

# Amnesty UK South Asia

**September 2023**



## 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.

Cherry, Nigina, Lucja & Jerry

## AFGHANISTAN

**32,300 people called on the UK government to support women in Afghanistan**



<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/thanks-for-supporting-women-in-Afghanistan>

On 12 September, Chiara Capraro, AIUK Programme Director for Women's Human Rights was joined by AIUK country co-ordinator, Nigina Istanakzai-Zarifi, and Afghan human rights defenders, Maryam Rahmani and Horia Mosadiq, in

handing the AIUK petition, signed by 32,000 people, to the UK government. AIUK is calling on the UK government to take action by:

- Consulting and listening to women-led organisations in Afghanistan
- Supporting Afghan activists who are protecting the rights of women and girls
- Ensuring that respecting women's rights is non-negotiable with the Taliban
- Providing safe passage for Afghan women and girls seeking asylum.

Amnesty has also been able to:

- Continue to ramp up pressure by producing multiple in-depth reports on the **rights of women in Afghanistan since the Taliban's takeover**, and **legal assessment of why the Taliban's actions should be considered a crime against humanity of 'gender persecution'**
- Reach hundreds of thousands of people on social media this year about Afghan women's fight for their rights.

## Female suicides on the rise under Taliban regime



An article by Zahra Nader and Zan Times reporters published in the *Guardian* highlights the fact that rates of suicide and attempted suicide among young Afghan women have surged since the Taliban takeover in August 2021. They now exceed those of men, making Afghanistan one of the very few countries in the world where this is the case. Health care workers say it is approaching a public health crisis. The situation could be even worse than figures gathered indicate, as health workers are afraid to disclose information and families often cover up such deaths because suicide is considered shameful. The Taliban have declined requests for comment or further information. Read more [here](#).

Zan Times is an Afghan women-led investigative newsroom.

## Women alone in fighting an unequal war

Research by an organisation, Rukhshana media, also highlights severe psychological trauma among girls and young women as a result of being denied access to education. They found rates of suicide, femicide, forced marriage and domestic violence have increased drastically. They also noted that the vast majority of Afghan men support women's education, but this consensus has never been utilised as a means of mobilising people against the unacceptable situation under the Taliban. Women are left alone in their fight against the Taliban. Read more [here](#).

# BANGLADESH

## Protect the Protest & Freedom of Expression Campaign

We hope you were able to read the Bangladesh special report sent earlier in the month. Since then, there have been more arrests and the situation is deteriorating. An Activist Led Campaign on 'Protect the Protest' and Freedom of Expression in Bangladesh has been approved. Please contact [jerry.allen@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:jerry.allen@amnesty.org.uk) if you are interested in joining this campaign. This is an activist led campaign and is not an official Amnesty International UK campaign.

Please see the blog: [Bangladesh: Increasing repression of Freedom of Expression and the Right to Protest](#).

## Leaders of human rights organisation Odhikar sentenced to two years' imprisonment

On 14 September the Dhaka Cyber Tribunal sentenced the leaders of human rights organisation Odhikar, Adilur Rahman Khan and ASM Nasiruddin Elan, to two years' imprisonment under the draconian ICT Act, after a decade of being charged and facing persecution by the state. The case was filed after Odhikar published a fact-finding report documenting extrajudicial killings conducted by the state in response to a protest in 2013. The state's relentless crackdown on Odhikar and its leaders is an assault on the right to speak truth to power. Documenting human rights violations is not a crime. We urge the Bangladeshi authorities to release Khan and Elan immediately and unconditionally. [#FreeKhan](#) [#FreeElan](#)



The BBC produced a [report](#) explaining the background to the case.

On 5 September a spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said: “We are very concerned by the continued intimidation and harassment of human rights advocates and civil society leaders through legal proceedings in Bangladesh, including Nobel laureate Mohammad Yunus, known for his work on poverty alleviation through Grameen Bank, and two leaders of the respected human rights organization Odhikar.”

### Stop weaponizing labour law to harass Nobel Laureate Mohammad Yunus

[On 18<sup>th</sup> September Amnesty published a further statement.](#) “Authorities in Bangladesh must stop weaponizing labour laws and immediately end their harassment and intimidation of the Nobel Peace Laureate Mohammad Yunus”. The ongoing trial is one of more than 150 cases filed against Mohammad Yunus since the ruling Awami League party came into power. Amnesty International believes that initiating criminal proceedings against Mohammad Yunus and his colleagues for issues that belong to the civil and administrative arena is a blatant abuse of labour laws and the justice system and a form of political retaliation for his work and dissent.



Agnès Callamard, Secretary General of Amnesty International said: “Mohammad Yunus’ case is emblematic of the beleaguered state of human rights in Bangladesh, where the authorities have eroded freedoms and bulldozed critics into submission.”

### UK Government statement

14<sup>th</sup> September: “In discussions on democracy and human rights, the UK encouraged free, fair, participatory and peaceful elections so the people of Bangladesh can exercise their democratic rights. The UK also underlined the need to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms.”



### #FreeKhadija

Urgent Action: [Authorities must immediately release university student Khadijatul Kubra.](#) Khadija is a 19 year-old university student charged for hosting a webinar where a guest made remarks that were critical of the Bangladesh government. She has been in detention for a year.

# INDIA

## Rishi Sunak should call out Prime Minister Modi's 'appalling' human rights abuses at G20

In a press release ahead of the G20 Summit hosted by India, Amnesty International called on Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to address India's human rights record during his attendance at the Summit in New Delhi. Sacha Deshmukh, Amnesty International UK's Chief Executive, said: "India's hosting of the G20 offers a crucial opportunity for Rishi Sunak to speak openly and frankly to Prime Minister Modi about India's appalling human rights record, and the much-anticipated UK-India trade deal talks must not silence that. Under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, the Indian authorities have harassed, silenced and carried out arbitrary arrests of Government critics, placed unlawful restrictions on journalists and human rights defenders, and launched punitive raids on the offices of NGOs and media organisations such as the BBC. There has been a deeply worrying pattern of anti-Muslim hate speech from numerous political and religious leaders, and Muslims and other minorities have been on the receiving end of discriminatory laws."



Read more [here](#).

## Open letter to G20 countries on Kashmir

Ahead of the G20 Summit in India, Amnesty International signed a joint open letter to representatives of G20 member countries, guest countries and invited international organisations raising their serious concerns regarding human rights violations occurring in Indian-administered Kashmir, particularly the unlawful detention and persecution of human rights defenders and journalists. The letter urged these governments to raise these issues directly and forthrightly with the government of India in accordance with their obligations under international law and to call on India to adhere to its international legal obligations. Other signatories were: Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD); Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA); CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation; Front Line Defenders; Kashmir Law & Justice Project (KLJP).

Read more [here](#).

## Kashmiri HRD Parvez Imroz's house raided



On 1 August Parvez Imroz house was raided by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), in connection with a 2020 case that alleges NGOs, including Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS), received funds from extremist organisations through illegal means. JKCCS has done enormous amounts of human rights work in Kashmir. Imroz's mobile phone was been confiscated and he was summoned to appear before the NIA, which often leads to detention.

The NIA has invoked the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act – India's primary counter-terrorism law against many civil society activists in this case. Khurram Parvez, the co-founder of JKCCS and Irfan Mehraj, a prominent journalist remain detained. Imroz is therefore at serious risk of arrest at any time. Amnesty International published a [tweet deck](#) and is preparing an advocacy briefing about the case, highlighting India's misuse of laws under the guise of terrorism and money laundering.



## Increasing pressure on Kashmiri journalists

In late July (ahead of fourth anniversary of revocation of article 370), there were reports of strong actions and harassment against activists, journalists or anyone who speaks against the Indian government, including cancellation of the passports of 92 individuals. Known human rights defenders were also subject to intensive trolling on social media by individuals purporting to be members of the ruling BJP. Journalists and others connected with the media have been particularly targeted. Next year will be an election year and the fifth anniversary of revocation of article 370, so it is likely such harassment will intensify and there will be more arrests.

## BBC report on lack of media freedom

On 1 September a BBC World service report on Kashmir highlighted the increasing lack of media freedom. In a hard-hitting report, Logita Limaye said that the BBC has spent more than a year investigating accusations against the Indian government that it is running a sinister and systematic campaign to intimidate and silence the press in the region. They spoke to more than two dozen journalists – editors, reporters and photojournalists working independently and for regional and national outlets – all of whom see the government's actions as a warning to them. They had to meet in secret, and names had to be hidden, for fear of reprisals.

*Asif Sultan* (pictured) was arrested in 2018 after he wrote an article about militants. *Fahad Shah*, who edited a digital magazine, was arrested under anti-terror laws in February 2022, accused of "propagating terror". A month before him, freelance journalist *Sajad Gul* was arrested soon after he posted a video on social media of locals shouting anti-India slogans. Sajad was charged with criminal conspiracy. Both have been re-arrested under new charges, each time they have been granted bail.



The latest journalist arrest was in March this year. *Irfan Meraj*, whose work has appeared in international outlets, is accused of having links with terror funding. Many others from the press have had cases registered against them.

The BBC has repeatedly asked the regional administration and police to respond to the allegations against them. Interviews have been sought and emails sent with specific questions. No reply has been received. Read more [here](#).

## India-UK Trade deal should be a catalyst for action on SDGs

An article on the Bond website notes that the UK's trade negotiations with India are an opportunity to ensure the final agreement provides a positive example of how trade can serve people and the planet, but will it? Details of the deal seem to be wrapped in secrecy, yet they could be a force for good, enabling action on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Rishi Sunak is attending the Summit, with the aim of continuing the intense negotiations, in contrast to his decision to miss other global summits such as the UN SDG Summit later this month. The world is waiting for G20 leaders to be bold and decisive in tackling global interlinked crises emerging from debt to food insecurity, rising humanitarian needs, and climate change. The need to reform global financial architecture and scale up investments for a more sustainable, equitable world is ever more pressing.

Read the article [here](#).

## India must end inhumane detention of human rights defender GN Saibaba: UN expert

In a press release on 21 August, Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders said that India's persistent detention of human rights defender GN Saibaba is an inhumane and senseless act.

“GN Saibaba is a long-standing defender of the rights of minorities in India, including the Dalit and Adivasi people and his continued detention is shameful. It bears all the hallmarks of a State seeking to silence a critical voice. Saibaba, a former English professor at Delhi University, has suffered from a spinal disorder and polio since the age of five and



uses a wheelchair. He was arrested in 2014 and sentenced to life imprisonment in 2017 for multiple offences under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). UN human rights experts have repeatedly raised grave concerns about his prosecution, and his detention was declared arbitrary by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention in an opinion issued in 2021. His condition in prison is a matter of serious concern”, Lawlor said.

Mr. Saibaba has been detained in a high security ‘barracks’ in conditions incompatible with his status as a wheelchair user. His 8x10 feet cell has no window and one wall is made of iron bars, exposing him to extreme weather, especially in the scorching summer heat. The UN has repeatedly expressed concerns for his health, which has seriously deteriorated. The expert is in contact with the Indian Government regarding the need for his release.

### Rishi Sunak raises the case of Scottish Sikh detained by India since 2017

The UK prime minister has confirmed that he raised the case of the Scottish Sikh, Jagtar Singh Johal, who has been held by Indian authorities since 2017, in talks with the Indian prime minister. Rishi Sunak had faced pressure to highlight the case of Johal. His family claim he has been the victim of torture and more than 70 MPs demanded that Mr Sunak lobby for his release. Earlier this week, the Foreign Office ruled out intervening in the case, but after speaking to his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi, Mr Sunak confirmed he raised the case along with other consular issues. Read more [here](#).



### UN Experts concerned by continuing abuses in Manipur

A statement by the UN noted an inadequate response on the part of authorities to the situation, which includes allegations of human rights abuses such as acts of sexual violence, extrajudicial killings, home destruction, forced displacement, torture and ill-treatment. They said recent events in Manipur were another tragic milestone in the steadily deteriorating situation for religious and ethnic minorities in India. Read more [here](#).

## PAKISTAN

### Authorities must ensure the protection of minority Christian community

After allegations of blasphemy made against two Christian residents of Jaranwala, vigilante mobs **attacked at least five churches** and many Christian homes in the area.



Responding to the attack and arson, Rehab Mahamoor, interim regional researcher for South Asia at Amnesty International, stated: “The Pakistani authorities must urgently ensure the protection of the minority Christian community in Jaranwala is in accordance to their needs and wishes and that those found responsible for the arson and attacks on Churches and homes are held accountable. Such attacks add to the climate of discrimination and fear for religious minorities.”

The existence of blasphemy laws continues to embolden groups and individuals who threaten, attack or attempt to kill the accused, or anyone connected, including members of their community.

Read more [here](#):

## An opportunity to remedy inequality in Pakistan

The Sindh provincial government in Pakistan has taken an important step to mitigate harm from last year's (July 2022) devastating floods and provide redress for gender inequality and barriers to land ownership for women living in rural areas.

In an attempt to rehabilitate those who suffered catastrophic losses in the floods, the Sindh government has begun providing land titles and funds to construct houses for people who were previously landless, a third of them being women. If implemented, the government could begin to provide redress for harmful social practices that have long excluded women from land ownership.

Read more from Human Rights Watch's research [here](#).



## Upholding the right to electricity and the quality of standards of living



Widespread protests have emerged in Pakistan against a recent hike in electricity prices. In some cities, the protests have turned violent. The price hike, approved by the government, has come as Pakistan faces one of the worst economic crises in its history, jeopardising millions of people's right to health, food and an adequate standard of living.

Read more [here](#) from Human Rights Watch's research.

# SRI LANKA

## Flawed plans for a 'Truth Commission'

Nine international human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, have grave reservations about the Sri Lankan government's proposed National Unity and Reconciliation Commission. The latest initiative risks repeating the mistakes of the past, exposing victims to renewed security threats and re-traumatisation without any realistic chance of a different outcome.

We urge the government of Sri Lanka to:

- Fully engage with the victims of human rights violations and their families
- Deliver a transitional justice process that upholds their rights and abides by Sri Lanka's obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law
- Demonstrate its commitment to providing truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-recurrence by immediately ending human rights violations against victims' families and communities.

[See the statement.](#)