



# Task force to improve India's rights record

Neeraj Chauhan

neeraj.chauhan@hindustantimes.com

**NEW DELHI:** The government is forming a task force to prepare a National Action Plan on Human Rights (NAPHR) as mandated under the UN Human Rights Council's (UNHRC) Universal Periodic Review (UPR) to improve India's human rights record, government officials aware of the development said on condition of anonymity.

The task force will involve the Union home ministry and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and have representatives from ministries such as social justice and health, the officials added. Civil society organisations will also be consulted as part of the process at a later stage; the first draft of the NAPHR is likely to be ready by the end of November.

One of the officials said that Union home minister Amit Shah may announce NAPHR on

## ON THE RECORD

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### WHAT IS UPR?

Universal Periodic Review is a state-driven process under the UNHRC and provides opportunities to member states to declare what actions they have taken to improve human rights

### REVIEW CYCLE

A review cycle lasts four-and-a-half years within which records of member states are reviewed. In the third UPR in 2017, India accepted 152 out of 250 recommendations

### PLANS

At a meeting held in August, officials decided to form a task force that will involve the Union home ministry and NHRC. The first draft of the NAPHR is likely to be ready by the end of November

## ANNOUNCEMENT DATE

**An official said that Union home minister Amit Shah may announce NAPHR on the NHRC's foundation day on October 12**

NHRC's foundation day on Saturday (October 12).

UPR is a state-driven process under UNHRC's auspices and provides opportunities to member states to declare what actions

they have taken to improve human rights and to fulfil their obligations. According to UNHRC, it is designed to ensure equal treatment for every coun-

**CONTINUED ON P 6**



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**Wednesday, 9th October 2019; Page: 1**

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try when human rights situations are assessed with the ultimate aim of improving them and addressing violations.

A review cycle lasts four-and-half years, during which records of member states are reviewed.



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Wednesday, 9th October 2019; Page: 1

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The first cycle began in 2008 and lasted until 2011 while the third cycle is currently underway since 2017.

In the third UPR of UN in 2017, India accepted 152 out of 250 recommendations on human rights. These pertain to sustainable development goals related to eliminating poverty, access to safe drinking water, sanitation and improving protection for women and children.

India “noted” and refused to accept some recommendations, including those related to the Armed Forces Special Powers Act and the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act.

In UPR-1 and UPR-3, UN recommended that India should have NAPHR covering issues such as the rights to health, education, food security, and housing; aspects related to custodial justice; and measures against the trafficking of women and children.

As part of the plan, specific benchmarks along with assessment indicators need to be evolved to enable the preparation of a road map for human rights, the officials said.

The officials added that the plan has been pending for 11 years (since 2008) as NHRC has repeatedly told the government that the home ministry should take the lead in preparing it.

A meeting was held in August regarding the plan. According to the minutes of the meeting, which HT has accessed, it was concluded that “it was time to reach a consensus on the way forward”.

Officials decided to form the task force at that meeting. The task force, which will have 10-20 members, will also examine the plans of other countries before preparing its final draft.

“NAPHR, once implemented, will help mitigate the criticism India faces at international level when it comes to its human rights record as well as strengthen the social justice system,” said a second official.

Lawyer and Human Rights Law Network founder Colin Gonsalves said that the move to prepare NAPHR is not meant to serve any purpose. He added that there is a Constitution and hundreds of Supreme Court judgments that talk about human rights but claimed the government does not follow them.

According to a handbook on the preparation of NAPHR, it has to be created for “a stronger administration of justice, strengthening human rights institutions, and linking rights with development”.