursement of compensation to the affected workers as well as the health of those injured. Reportedly, the rescue operations were initiated by the police after the boiler was shut down and cooled. The workers were admitted to different hospitals.

Public shaming of a woman in a village

(Case No. 773/12/23/2026-WC)

On 15th April 2026, the media reported that villagers paraded a woman with her husband on her shoulders on allegations of elopement in the Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh on 13th April 2026. Reportedly, the villagers also shaved her head. The incident came to light after a video was circulated on social media. Therefore, the Commission has issued notices to the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police, Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh, calling for a detailed report on the matter. The report is expected to include the status of the investigation and compensation, if any, provided to the victim woman. Reportedly, after the video was circulated on social media, the police traced the woman and provided her protection. An FIR was registered and some arrests have also been made.

Students die after school gate collapse

(Case No. 352/18/21/2026)

On 16th April 2026, the media reported that two girl students died after an iron gate of a government

primary school collapsed on them in the Gajapati district of Odisha on 15th April 2026. Reportedly, the incident occurred when the girls were playing near the school entrance. Therefore, the Commission has issued notices to the Chief Secretary, Government of Odisha and the Superintendent of Police, Gajapati, calling for a detailed report on the matter. Reportedly, the students were trapped under the debris. The locals rushed the victims to a nearby hospital, where the doctors declared them dead.

Death of two sanitation workers

(Case No. 526/7/24/2026)

On 16th April 2026, the media reported that two sanitation workers died and another was injured after inhaling poisonous gases while cleaning a sewer line at the Ambedkar Chowk of Firozpur Jhirka area in the Nuh district of Haryana on 15th April 2026. Reportedly, the contractor, engaged by the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) of the state government, had deployed three workers for cleaning the sewer line without any safety gear. Therefore, the Commission has issued notices to the Nuh Municipal Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police, calling for a detailed report on the matter. The report is expected to include the status of the investigation, health of the injured and compensation to him as well as to the next of kin (NoK) of the deceased workers.

The Commission has also noted that in spite of guidelines issued by the Supreme Court and its specific advisory emphasising the mechanised cleaning of sewer lines/ manholes with safety gear for the sanitation workers, such incidents are occurring frequently across the country.

Deaths due to drowning in a pit left open by the civic authority

(Case No. 619/13/18/2026)

On 17th April 2026, the media reported that four children died due to drowning in a fifteen-feet-deep pit near a drain work site in the Islampura area of Nanded district in Maharashtra on 16th April 2026. Reportedly, the drain was being constructed by the local civic body and wastewater had accumulated in the nearby pit. Therefore, the Commission has issued notices to the Commissioner, Nanded Waghala City Municipal Corporation, the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police, Nanded, Maharashtra, calling for a detailed report on the matter. It is expected to include the status of health and compensation, if any, paid to the next of kin (NoK) of the deceased.

Reportedly, the children were playing near the site and entered the water without anticipating its depth. Upon hearing their cries, local residents and the police reportedly reached the spot and attempted to rescue them. However, the children could not be saved.

Explosion at firecracker factory

(Case No. 513/22/45/2026)

On 20th April 2026, the media reported that at least 18 workers died and six others were injured in an explosion at a private firecracker manufacturing unit in the Kattannarpatti area of the Virudhunagar district, Tamil Nadu. Reportedly, more than 100 workers, including women, were present at the factory complex when the incident occurred on 19th April 2026. The blast was allegedly triggered due to friction during the chemical mixing and manufacturing process. Reportedly, in a recent similar incident in the district, four persons had died. Therefore, the Commission has issued notices to the Chief Secretary, Tamil Nadu and the Superintendent of Police, Virudhunagar, calling for a detailed report on the matter. The report is expected to include the status of health of the injured persons, investigation of the case and compensation, if any, paid to the NoK of the deceased and the injured.

Explosion causing fire at a chemical factory

(Case No. 345/6/5/2026)

On 24th April 2026, the media reported about an explosion that caused a fire at a chemical factory, leaving at least 16 workers injured on 23rd April 2026. The factory is located in the Jhagadia GIDC industrial estate of Bharuch district, Gujarat. Reportedly, a preliminary inquiry indicated technical or chemical factors behind the incident. Therefore, the Commission has issued notices to the Chief Secretary, Gujarat and the Superintendent of Police, Bharuch, calling for a detailed report on the matter. The report is expected to include the status of health of the injured workers, the investigation of the case and compensation, if any, paid to them. Reportedly, the incident has raised concerns regarding industrial safety in the area and the need for strict compliance with safety protocols. The injured workers were admitted to nearby hospitals for treatment.

Illegal detention and torture of a journalist

(Case No. 265/6/21/2026)

On 29th March 2026, the media reported that a journalist was apprehended in an unlawful manner by the Rajkot

Crime Branch police in Gujarat on 22nd March 2026. The journalist was stripped naked, suspended upside down and subjected to physical torture, resulting in serious injuries to him. Reportedly, the police tried to threaten the Rajkot Civil Hospital staff against admitting the victim. He was also threatened that false criminal cases would be registered against him and his house would be demolished. Therefore, the Commission has issued a

notice to the Director General of Police, Gujarat, calling for a detailed report on the matter, including the present status of the investigation and the health of the victim. According to the media report, the journalist operates an online media outlet. The report has also revealed extensive details of the injuries caused to him in police torture. He was admitted to the Rajkot Civil Hospital the next day on 23rd March 2026. ■

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 April 2026, an amount of Rs 51.6 lakh was recommended for the victims or their next of kin (NoK) in 11 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 NHRC, India website by logging the case number given in the table below:

| S. No. | Case Number | Nature of complaint | Amount (Rs in lakh) | Authority |
|--------|--------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. | 1277/7/3/2022-JCD | Death in judicial custody | 5.00 | Govt. of Haryana |
| 2. | 969/9/5/2024-JCD | Death in judicial custody | 5.00 | Govt. of Jammu & Kashmir |
| 3. | 542/34/6/2024-JCD | Death in judicial custody | 5.00 | Govt. of Jharkhand |
| 4. | 6/16/1/2023-JCD | Death in judicial custody | 5.00 | Govt. of Mizoram |
| 5. | 1137/18/28/2024 | Death due to electrocution | 5.00 | Govt. of Odisha |
| 6. | 1146/18/5/2025 | Death due to electrocution | 4.00 | Govt. of Odisha |
| 7. | 18352/24/10/2024 | Harassment of students and parents | 0.1 | Govt. of Uttar Pradesh |
| 8. | 22307/24/40/2024 | Death due to electrocution | 5.00 | Govt. of Uttar Pradesh |
| 9. | 24951/24/27/2021 | Death due to electrocution | 5.00 | Govt. of Uttar Pradesh |
| 10. | 3068/25/9/2023-DH | Death in police custody | 5.00 | Govt. of West Bengal |
| 11. | 523/33/24/2024-PCD | Death in police custody | 7.50 | Govt. of Chhattisgarh |

Payment of relief to the victims

During April 2026, the Commission closed 15 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 58.75 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 NHRC, India website by logging the case number given in the table

| S. No. | Case Number | Name of complaint | Amount (Rs in lakh) | Authority |
|--------|--------------------|--|---------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | 564/1/3/2022-JCD | Death in judicial custody | 5.00 | Govt. of Andhra Pradesh |
| 2 | 1080/7/10/2023-JCD | Death in judicial custody | 5.00 | Govt. of Haryana |
| 3 | 102/34/1/2024-JCD | Death in judicial custody | 5.00 | Govt. of Jharkhand |
| 4 | 1394/34/3/2021-JCD | Death in judicial custody | 4.00 | Govt. of Jharkhand |
| 5 | 275/13/3/2021-JCD | Death in judicial custody | 5.00 | Govt. of Maharashtra |
| 6 | 658/22/13/2021-JCD | Death in judicial custody | 5.00 | Govt. of Tamil Nadu |
| 7 | 60/2/7/2023-PCD | Death in police custody | 5.00 | Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh |
| 8 | 2580/4/39/2024 | Assault by police | 0.50 | Govt. of Bihar |
| 9 | 647/4/23/2024 | Assault by police | 0.25 | Govt. of Bihar |
| 10 | 4460/18/3/2022 | Illegal arrest | 5.00 | Govt. of Odisha |
| 11 | 1257/34/16/2022 | Inaction by the state government/ central govt. officials | 2.50 | Govt. of Jharkhand |
| 12 | 394/20/32/2022 | Unlawful detention | 2.00 | Govt. of Rajasthan |
| 13 | 11155/24/48/2020 | Custodial torture | 5.00 | Govt. of Uttar Pradesh |
| 14 | 27432/24/31/2022 | Death due to negligence | 7.50 | Govt. of Uttar Pradesh |
| 15 | 9180/24/72/2022 | Non-payment of pension/ compensation | 2.00 | Govt. of Uttar Pradesh |

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 NoK. The Commission also received reports of compliance with recommendations by the respective state authorities. Summaries of such cases are as under:

Death due to suicide in judicial custody

Case No. 506/34/18/2022-AD)

The matter pertained to the suicide of a 30-year-old undertrial prisoner in judicial custody of the District Jail, West Singhbhum, Chaibasa, Jharkhand in 2022. Based on the material received in response to its notices, the Commission found that the victim died by jumping from the staircase of Ward No. 2 of the jail. He was taken to the District Hospital for treatment, where he died. It held that when a person is under the custody of jail, the onus of his safety and security lies with the state and in case of any negligence or failure to provide the same on account of acts of omission or commission on the part of jail authorities, the state becomes vicariously liable to pay the compensation for the same.

Therefore, the Commission recommended that the state government pay Rs 7 lakh as relief to the next of kin of the deceased, which was paid.

Contaminated mid-day Meal

Case No. 1257/34/16/2022)

The matter pertained to an incident in which 25 students of the Rajkiya Vidyalaya Bansurali, Ranchi fell ill after consuming a mid-day meal allegedly contaminated with a lizard. Based on reports received in response to its notices, the Commission found violations of mandatory provisions relating to hygiene and quality of meals under the Mid-Day Meal Rules, 2015 and the guidelines of the Jharkhand State Mid-Day Meal Authority. It held that the state is responsible for ensuring safe and hygienic meals for students and any

lapse in this regard amounts to negligence. Accordingly, the Commission issued a show cause notice and, in the absence of any objection, confirmed its recommendation that the state government pay Rs 10,000 each as relief to the affected students. The amount was subsequently paid.

Death due to suicide in police custody

Case No. 4460/18/3/2022)

The matter pertained to the death of a man in custody at the Choudwar Excise Police Station, Odisha, on 20th December 2022, initially alleged to be due to police brutality. Based on reports received in response to its notices, the Commission found that the death was caused by suicide. It held that since the deceased was in police custody, the responsibility for his safety and security lay entirely with the state and any failure to prevent self-harm amounted to negligence, attracting vicarious liability. Accordingly, the Commission issued a show cause notice and, upon the state government's concurrence, confirmed its recommendation that Rs 5 lakh be paid as relief to the next of kin of the deceased. The amount was subsequently paid.

Death due to fall in an open deep pit

Case No. 27432/24/31/2022)

The matter pertained to the death of a 26-year-old man in Tronica City, Ghaziabad on 29th August 2022, after he fell into a 10-foot-deep pit dug for pillar construction by the National

Highways Authority of India. Based on reports received in response to its notices, the Commission found that the site lacked proper barricading, lighting and warning measures, indicating negligence on the part of the Ghaziabad Municipal Corporation and allied agencies responsible for maintaining public pathways. It held that such inaction led to the loss of life and that the state was vicariously liable to compensate the next of kin of the deceased. Accordingly, the Commission issued a show cause notice and, in the absence of any response, confirmed its recommendation that the state government pay Rs 7.5 lakh as relief to the next of kin. The amount was subsequently paid.

Death due to suicide in judicial custody

Case No. 102/34/1/2024-JCD)

The matter pertained to the custodial death of a 24-year-old undertrial prisoner in Jharkhand on 26th January 2024. Based on reports received in response to its notices, the Commission found that the deceased committed suicide in the morning hours while admitted in a hospital ward, indicating a lack of proper surveillance and negligence on the part of jail authorities. It held that the responsibility for the safety and security of a person in custody lies with the state and any failure in this regard attracts vicarious liability. Accordingly, the Commission issued a show cause notice and, in the absence of a response, confirmed its recommendation that the state government pay Rs 5 lakh as relief to the next of kin of the deceased. The amount was subsequently paid. ■

Spot enquiries

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

- **Case No. 2255/30/6/2023**

From 6th to 10th April 2026, a spot enquiry was conducted into the allegations that the complainant was illegally arrested by the Model Town police, Delhi and was physically assaulted.

- **Case No. 1777/22/16/2024-WC**

From 6th to 10th April 2026, a spot enquiry was conducted into the allegations that a female performer was hired for a dance programme in Pattukkottai, Tamil Nadu. Later she was kidnapped along with her friends, raped and abandoned in Nagapattinam.

- **Case No. 4821/30/3/2025**

From 7th to 10th April 2026, a spot enquiry was conducted into the allegations that a hearing-impaired woman working as a cook was repeatedly harassed by the Hauz Khas Police following a theft at her employer's residence. It was alleged that police personnel searched her house without a warrant, took her and others to the Pushp Vihar Crime Branch, physically assaulted her and forced them to sign blank papers.

- **Case No. 16665/24/54/2024**

From 7th to 10th April 2026, a spot enquiry was conducted into the allegations that the complainant's 2-year-old daughter was kidnapped, raped and brutally murdered in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh. He alleged that the police and medical team tampered with the evidence and a false post-mortem report was made to suggest the injuries were caused by animal bites instead of an assault.

- **Case No. 1669/36/0/2025**

From 13th to 17th April 2026, a spot inquiry was conducted into the allegations that the negligence of the State Secretary of the Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Telangana Backward Classes Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society (MJPTBCWREIS), Telangana caused administrative lapses leading to suicide by 72 students. The complainant stated that frequent food poisoning incidents and the misappropriation of PM SHRI funds meant for 100 schools occurred under the Secretary's watch. The complainant alleged that despite an enforcement inquiry, no action was taken regarding the corruption involving crores of rupees.

- **Case No. 3553/24/4/2026-WC**

From 20th to 24th April 2026, a spot enquiry was conducted into the allegations that the Mary Wanamaker Girls' Intermediate College Hostel, Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh was charging a high fee for its hostel without ensuring basic amenities, dignity and security to the students.

- **Case No. 18633/24/14/2019-JCD**

From 20th to 24th April 2026, a spot enquiry was conducted in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh in a matter of death in judicial custody, alleging that there were 14 ante-mortem injuries on the body of the deceased, but no enquiry was made about how these injuries were inflicted.

- **Case No. 1509/18/9/2023**

From 27th to 30th April 2026, a spot enquiry was conducted into the allegations that a 40-year-old man, belonging to a Scheduled Tribe and residing in Burudi village of district Mayurbhanj, Odisha, was killed by the Forest Department personnel. ■

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 18th April 2026, NHRC, India Member, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani visited the Rythu Bazar, Sanath Nagar (Hyderabad) to assess conditions affecting farmers and their rights in accessing fair market spaces. She noted that genuine farmers face barriers to entry, with the market dominated by intermediaries. She observed instances of harassment and extra labour charges impacting farmers' rights and earnings. She further observed misuse of the farmer ID system, non-farmers operating freely, lack of monitor-



ing by officials and inadequate basic facilities, highlighting concerns around fairness, transparency and protection of farmers' rights.

On 19th April 2026, she visited the Tribal Girls' Hostel and school located in the Vardhannapet village, Warangal district, Telangana. She observed that 168 girls live in unsafe, undignified and neglectful conditions. They lived without adequate sanitation facilities, drinking water, quality food and infrastructure. There was no female supervisor. She also noted that registers and records are not maintained properly by the authorities. She found that the hostel functioned in a highly disorganised and neglected manner, raising serious concerns about the safety, health and well-being of the girl students.



► NHRC, India Member, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani inspecting the Tribal Girls' Hostel in Warangal district, Telangana

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 Rapporteur

From 14th to 18th April 2026, Shri Sayeed Ahmed Baba visited District Jail, Nagaland Institute of Medical Sciences and Research, District Hospital, an orphanage, a juvenile home, an Anganwadi Centre and met the representatives of non-governmental organisations in Kohima, Nagaland. He also visited Dimapur Central Jail to assess the facilities for the prisoners and human rights situation. He also held meetings with senior state government officials to sensitise them on human rights issues.

From 19th to 26th April 2026, Shri Upendra Singh Baghel visited Agra and Aligarh districts in Uttar Pradesh and undertook field visits; interacted with district and state authorities; visited District Prison Agra, Government Protection Home and Kalindi Vihar; met the representatives of non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations working on prison reforms and women protection and reviewed coordination mechanisms.

From 20th to 23rd April 2026, Shri S.K. Satapathy visited Kendujhar District, Odisha. He inspected the District Jail and Sub-Jail, Champua, assessing detention conditions, basic amenities and inmates' rights. He also visited a primitive tribal village to review the status of welfare measures for tribal communities and the Women's Mental Health Home to evaluate care and rehabilitation standards. He also interacted with local NGOs on human rights issues. Surprise inspections of police lockups at Kendujhar Sadar, Champua and Ghata Gaon were conducted to examine compliance with custodial safeguards.



NHRC, India Special Rapporteur, Shri Sayeed Ahmed Baba interacting with the children at an Anganwadi Centre in Kohima

From 20th to 25th April 2026, Shri Subhash Chandra visited Indore, Khandwa and Burhanpur districts in Madhya Pradesh and visited prisons, detention centres, Anganwadi Centres, shelter homes for women, orphanages and facilities for persons with disabilities to assess human rights situation.

From 20th to 25th April 2026, Smt. Shomita Biswas visited Shimla district in Himachal Pradesh and held meetings with the senior officers in the Social Welfare Department, Home Department, Women and Child Development Department and Health Department. She also visited jails, child care institutions, shelter homes, Anganwadi Centres and other institutions to assess the human rights situation.

From 20th to 25th April 2026, Shri K. Padmakumar visited the Andaman & Nicobar Islands and held meetings with the District Administration of the South Andaman and Nicobar districts and senior officers of the Union Territory administration, including Departments of Tribal Welfare, Social Justice and Home Affairs; reviewed the welfare and protection of tribal communities and related human rights issues.

From 24th to 29th April 2026, Smt. Suchitra Sinha visited four villages in Chandil Block, Seraikela–Kharsawan district in Jharkhand. She held meetings with officials associated with the Swarnarekha Multipurpose Project, elected village heads (Mukhiya), displaced persons and the District Legal Services Authority.

From 26th to 30th April 2026, Shri Mohammad Jamshed visited Mumbai in Maharashtra and inspected a police station lock-up in South Mumbai, Arthur Road Central Jail and Women's Central Jail, Byculla.



► NHRC, India Special Rapporteur, Shri S.K. Satapathy interacting with the villagers in Kadalibadi, Odisha



► NHRC, India Special Rapporteur, Smt. Shomita Biswas at Model Jail Kanda, Himachal Pradesh

Special Monitor

From 1st to 4th April 2026, Shri Balkrishan Goel visited observation homes, places of Safety, Specialised Adoption Agencies/ Child Care Institutions, Anganwadi Centres, Central and District Jails, District Hospitals, Community Health Centres, Primary Health Centres, Government Schools, Public Distribution System distribution points and Old Age Homes in the Patna and Darbhanga districts of Bihar to assess the human rights situation. He also held meetings with District Magistrates and district-level officers.

From 6th to 11th April 2026, Dr. Pradeepta Kumar Nayak visited Bhopal, Sehore and Raisen districts in Madhya Pradesh. He held meetings with the State Health, Leprosy and Mental Health officials, District Magistrates and district officers; reviewed implementation of health programmes including services for persons affected by leprosy. He also visited hospitals, District Hospitals, Community Health Centres,



► NHRC, India Special Monitor, Dr. Pradeepta Kumar Nayak interacting with the leprosy affected persons in Sehore, Madhya Pradesh

Primary Health Centres, Urban Primary Health Centres, communities and leprosy colonies in these districts.

From 13th to 18th April 2026, Shri Dhananjay Tingal visited Patna, Kishanganj, Purnea, Katihar and Saharsa districts in Bihar and held meetings with senior officials of the Labour Department, Women and Child Development Department and Home Department. He also reviewed the implementation of systems to check bonded and child labour.

From 20th to 25th April 2026, Dr. Purva Mittal visited Chandigarh and SAS Nagar, Mohali districts in Punjab. She visited Women Police Stations, the State Legal Services Authority, the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, the One Stop Centre (Sakhi), the Municipal Corporation, the Office of the State Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities and the Punjab State Disaster Management Authority to assess the human rights situation.

From 21st to 27th April 2026, Prof. Kanhaiya Tripathi visited Ranchi, Deoghar, Dhanbad, Ramgarh and Hazaribagh districts of Jharkhand and

conducted on-the-spot inspections and interactions at various universities, colleges, institutes and schools to assess the status of human rights education and gender equality at higher and school-level education.

From 22nd to 27th April 2026, Shri Gopi Shankar visited Bengaluru district in Karnataka to assess the human rights situation. He held meetings with the Health Secretary, Director of Medical Education, Vice Chancellor of Karnataka Medical University, Dean of Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health, authorities of the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences and the State Adoption Resource Agency. He also visited Juvenile Correction Homes and Shelter Homes run by the state government. The visit aimed at data collection, analysis and advocacy on the issues relating to persons with diverse sex characteristics, intersex infants and gender non-confirming children.

From 23rd to 29th April 2026, Shri Balkrishan Goel visited Papum Pare and Lower Subansiri Districts, Arunachal Pradesh and conducted on-

the-spot inspections of Observation Homes, Places of Safety, Specialised Adoption Agencies/ Child Care Institutions, Anganwadi Centres, Central and District Jails, District Hospitals, Community Health Centres, Primary Health Centres, Government and Residential Schools, Tribal Hostels, Public Distribution System distribution points and Old Age Homes. He also held meetings with the Chief Secretary, Director General of Police, District Magistrates/ Deputy Commissioners and other concerned officers at the state and district levels to understand their perspective and challenges in implementation of various schemes and related human rights aspects.

From 26th April to 30th April 2026, Shri Umakant visited rural and suburban areas of Patna district, Bihar and met senior officials to review implementation of constitutional provisions and associated human rights aspects; interacted with Gram Sabha office bearers, representatives of Village Panchayats, Block Panchayats and Zila Parishads and local residents. ■



NHRC, India Special Monitor, Shri Gopi Shankar interacting with the Karnataka officers dealing with the issues relating to persons with diverse sex characteristics, intersex infants and gender non-confirming children

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 court competitions, 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.

Training programmes

NHRC, India supports training programmes organised by different institutions. These are also addressed by the Chairperson, Members, Secretary General and senior officers of the NHRC, India. On 8th April 2026, the Commission supported the Health Parliament, Academy of Digital Health Sciences International Patients Union, Global Digital Health Summit in organising the 'International Patients'

Union Conference 2026' at the India International Centre, New Delhi.

Exposure visits

To promote human rights awareness among college-level students and their faculties, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India invites them 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 faculties of the following institutions visited the Commission in April 2026:

- A group of 36 students and two faculty members from the St. Wilfred's College of Law, Raigad, Maharashtra.
- A group of 37 students and a faculty member from the National Forensic Sciences University, Rohini, Delhi.
- A group of 19 students and a faculty member from the Department of Political Science, University of Delhi.
- A group of 30 students and 3 faculty members from the Allahabad Degree College, Beniganj Campus, Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh.



- A group of 42 students and 4 faculty members from the Ponnaiyah Ramajayam Institute of Science & Technology (PRIST), Deemed to be University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu.



- A group of 17 students and 3 faculty members from the Adamas University, North 24 Pargana, West Bengal.



- A group of 24 students and 2 faculty members from the Dr. D.Y. Patil Law College, Pimpri, Pune, Maharashtra.



- A group of 18 students and 2 faculty members from the Mohammad Abdul Bari Institute of Juridical Science, Murshidabad, West Bengal.



- A group of 29 students and 2 faculty members from the Amex Law College, Nawabhat, Bardhaman, West Bengal.



- A group of 18 students and 3 faculty members from the Gurugram University, Gurugram, Haryana.

Awards

Celebrating Cinema with a Cause: NHRC Awards Human Rights Short Films-2025

Cinema has the unique power to transcend barriers of language, geography and social background, stirring emotions and inspiring collective reflection. Recognising the transformative role of visual storytelling in advancing human dignity and social awareness, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India continues to encourage filmmakers across the country to use the medium of cinema as a force for social change.

In celebration of this creative commitment to human rights, the NHRC, India organised an award ceremony on 7th April 2026 at its premises in New Delhi to felicitate the seven winners of its Human Rights Short Film Competition-2025.

Addressing the gathering, Chairperson, Justice V. Ramasubramanian congratulated the award winners and applauded their passion for filmmaking and social engagement. Emphasising the profound influence of audio-visual storytelling, he described cinema as a powerful medium that connects directly with the subconscious mind and leaves a lasting impact on society. Referring to the enthusiastic participation from across the country, he noted that entries

were received in 24 Indian languages and dialects, reflecting both India's cultural diversity and the truly national character of the Commission.

The event was attended by NHRC Members, Justice (Dr.) Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi and Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani, Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal, Director General (Investigation) Smt. Anupama Nilekar Chandra, along with several senior officers of the Commission.

In his address, NHRC Member, Justice (Dr.) Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi observed that each of the seven award-winning films carried a distinct and socially relevant message, reaffirming the transformative role of cinema in promoting and protecting human rights. He particularly commended the documentary 'The Dusk of Life' and the short film 'Rani' for their poignant and sensitive portrayal of marginalised communities and lived realities often overlooked by society.

NHRC Member, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani described filmmaking as a compelling instrument of advocacy and social transformation. She noted that meaningful cinema has the power to challenge stereotypes, break societal barriers and inspire positive action. Emphasising the role of youth in shaping a more inclusive society, she said that young filmmakers can emerge as powerful torchbearers of human rights awareness.

Earlier, Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal presented an overview of the growing reach and impact of the competi-



► NHRC, India Chairperson, Justice V. Ramasubramanian; Members, Justice (Dr.) Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani; Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal; DG (I), Smt. Anupama Nilekar Chandra and senior officers with the prize winners of the human rights Short Film Competition 2025

tion. He said that while 303 entries were received in 2024, the number rose significantly to 526 in 2025, out of which 438 films qualified for jury evaluation through a rigorous three-stage selection process. He noted that the competition has steadily evolved into one of the Commission's most impactful outreach initiatives for spreading awareness about human rights through creative expression.

The winners were announced by the Joint Secretary, Smt. Sainingpui Chhakchhuak. The first prize, carrying a cash award of Rs 2 lakh along with a trophy and certificate, was awarded to 'Rani' by Ms. Sarika Jain. The Hindi film, with English subtitles, explores class divisions and the everyday struggles faced by women domestic workers with remarkable sensitivity and realism.

The second prize of Rs 1.5 lakh was conferred on 'Meanwhile She..' by Shri Amal S. The Malayalam film, subtitled in English, highlights the disproportionate burdens borne by working women navigating gender stereotypes, domestic violence and societal expectations.

The third prize of Rs 1 lakh was awarded to 'The Delivery' by Shri Sai Shashank Tati from Tamil Nadu. The Tamil film, with English subtitles, sheds light on the precarious conditions faced by gig workers, including job insecurity and the

absence of adequate social protection mechanisms.

Four films received Special Mention Certificates along with a cash award of Rs 50,000 each: 'Malati' by Ms. Falguni Bhakta, 'Second Chance' by Shri Ravi Karnwal, 'Dusk of Life' by Shri Damodar D. Pawar and 'Bhagyashree' by Shri Manoj Appaso Janwekar. These films explored a wide spectrum of issues, including tribal education, prison reforms, resilience among the elderly and the rights and dignity of widows in rural India.

The filmmakers also shared insights into their creative journeys and the inspiration behind their films during the interaction session. All the award-winning films are available on the Commission's website and may be used by government institutions, educational bodies and civil society organisations to promote awareness and dialogue on human rights issues.

Adding a visual dimension to the celebration, a poster exhibition featuring all the award-winning films from the past five years, along with their themes, was mounted at the venue. The exhibition offered visitors a compelling glimpse into the rich and diverse repository of socially conscious cinema nurtured by the Commission over the years.



► NHRC, India Chairperson, Justice V. Ramasubramanian, Members, Justice (Dr.) Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani and Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal viewing a poster exhibition featuring all the award-winning films

Entries opened for the Short Film Competition-2026

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India has invited entries for the 12th edition of its annual Short Film Competition on Human Rights, with submissions open until 30th June 2026. The most compelling and impactful films will be honoured with awards by the Commission.

Instituted in 2015, the NHRC Short Film Awards seek to inspire and recognise the power of cinema as a catalyst for promoting and protecting human rights. Over the years, the competition has emerged as a vibrant national platform for filmmakers, storytellers, students and citizens from across the country to raise awareness on critical human rights issues through creative expression. Previous editions have witnessed an overwhelming response from diverse regions of India, reflecting the growing engagement of filmmakers with socially relevant themes.

Entries may be submitted in English or any Indian language, with English subtitles. The short films should have a duration ranging from 3 to 10 minutes and may be documentary, fiction or dramatisation of real-life stories produced in any technical format including animation. The films should explore socio-economic, cultural and political rights centred around the following themes:

- Right to life, liberty, equality and dignity

There is no entry fee or bar on the number of entries an individual can send to participate in the contest. However, the participants must send each film separately with a duly filled-in entry form. The terms & conditions, along with the entry form, can be downloaded from the NHRC website: www.nhrc.nic.in.

The film, a duly filled-in entry form and other requisite documents may be sent using Google Drive at nhrshortfilm@gmail.com. Any queries may also be sent to this email address.

- Covering issues specific to bonded and child labour, women and children's rights
- Rights and challenges of elderly persons
- Rights of persons with disability
- Manual scavenging, right to healthcare
- Issues of fundamental freedoms
- Human trafficking
- Domestic violence
- Human rights violations due to police atrocities
- Custodial violence and torture
- Socio-economic disparities
- Rights of Nomadic and Denotified Tribes
- Prison reforms
- Right to education
- Right to a clean environment, including environmental hazards impacting life on planet Earth
- Right to work
- Right to equality before law
- Right to food and nutritional security
- Rights of LGBTQI+
- Human rights violation due to displacement on account of either man-made or natural calamity
- Celebrating human rights and values in Indian diversity
- Development initiatives improving life and living standards, etc.



राष्ट्रीय मानव अधिकार आयोग, भारत
National Human Rights Commission, India

Short Film Competition- 2026

NHRC, India invites online entries for its 12th annual Short Film Competition on human rights

 **Last date:** 30th June 2026

For details, scan the QR code
OR
visit the NHRC, India website:
www.nhrc.nic.in



NHRC, India in the International arena

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India continues to actively engage with a range of international programmes and initiatives to promote the exchange of ideas and best practices on diverse aspects of human rights. As part of these efforts, institutional delegations from different countries regularly visit the Commission and interact with its Chairperson, Members and senior officers to gain insights into its mandate, functioning and initiatives for the promotion and protection of human rights.

The Commission's Chairperson, Members and senior officers also participate in various international forums and engagements to share the Commission's experiences and achievements, strengthen cooperation with other National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and deliberate on emerging human rights challenges in an increasingly fast-evolving global landscape.

Online engagements

- On 2nd April 2026, Shri Samir Kumar, Joint Secretary, NHRC attended the Annual General Meeting of

Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (CFNHRI).

- On 8th April 2026, Shri Samir Kumar, Joint Secretary, NHRC participated in the Consultative Meeting of National Human Rights Institutions of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Member States.
- On 22nd April 2026, Shri Samir Kumar, Joint Secretary and Ms. Varsha Apte, Consultant (Research), NHRC, India attended the Consultative Meeting of National Human Rights Institutions of SCO Member States.
- On 22nd April 2026, Ms. Eukti Garg, Junior Research Consultant, NHRC, India attended GANHRI Learning Call on Sports and Human Rights.
- On 24th April 2026, Shri Samir Kumar, Joint Secretary, Ms. Varsha Apte, Consultant, Research and Ms. Stuti Joshi, Junior Research Consultant, attended a meeting with Ms. Ma'aly Hazzaz (Advisor for Communication and Information, UNESCO) and Ms. Aida Martirous-Nejad (Human Rights Officer, OHCHR) regarding reporting under the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists. ■

News from the State Human Rights Commissions

Given the ever-expanding dimensions of human life and the evolving challenges associated with them, the promotion and protection of human rights remains a continuous and dynamic process. In India, democratically elected governments remain committed to ensuring the welfare of the people and safeguarding their rights through an extensive executive framework. This commitment is further reinforced by robust democratic institutions, including the legislature and the judiciary, along with a vibrant and vigilant media. The National Human Rights Commission and the State Human Rights Commissions (SHRCs) play a vital role in the protection and promotion of human rights across the country. In addition, several national commissions, supported by corresponding state-level bodies, work at the regional level to safeguard the rights and welfare of different sections of society. Together, these institutions function as important watchdogs, ensuring accountability, justice and inclusive welfare measures. This column seeks to spotlight the significant and noteworthy initiatives undertaken by various SHRCs in advancing the cause of human rights and strengthening the culture of dignity, justice and equality in society.

Haryana State Human Rights Commission

The Haryana State Human Rights Commission (HSHRC) undertook several significant interventions in April 2026, including taking *suo motu* cognizance of media reports on non-functional CCTV cameras in Panchkula. Observing

that the lapse weakened public safety, traffic enforcement and crime monitoring, thereby affecting the right to life and security, the Commission sought detailed reports from municipal and police authorities on accountability and corrective measures.

The Commission also took *suo motu* cognizance of multiple student suicides and an attempted suicide at the National Institute of Technology Kurukshetra, expressing concern

over deficiencies in mental health support, counselling systems and institutional response mechanisms. Authorities were directed to submit comprehensive reports on preventive measures and student welfare safeguards.

In another intervention, the Commission addressed infrastructure deficiencies and alleged violations of patient rights at the Civil Hospital in Sector-6, Panchkula. Following its directions, repairs, improved staffing and strengthened grievance redressal measures were initiated, while further compliance reports were sought from the authorities concerned.

The Commission also contributed to the policy discourse on the elimination of beggary, advocating a rights-based approach focused on rehabilitation, education and social integration, while cautioning against practices that could perpetuate exploitation.

Chairperson, Justice Lalit Batra visited a residential school for visually impaired girls in Narnaul and appreciated its efforts, while recommending a more dignified name and enhanced government support. During a visit to 'VISHWAS', an NGO in Gurugram, he also acknowledged the organisation's commendable work in empowering children with special needs despite financial constraints.

Madhya Pradesh State Human Rights Commission

The Madhya Pradesh State Human Rights Commission (MPSHRC) ensured substantial relief and redressal in various human rights matters during April 2026 through continuous intervention and monitoring. In 22 cases involving drowning, snakebite, lightning strikes, custodial death, electrocution, wild animal attacks, well-collapse incidents and other unnatural deaths, the Commission facilitated payment of Rs 1.19 crore as compensation to the legal heir of the deceased. Most of these matters were taken up *suo motu* on the basis of media reports, followed by sustained hearings and directions to authorities for timely relief.

The MPSHRC also ensured relief in cases related to wrongful imprisonment, medical negligence, police excess, delayed subsistence allowance, salary arrears, pension and retirement dues and pending honorarium payments. These included Rs 2 lakh compensation to a victim of wrongful imprisonment in Raisen, Rs 1 lakh in a medical negligence case in Betul, Rs 20,000 compensation in a police misconduct matter in Satna and Rs 15,000 compensation in a healthcare negligence case in Narmadapuram. The Commission further ensured payment of over Rs 4 lakh in salary arrears, pension dues of Rs 1.54 lakh, gratuity worth Rs 14.42 lakh and nine months' pending salaries to employees.



► HSHRC Chairperson, Justice Lalit Batra visiting 'VISHWAS', an NGO in Gurugram empowering children with special needs

Key outcomes of the Commission's intervention included payment of pending honorarium to guest teachers in Mandla, distribution of school uniforms to students in Betul, release of pensionary benefits and clearance of dues of the Sahariya Development Agency employees. In a major prison welfare initiative, 37 prisoners benefited under the Ministry of Home Affairs' scheme for poor prisoners through payment of bail and fine amounts. They included 25 convicted and 12 undertrial prisoners.

On 16th April 2026, Chairperson, MPSHRC, Dr. Avdhesh Pratap Singh reviewed complaints and human rights-related cases during a public hearing held in the Chhatarpur



► MPSHRC Chairperson, Dr. Avdhesh Pratap Singh presiding over a public hearing

district. 14 new complaints and 60 pending cases linked to revenue, police, health, forest, electricity and women and child development departments were heard. Officials were directed to ensure time-bound disposal of cases, adequate drinking water supply during the summer and protection of citizens' constitutional and human rights. Dr. Singh also stressed resolving family disputes amicably to strengthen social harmony.

On 17th April 2026, the MPSHRC Chairperson, chaired a public hearing in the Panna district on complaints and reported cases of human rights violations. 9 new cases and 15 pending cases were heard. Officials from departments including Panchayat and Rural Development, Forest, Revenue, Education and the Panna Tiger Reserve were instructed to ensure prompt disposal of cases and immediate payment of pending financial assistance. The need for ensuring an adequate drinking water supply in the district was also emphasised. Dr. Singh stressed that protecting human rights is essential for inclusive development.

On 18th April 2026, during his visit to the Neemuch district, Dr. Singh interacted with district officials, MPSHRC associates and representatives of voluntary organisations. He called for focused efforts to provide education and self-employment opportunities to youth of the Bachhada community and stressed the need for awareness campaigns against child marriage. He also appreciated the work of district administration under the 'Pankh Abhiyan' initiative of the state government to empower girls through their holistic development under the *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao* scheme.

Telangana State Human Rights Commission

The Telangana State Human Rights Commission (TSHRC) continues to actively intervene in matters affecting the fundamental rights of citizens, taking timely cognizance of incidents with serious human rights implications across the state.

The Commission took *suo motu* cognizance of a reported food poisoning incident at the Tribal Ashram High School, Ellur, where six students and a teacher fell ill after consuming improperly stored food. Observing prima facie negligence in food safety and supervision affecting tribal children violating the Right to Life under Article 21, the Commission has called for a report from the District Collector by 27th April 2026.

In another matter, the Commission took *suo motu* cognizance of fatal stray dog attacks in the Peddapalli and Yadadri Bhuvanagiri districts, which resulted in the deaths of a 3-

year-old girl and a man. Noting a prima facie violation of the Right to Life and negligence by local authorities, it has sought reports from the concerned District Collectors. The matter is listed for hearing on 2nd June 2026.

Separately, the Commission issued an interim order regarding non-release of irrigation water to farmers from Ghanapur Anicut (check dam) in the Sangareddy district, which endangered crops across over 20,000 acres. Observing a violation of the Right to Livelihood under Article 21, the Commission recommended the immediate release of 0.30 TMC water from the Singur irrigation project for 12 days.

Karnataka State Human Rights Commission

In a significant effort to strengthen access to justice at the grassroots level, the Karnataka State Human Rights Commission (KSHRC) undertook a two-day district outreach sitting in Uttara Kannada. On 28th and 29th April 2026, the KSHRC visited the Uttara Kannada district and conducted a full bench sitting at the District Commissioner's office. The Commission heard 30 pending cases, reviewed reports received from authorities and registered five fresh complaints on the spot. The Deputy Commissioner, CEO Zilla Panchayat and Superintendent of Police, along with other officers, were present.

An interactive session with district officers and the public was organised to directly present human rights concerns. The Commission also undertook surprise visits to institutions such as the district prison, police stations, hostels, bus station and government hospital, engaging with inmates, students, officials and the public. Key recommendations included improving sanitation facilities at the bus station and operationalising an MRI machine at the district hospital.



► KSHRC Acting Chairperson, Dr. T. Sham Bhatt presiding over a full bench hearing in Uttara Kannada district

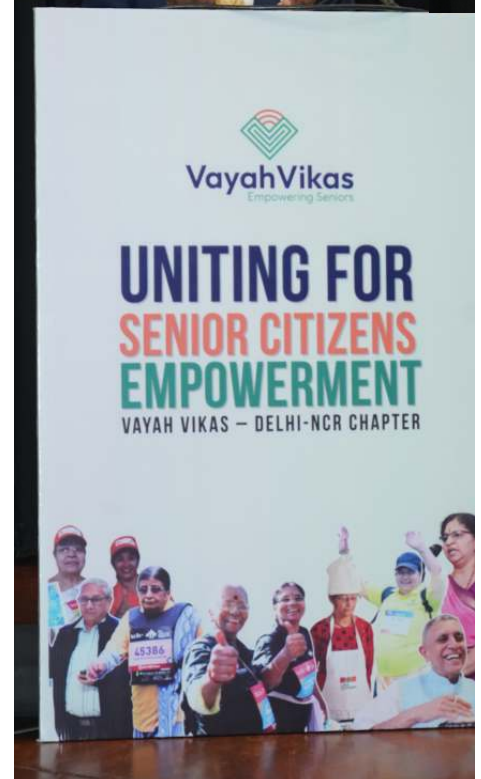
News in brief

- On 5th April 2026, NHRC, India Member, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani addressed the Global Summit 'ATLEG 2026' in Hyderabad, Telangana. She spoke about the 'Impact of Technologies on Human Rights' and said that technology must become a tool of dignity, justice and inclusion. She said that the true measure of progress is not how advanced our technology becomes but how strongly we protect human rights. She urged the youth to become ethical guardians of technology and build a digital India that is just, inclusive and compassionate.



- On 7th April 2026, NHRC, India Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal delivered the keynote address at a conference on 'Uniting for Senior Citizens Empowerment' at India International Centre, New Delhi. He said that ageing should be seen as a new beginning and seniors as national asset. He highlighted India's demographic transition, noting that the elderly population is expected to rise from 10% to 21% by 2050, bringing challenges such as health issues, financial dependence, loneliness and low digital literacy.

Referring to a recent report, Shri Lal pointed to rising chronic illnesses, mental health concerns, social isolation and limited access to assistive devices and financial security. He emphasised learning from global and Indian best practices and called for a hybrid approach focusing on home-based care, digital inclusion, caregiver support and inter-generational engagement, while urging recognition of seniors as active contributors to society.



- On 9th April 2026, NHRC, India Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal addressed students and faculty at Miranda House, University of Delhi on Rights in Motion: How India Protects its Citizens in a Changing World. The session was part of 'Ecclesia 2026- Changing Contours of Politics: India and Beyond.' He said that human rights are evolving amid rapid technological change, geopolitical uncertainties and interconnected systems. He noted that threats to citizens' rights are now multidimensional, ranging from social unrest and cybercrime to global conflicts affecting daily life.



Emphasising emerging concerns, Shri Lal highlighted digital rights, data privacy and risks like algorithmic bias, alongside persistent issues of poverty, inequality and access to basic services. He underlined India's constitutional framework, judiciary and governance in safeguarding rights, citing efforts during COVID-19 and Operation Ganga. He called for stronger accountability, digital protection, inclusive development and youth engagement to build a just, resilient and rights-orientated society.

- On 13th April 2026, NHRC, India Member, Justice (Dr.) Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi addressed a seminar as Chief Guest on "Empowering SC/ ST Communities through MSME and Agricultural Initiatives" in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, focusing on the socio-economic development of SC/ ST communities. He emphasised that true empowerment goes beyond financial assistance and requires knowledge, skills and confidence.

Justice Sarangi highlighted the importance of coordinated efforts among government agencies, banks, industry bodies and civil society organisations to achieve meaningful and sustainable outcomes. Stressing inclusivity, he underlined the need to promote digital literacy so that all sections of society can effectively use modern tools and opportunities. He said that empowering communities through MSMEs and agricultural initiatives is not just an economic goal but a social imperative to ensure dignity, equality and equal opportunity for all.



- On 13th April 2026, NHRC, India Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal delivered the valedictory address at the 6th INSA-NCGG LEADS Programme in New Delhi, an initiative he conceptualised in 2023 with Prof. Ashutosh Sharma, now a high-impact platform for the scientific community. He described participants as future institution builders shaping India's research and innovation ecosystem.

He said that India's scientific tradition views science not merely as a tool of power but as an instrument for collective wellbeing, as exemplified by Dr. Homi J. Bhabha, Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, Prof. Satish Dhawan, Prof. Bhatnagar and Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam. He noted that emerging challenges from national security to ethical governance of AI and biotechnology require scientists to engage with policy, society and global frameworks as leaders of change.



Emphasising that innovation requires execution, Shri Lal called for interdisciplinary leadership and aligning science with governance to build an inclusive, innovation-led India by 2047.

- On 16th April 2026, NHRC, India Chairperson, Justice V. Ramasubramanian delivered the valedictory address on the conclusion of Hidayatullah National Law University's National Faculty Development Programme titled 'Emerging IP Jurisprudence and Evolving Trends of IP Teaching and Research' in Raipur, Chhattisgarh. He emphasised the pivotal role of the academic community in shaping a future ready Intellectual Property (IP) jurisprudence.

Justice Ramasubramanian shared insights on the evolving relationship between Intellectual Property Law, Human Rights and Public Interest. Highlighting the judiciary's significant role in encouraging innovation in India, he underscored the need to balance such advancements with accessibility and affordability. He urged academics to take the lead in developing legal principles that effectively respond to emerging global and domestic challenges.

- On 24th April 2026, NHRC, India Chairperson, Justice V. Ramasubramanian addressed as the Chief Guest the International conference on 'Intellectual Property in the Climate and Sustainability Agenda,' organised by the Presidency University, Bengaluru, Karnataka. He drew attention to the broader legal landscape, mentioning that thousands of cases remain unresolved or inadequately addressed, reflecting systemic challenges in ensuring sustainability and justice. He said that there is a need for a discourse on environmental governance and technological advancements for the betterment of present and future generations. An article based on this address has been carried on the previous pages of this edition of the Newsletter.



- On 25th April 2026, NHRC, India Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal delivered the keynote address in the two-day 'Public Policy Leaders Programme' organised by the Academy of Digital Health Sciences in collaboration with Health Parliament at the India International Centre, New Delhi, with senior government officers, academia, civil society, NGOs and industry representatives. Speaking on 'From Policies to Programme: Implementing for a

Billion Plus,' he emphasised that the key challenge in governance is not policy formulation but effective implementation in a country of 1.46 billion people with vast diversity. He noted that successful implementation begins with accurate problem identification through inclusive consultation, followed by strong design, execution strategies and partnerships.

He underlined that policies must be anchored in aspirational ideas with visible impact and stressed the importance of dialogue, transparency, accountability and stakeholder ownership. Highlighting the role of elected representatives, he said they are crucial in linking policy intent with last-mile delivery. Referring to Constitutional values and Directive Principles of State Policy, he cited programmes such as Jal Jeevan Mission and Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen), stressing that real impact comes when ideas are translated into action through inclusive design, shared ownership and disciplined execution.

- On 26th April 2026, NHRC, India Member, Justice (Dr.) Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi, addressed the 26th State Level Award Ceremony 2026 as Chief Guest. It was organised by the State Council for Artistic Research & Training (SCART) Odisha in Cuttack. He underscored the vital role of organisations like SCART in nurturing young



talent and providing direction and opportunities, noting that while today's youths are highly capable, they often require structured guidance to realise their full potential.

Justice Sarangi further emphasised that every individual can contribute meaningfully, within their own capacity, to the promotion of art, culture and social values. He also presented awards recognising excellence across diverse fields, including teaching, arts, poetry, writing, dance, music, acting and social service, along with honours for ideal homemakers and farmers.

- On 28th April 2026, NHRC, India Member, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani addressed a conference on 'Economic Empowerment of Women,' organised by the Samvardhini Nyas, in collaboration with Khenjonglang, a Manipur based prominent theatre research, training and production centre, Manipur. The State Women Commission Chairperson, Smt. Tiningpham Mon Song, along with officials from the Social Welfare Department were present. She highlighted the importance of women's economic independence, noting that empowering them leads to stronger families, better education for children and more inclusive societal development.



- On 29th April 2026, NHRC, India Member, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani addressed the second session of the conference organised by the Samverdhini Nyas, on 'Co-existence, Social Harmony and Constitutional Morality.' She said that these values represent the unity in diversity, which is the foundation of democracy in India. She emphasised the Constitutional values- justice, liberty, equality and fraternity, while highlighting the role of the NHRC, along with education, media and inclusive governance, in building a just and harmonious society.

- On 30th April 2026, NHRC, India Secretary General, Shri Bharat Lal delivered the keynote address at the YouTube Open Forum on 'Safeguarding Youth, Sustaining Well-being' in New Delhi, focusing on the responsible use of social media by children in the digital age. He stressed that children are not only the future but the foundation of society and they must be nurtured as creators with strong character, values and



creativity rather than passive consumers. Citing emerging data, he noted that 76% of children aged 14-16 are on social media, with nearly half spending over three hours daily, raising concerns of digital addiction as a public health issue.

Shri Lal highlighted risks such as cyberbullying, mental health challenges and algorithm-driven addictive behaviour. His core message was that technology must be part of the solution, not the problem, with platforms adopting “safety by design” and “privacy by default” proactively. He also called for a balanced ecosystem over blanket bans, emphasising platform accountability, age-appropriate access, digital literacy, algorithmic transparency and inclusion of children's voices in policymaking.



Forthcoming events

- On 12th May 2026, The NHRC, India will organise a Core Group meeting on 'Protecting Migrant Workers' Rights: Shared Responsibility of Government and the Private Sector' in hybrid mode at its premises.
- From 18th to 29th May 2026 The NHRC, India will organise the two-week Online Short Term Internship Programme for university-level students.
- On 18th May 2026, The NHRC, India will organise a meeting of the State Human Rights Commissions, Special Rapporteurs and Special Monitors in hybrid mode at its premises in New Delhi.
- From 1st June 2026 The NHRC, India will begin its month-long in-person internship for post- graduate-level students at its premises in New Delhi.

Complaints in April 2026

| | |
|---|--------|
| Number of fresh complaints received | 4,600 |
| Number of cases disposed including old cases | 4,040 |
| Number of cases under consideration by the Commission | 41,463 |

