

Special Rapporteur, NHRC reviews Human Rights Issues Relating to Social Welfare, Tribal Affairs, Prisons and Health Sectors in Ladakh

Leh, July 20, 2026: Special Rapporteur of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) for the Himalayan Region, Smt. Shomita Biswas, chaired an interactive review meeting to assess the status of human rights-related issues concerning the Social and Tribal Affairs, Prisons and Health sectors in the Union Territory of Ladakh at the DC Conference Hall, Leh.



The meeting was attended by Deputy Commissioner Leh, Deputy Commissioner Changthang, Special Secretary Home, Senior Superintendent of Police Leh, Superintendent of Police Changthang, Deputy Superintendent of Police Leh, Deputy Director Health Services, Chief Education Officer Leh and other senior officers from the concerned departments. Deputy Commissioners and other officers from various districts also participated in the meeting virtually.

The meeting commenced with a welcome address by the Programme Manager of the Social Welfare Department, who welcomed the Special Rapporteur to Ladakh and briefed the participants about the purpose and objectives of the interaction. In her introductory remarks, Smt. Shomita Biswas shared her experience of working on human rights issues and highlighted the broad and cross-cutting nature of human rights, which encompasses every aspect of human life and dignity. She stated that her mandate as Special Rapporteur for the Himalayan Region involves examining issues affecting vulnerable sections of society, particularly children, women, persons with mental health concerns, prisoners and other marginalised groups.

She emphasised that the protection of human rights requires a coordinated and sensitive approach involving the Home, Social Welfare, Health, Education and other concerned departments. She particularly highlighted the need for greater attention to children and adolescents, women, persons with mental health concerns and individuals in institutional care.

Discussing mental health, the Special Rapporteur observed that stigma continues to discourage many people from seeking psychiatric and psychological support. She stressed the importance of early identification and intervention, particularly among children and adolescents, and called for greater awareness among parents, teachers and communities.

She also underlined the need to address substance abuse and the influence of harmful digital content among young people through counselling, awareness, supervision and rehabilitation rather than relying solely on punitive measures.

Smt. Biswas stressed that adolescent health, nutrition, education and mental well-being are integral to the protection of human rights. She highlighted the need to address issues such as anaemia among adolescent girls, nutritional deficiencies, adolescent health education and access to appropriate counselling and healthcare services.

She also emphasised the importance of ensuring adequate nutrition for pregnant women, lactating mothers and children through Anganwadi and other welfare mechanisms.

During the meeting, officers of the Social Welfare Department made a detailed presentation on various schemes and initiatives being implemented for the welfare and protection of vulnerable sections of society.

The presentation covered Mission Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0, major activities under the Mission Vatsalya, statutory services and institutional mechanisms, Mission Shakti, the Nasha Mukti

Bharat Abhiyan, District De-Addiction Centres, Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarships, the Lieutenant Governor's Students Support Initiative, Integrated Social Security Schemes, the National Social Assistance Programme and infrastructure development initiatives. The status of new Observation Homes, model Anganwadi Centres, including those at Thiksey, Kalibuk and Stakna, old-age homes in Leh and Kargil, and the Open Shelter Home at Kargil was also reviewed.

The Special Rapporteur sought details regarding the status of drug-related cases, emerging trends in substance abuse and the mechanisms in place to address the issue. The Senior Superintendent of Police, Leh, apprised her of the current situation and informed the meeting about the increase in cases in recent years, which has also been influenced by improved connectivity and changing social patterns. The criteria and implementation of scholarship schemes, as well as the maintenance and sustainability of welfare infrastructure, were also discussed. During the review, Smt. Biswas emphasised the need for a dedicated and adequately trained jail cadre and sought details regarding the mechanisms for addressing human rights complaints within the prison system. She also enquired about medical facilities, the availability and qualifications of medical personnel, routine health check-ups, mental health screening and the maintenance of health records of inmates.

She stressed the importance of regular medical and mental health assessments of prisoners, early identification of vulnerable inmates, proper categorisation and timely intervention. She also called for strengthening welfare and rehabilitation programmes, including skill development and vocational training, and suggested that computer-related skills and other employability-oriented training be explored to support the reintegration of inmates into society.

The Health Department presented an overview of the healthcare services and programmes being implemented in Ladakh, including maternal and child health services, the National Health Mission, key maternal and child health indicators, the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK), Total Fertility Rate (TFR), the functioning of Community Health Centres, achievements under RBSK, the District Mental Health Programme and the National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly.

The Special Rapporteur sought details regarding the frequency and coverage of mental health services and stressed the need to develop a systematic and accessible mental healthcare mechanism. She emphasised that mental health services should reach vulnerable populations who may not be in a position to visit hospitals, including persons in prisons and institutional care.

She suggested regular outreach visits, structured mental health screening, counselling and group sessions, proper identification and categorisation of mental health concerns, and systematic follow-up mechanisms. She stressed that mental healthcare should be integrated into the overall welfare and rehabilitation framework and should be made accessible to all sections of society. The Special Rapporteur also emphasised the importance of coordinated institutional action to protect children, women, prisoners and other vulnerable groups. She highlighted the need for effective monitoring mechanisms, regular field-level assessments and close coordination among departments to ensure that government schemes and welfare initiatives translate into tangible benefits for the people.

She further stated that the changing social environment and emerging challenges require continuous preparedness and strengthening of institutional mechanisms. She called upon the concerned departments to remain vigilant, improve coordination and ensure timely intervention in matters concerning human rights, mental health, substance abuse, child protection, women's welfare and the rehabilitation of vulnerable persons.

The meeting concluded with an emphasis on strengthening inter-departmental coordination and adopting a more systematic, preventive and rights-based approach to addressing human rights concerns in Ladakh.

The Special Rapporteur is scheduled to undertake field visits to various districts of the Union Territory to assess the implementation of welfare and human rights-related initiatives on the ground and interact with concerned stakeholders and beneficiaries.