

# Amnesty

## UK South Asia

**May 2022**



### South Asia Coordinator Team

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Please let us know if you have taken any actions or need further information.

Thank you for your support.

Jerry, Cherry, Nigina & Ayesha

## SRI LANKA

### New Emergency regulations and shooting orders threaten human rights

Authorities in Sri Lanka must immediately rescind the emergency regulations and shooting orders that provide excessive powers to the police and military, and take immediate steps to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of peaceful protestors, Amnesty International has said.

The authorities must also refrain from using the state of emergency as a pretext to curb the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, including at the protest sites such as “Gotagogama” in the country.

[https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/05/sri-lanka-new-emergency-regulations-and-shooting-orders-threaten-human-rights/?fbclid=IwAR3vpEPnVm3a2wjvvyC9IMH-Sy2L98tqQ5\\_wELqgCGd8JFvCnmuOriZaxOs](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/05/sri-lanka-new-emergency-regulations-and-shooting-orders-threaten-human-rights/?fbclid=IwAR3vpEPnVm3a2wjvvyC9IMH-Sy2L98tqQ5_wELqgCGd8JFvCnmuOriZaxOs)



## From Bad to Worse: Rights Under Attack During Sri Lanka's Economic Crisis

A new Amnesty International report states that "People in Sri Lanka are facing a catastrophic economic crisis. They are experiencing severe shortages in essential medicines, cooking gas and food items, with fuel shortages prompting power outages of up to 13 hours a day while sky-high inflation has sharply increased the cost of living. The rights to education, health and adequate standard of living are all affected, forcing thousands out on to the streets in protest, demanding the resignation of the president and the prime minister. The Sri Lankan government must protect the human rights of everyone and ensure an enabling environment for peacefully expressing dissent."

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa37/5564/2022/en/>

## Urgent Action: Charge or release student Mohamed Imran

Mohamed Imran was 20 years old when he was detained in 2019 under the Sri Lanka's draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act. Three years later he has still not been charged with an offence and the authorities have not produced any evidence of his committing an internationally recognised crime. Take action to appeal for justice using the model letter provided.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa37/5595/2022/en/>



# INDIA

## Amnesty's advocacy messages

As the new Amnesty India International Secretariat (IS) team for India settles in to work on human rights in India, the following are key starting points for advocacy messaging:

1. Stop country-wide persecution of minorities
2. Ensure media and civil society can function without censorship and fear of reprisals – this covers repeal or amendment of draconian laws like the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (*used to close the Amnesty India office*), Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (*under which the BK16 are in prison*), Section 124A on Sedition in the Indian Penal Code, National Security Act, and Jammu and Kashmir Public Security Act to bring the laws in line with international human rights standards
3. Ensure that all allies and partners of India communicate publicly about the human rights issues.

## Authorities should stop targeting and prosecuting journalists and online critics

In a joint press release on World Press Freedom Day (3 May) ten human rights organisations called on India to stop targeting journalists and online critics for their criticism of government policies and practices, including by prosecuting them under counterterrorism and sedition laws. They said the Indian authorities should respect the right to freedom of expression and release any journalists detained on trumped-up or politically motivated charges for their critical reporting. They noted that targeting of journalists and a broader crackdown on dissent, has also



emboldened Hindu nationalists to threaten, harass, and abuse journalists critical of the government. The situation for journalists in Kashmir was mentioned as a particular concern. It was also noted that the Pegasus project found over 40 Indian journalists appeared on a leaked list of potential targets for surveillance. The Indian government has repeatedly stalled attempts to investigate these allegations, perpetuating an environment of surveillance impunity which has a chilling effect on free speech and media freedoms.

The organisations involved are Committee to Protect Journalists, Freedom House, PEN America, Reporters Without Borders, International Federation of Journalists, CIVICUS, Access Now, International Commission of Jurists, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/05/india-authorities-should-stop-targeting-prosecuting-journalists-and-online-critics/>

## Action from the Supreme Court of India?

India's Supreme Court has frozen a 152-year-old sedition law over fears the BJP government is using it to target opposition figures. "Sedition" can be applied to individuals or organisations said to be "creating hatred, contempt or disaffection" against the Indian government and may be punishable by life in prison. Recently it has been increasingly used to stifle dissent, according to human rights activists, with opposition politicians, activists and journalists among those jailed. More than 13,000 people have been charged with sedition in India since 2010 and 70% of these have been filed since Narendra Modi became Prime Minister in 2014.

Sedition is one of the charges laid against the BK16, although technically they are being held under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act. While this Supreme Court decision gives cause for some optimism, it is only a temporary freezing of a colonial era law while it is reviewed (before July) and it may be simply replaced by something very similar and in fact it may not affect the UAPA. However, it does seem to be an indicator that the Supreme Court recognises the fact that the law is being mis-used to repress any dissent or criticism of the government. HR activists are watching to see how it plays out, especially as the government has plenty more weapons at its disposal!



<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/terror-and-security/indias-supreme-court-halts-use-sedition-law-amid-claims-misuse/>

## Expulsion of Rohingya woman rings alarm bells



There are concerns that India may be planning to send more Rohingya refugees back to Myanmar as Hasina Begum was deported from Kashmir in April, despite having UN verification of her refugee status. Other Rohingya refugees have since been detained and around 275 are currently being held, said to be "living illegally" in India and at imminent risk of being deported.

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/apr/14/deportation-rohingya-woman-india-myanmar-fear-crackdown>

## Hate speech against religious minorities in India

A report by IAMC notes that PM Narendra Modi and his BJP government still have not effectively condemned calls for mass violence against Christians and the genocide of Muslims and details the continuing hate speech, discriminatory policies, harassment, and violence targeting Christians and Muslims.

<https://iamc.com/iamc-report-state-of-religious-minorities-in-india-march-2022>



## India finds Russian oil an irresistible deal, no matter the diplomatic pressure

It seems that economic expediency and political allegiance trump human rights again, as India continues to sit on the fence over the Russia Ukraine situation.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/04/world/asia/india-russia-oil.html>

# PAKISTAN

## Climate crisis: Pakistanis suffer through unbearable heatwave



Officials in Pakistan are warning of acute water shortages and life-threatening conditions as the country endures a searing heatwave. Jacobabad, the city in Sindh province that readers will remember from Amnesty's photo essay '[Unliveable for humans](#)' about the catastrophic consequences the climate crisis has on human rights in Pakistan, saw temperatures reach 49.5°C on 12 May. Temperatures have regularly exceeded 50°C in Jacobabad over the past four summers, and the city has reached the threshold at which the human body is no longer able to cool itself through sweating, which can prove fatal within a few hours, on four occasions since 1987.

It is not just the heat itself that presents a danger. Pakistan is home to more glaciers than any region outside the poles, and their quick melting can swell lakes which then burst their banks. [33 areas have been officially deemed to be at risk from glacial lake outburst floods, and indeed, a key bridge in Gilgit-Baltistan was swept away for this reason in recent days.](#)

[Amnesty has responded to the latest heatwave](#) by calling on wealthy and industrialised nations who have contributed and profited most from unsustainable practices to accept their huge responsibility to end such suffering through bold and concerted action in the reduction of carbon emissions. Amnesty also urges the Pakistan government to provide timely warnings of imminent heatwaves as well as advice and protective measures, and has renewed its calls for mitigation and adaptation efforts to be intensified.

Any climate crisis plans must take an inclusive approach, involving members of marginalised and societally oppressed communities in decision making processes. The importance of such an approach is highlighted by a recent UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, which shows that pregnant people are at high risk of heat-related illness. Exposure to high temperatures is linked to stillbirth, premature birth, and low birth rates, all of which are associated with infant mortality. This is compounded by poverty, as cost and resources prevent access to relief methods, such as electric fans.

Please watch the linked video by the Research and Development Forum for Safe Motherhood Pakistan and the White Ribbon Alliance to hear from some of those that have been impacted in their own words: [Women Amid Heat Waves: Voices from Pakistan](#)

## Baloch student abducted in the wake of suicide attack against Chinese nationals released

As discussed in the March edition of this newsletter, Baloch people have long been suffering through a human rights crisis and a low-level insurgency has created insecurity and instability in Balochistan for decades. Violence has been perpetrated by armed separatist groups committing acts of terrorism to protest against the region's political status and its material conditions, and also by an oppressive central government intolerant of dissent, particularly of the

kind which threatens its ability to exploit the region’s natural resources. Violence has increased in the last couple of years as infrastructure projects funded by China have begun to take shape in the region, such as the Belt and Road Initiative.

The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) claimed responsibility for a suicide bomb attack on 26 April which killed 3 Chinese nationals, who were teachers at Karachi University’s Confucius Institute. [In an email to Al Jazeera](#), the BLA said the intent behind attack ‘was to give a clear message to China that its direct or indirect presence in Balochistan will not be tolerated’.

As highlighted in Amnesty’s recent ‘[Living Ghosts](#)’ campaign digest, and in the report ‘[The disappeared of Balochistan](#)’ (November 2020), enforced disappearances have disproportionately impacted activists and suspected militants from the province. Baloch student Bebagr Imdad was abducted in broad daylight from the Punjab University campus in the wake of 26 April’s bombing. [Thankfully, he was released 13 days later](#). The intervening period saw the harassment and assault of students who had organised sit-ins to protest his abduction and the treatment of Baloch students throughout the country.

It is not clear if Bebagr Imdad was abducted by authorities due to potential links to the perpetrators of the attack, or due to a general appetite for retaliation against Baloch people in its wake. In any case, the motivation for such a denial of human rights is irrelevant. [Writing movingly for Dawn earlier this month](#), Sammi Baloch, whose father Dr Deen Mohammed was forcibly disappeared 14 years ago, said ‘we are not asking for roads, infrastructure and development — just our fundamental rights. The right to a fair trial and liberty’.



## BANGLADESH

### Speak now or forever hold your tongue

In an article for the Dhaka Daily star on World Press Freedom Day, Saad Hammadi, Amnesty International's South Asia Campaigner, said:

"Between January 2020 and February 2022, more than 200 journalists have been implicated across Bangladesh under the draconian Digital Security Act (DSA), leading, in some cases, to involuntary disappearance and pretrial detention."

[https://www.thedailystar.net/views/opinion/news/press-freedom-day-speak-now-or-forever-hold-your-tongue-3016671#.YnwE4CQL\\_o.mailto](https://www.thedailystar.net/views/opinion/news/press-freedom-day-speak-now-or-forever-hold-your-tongue-3016671#.YnwE4CQL_o.mailto)



# AFGHANISTAN

## Hazara area bombed

It's not just women who are suffering under the Taliban regime, minority groups such as the Hazara people, who are Shiite, are also targets. At least six people were killed and 11 others injured (including children) in April, after a series of bomb blasts hit Abdul Rahim Shaheed High School and near the Mumtaz Education Centre, both located within the predominately Hazara neighbourhood of Dasht-e-Barchi in West Kabul. Journalists were prevented by the Taliban from reporting on the attacks. Samira Hamidi, Amnesty International campaigner for South Asia said that "The Taliban, as the de facto authorities, are failing to protect civilians. These reprehensible attacks on schools highlight the violence that Afghan people continue to face in their daily lives". This is not the first time Hazara communities have been attacked since the Taliban took over.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/afghanistan-school-bombings-a-reprehensible-attack-on-religious-and-ethnic-minorities/>



## The window of opportunity to negotiate for women's rights is rapidly closing

Since the Taliban seized power seven months ago, Women and girls in Afghanistan have almost disappeared from the public life. This includes most of the several million girls who were enrolled in schools, the 88,000 female students who were studying at public and private universities, and the many many women barred from returning to their jobs as judges, prosecutors, senior security officials, businesspersons and teachers. Previously, women accounted for 36% of media workers, 28% of parliamentarians and the governors or deputy governors in more than half of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. All have been removed. Their absence is a stark indictment which brutally exposes women and girls' loss of fundamental rights and freedoms.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/there-is-a-window-of-opportunity-to-negotiate-for-the-rights-of-afghan-women-but-it-is-rapidly-closing/>



## Afghanistan: Women's faces become latest Taliban restriction after face veil rule



The Ministry for the Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue has announced that all women must cover their face in public, laying out an escalating set of punishments for anyone refusing to comply. This starts with a woman's male guardian (normally father, brother or husband) being visited at home by Taliban officials. If a woman's appearance is still not deemed acceptable, her male relative would be summoned to see ministry officials, and after that he could even potentially be jailed for three days or sent to court.

By dealing only with the male guardian, the Taliban also send a message that a woman is too low for them to even talk to.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-61363969>

## And as for a free press ....

Read the blog by an Afghan journalist who escaped to the US:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/05/bitter-memories-and-unknown-future-what-will-happen-to-the-free-press-in-afghanistan/>



## Some good news: Afghan team which fled Taliban beat Women's UK Parliamentary team



AIUK kickstarted its Football Welcomes month with a match between the Afghanistan National Team Development Squad and the UK Women's Parliamentary team. The Afghan team of girls and women fled the Taliban, arriving in the UK last November and were victorious against a cross-party group of MPs including Tracey Crouch, Kim Leadbeater and Alison McGovern. The match (comprising four games) celebrated the contribution refugees make to football and

highlighted women's rights issues in Afghanistan. The Football Welcomes initiative aims to welcome refugees and people seeking asylum into UK communities through football.

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/football-afghan-team-which-fled-taliban-beat-womens-uk-parliamentary-team-match>

## The back story: a history of women's rights in Afghanistan

It wasn't always like this, but throughout its tumultuous history, the rights of women in Afghanistan have so often been exploited by different groups for political gain. Read more about thirty years of complex and fraught history, and the impact that occupation and militarisation has had on the women and girls living in Afghanistan.

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/womens-rights-afghanistan-history>

