

Amnesty UK South Asia

January 2024



South Asia Coordinator Team

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Cherry, Nigina, Lucja & Jerry

BANGLADESH

"Democracy is dead in Bangladesh"

Before Bangladesh held the general election on 7 January the result was already inevitable, with the main opposition parties boycotting the poll and many of their leaders jailed. The statistics show politically motivated arrests, disappearances, killings and other abuses rising under the leadership of Ms Sheik Hasina. Human Rights Watch [recently called the arrests of opposition supporters](#) a "violent autocratic crackdown" by the government.

[Please see the BBC article.](#)

"The election of the absurd"

"Bangladesh's governing party officials are threatening people with the loss of state benefits if they do not show up at the polling centres in the country's uncontested election."

It is apparent that most Bangladeshis have lost faith in the electoral system and don't consider Bangladesh a democracy. We can expect more repression of opposition and minorities. Hopefully the world will take interest.

[Please also see this article by David Bergman.](#)

Joint statement: CSOS demand the release of political prisoners and call for fresh elections in Bangladesh



<https://anfrel.org/joint-statement-csos-demand-the-release-of-political-prisoners-and-call-for-fresh-elections-in-bangladesh/>

Muhammad Yunus convicted



Amnesty International statement: “A Dhaka Labour Court convicted 83 year old Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus and three of his colleagues under the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 and sentenced them to six months’ imprisonment.

The conviction of Yunus is emblematic of the beleaguered state of human rights in Bangladesh, where the authorities have eroded freedoms and bulldozed critics into submission. The unusual speed in which the trial against Muhammad Yunus was completed stands in stark contrast to the snail-paced progress in other labour rights-related court cases in Bangladesh. The abuse of labour laws and misuse of the justice system to settle political vendettas is a violation of international human rights law.

Amnesty International believes that initiating criminal proceedings against Muhammad 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.”

[Please see the Guardian article.](#)

Irene Khan, a former Amnesty chief now working as a UN special rapporteur who was present at Monday’s verdict, said the conviction was “a travesty of justice”. “A social activist and Nobel laureate who brought honour and pride to the country is being persecuted on frivolous grounds.”

Bangladesh must stop violating labour rights and uphold corporate accountability

Workers in Bangladesh face multiple barriers in their ability to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of association and collective bargaining. These workers have some of the lowest wages in the region and extremely high instances of occupational injury and death. Between 30 October 2023 and 8 November 2023, at least four workers died during protests – three by law enforcement using lethal force and one in a fire.

Amnesty International calls on the Government of Bangladesh to take immediate and concrete steps to ensure workers have their rights to freedom of association, assembly and expression respected and that legislative changes are made so workers and their dependents can obtain adequate and timely compensation for occupational injuries and deaths.

[Please see the full Amnesty Statement.](#)

INDIA

BK16: Why is the Supreme Court of India staying its own bail orders?



Mahesh Raut was granted bail in September but remains in prison. A similar fate may await Gautam Navlakha, who was granted bail on 19 December. Mahesh Raut and Gautam Navlakha are among the 16 accused in the Bhima Koregaon case.

In both instances, while granting bail, the High Court stayed its orders, to allow the National Investigation Agency to file appeals before the Supreme Court. The stay is presumably because the charges against Raut and Navlakha (and others in the BK16 case) are considered

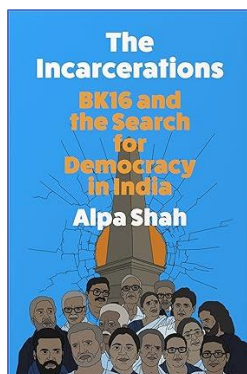
serious. However, the Supreme Court noted earlier this year that the National Investigation Agency's primary evidence, a batch of letters, were of "weak probative value or quality", which is also noted in the bail orders secured by Raut and Navlakha. A digital forensics firm, Arsenal Consulting, also concluded that false evidence had been planted on the laptops and devices of the accused.



Most legal experts to whom *Scroll* spoke said that it is unusual for a court to stay its own orders, even though there is no legal bar on it. Some expressed concerns about the impact of such stays on bail jurisprudence in the country.

Read the *Scroll* article [here](#).

Book publication in March: *The Incarcerations* by Alpa Shah



Tells the story of the Bhima Koregaon case. Highlighting how these alleged terrorists were charged with inciting violence at a New Year's Day commemoration in 2018, accused of waging a war against the Indian state and plotting to kill Prime Minister, Narendra Modi. Shah exposes the shocking revelations of cyber warfare research, which show not only hacking of emails and mobile phones of the BK-16, but also implantation of the electronic evidence that was used to incarcerate them.

The book also tracks through the lives and work of the BK16, looking at the issues they have fought for and how the search for democracy relates to the three main minorities in India – Adivasis, Dalits and Muslims.

Amnesty confirms use of Pegasus spyware to infect journalists' phones

Warnings from Apple in late October that Indian journalists and opposition figures [may have been targeted by state-sponsored attacks](#) prompted a forceful counterattack from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government. Officials publicly doubted Apple's findings and announced a probe into device security.

India has never confirmed nor denied using the Pegasus tool, but Amnesty International reported that it found NSO Group's invasive spyware on the iPhones of prominent journalists in India, lending more credibility to Apple's early warnings. "Our latest findings show that increasingly, journalists in India face the threat of unlawful surveillance simply for doing their jobs, alongside other tools of repression including imprisonment under draconian laws, smear campaigns, harassment, and intimidation," said Donncha Ó Cearbhaill, head of Amnesty International's Security Lab, in a blog post.

Read more [here](#).

Death of three civilians in Kashmir triggers widespread anger

Three Kashmir civilians died after they were picked up by the Indian army in the hill village of Topa Pir in Poonch district, close to the line of control in Indian administered Kashmir, after suspected rebels ambushed military vehicles in the area killing four Indian soldiers.

The deaths of these three civilians have caused huge anger among the people of Kashmir, leading to calls for an investigation into alleged custodial killings. Families of the dead say they were shocked when the police called telling them to take back the bodies of the deceased and said they showed signs of torture. All three victims belonged to the Gujjar tribal community, who traditionally lead a pastoral life in the mountains. The Indian army say an investigation is under way, but anger is still rife across the region.

Read the Al Jazeera article [here](#).



Bulldozer Injustice: New Amnesty research on punitive destruction in India



Following previous items featured in the media (and this newsletter) on the use of JCB bulldozers as a tool for punishing dissent and persecuting minorities such as Muslims, Amnesty International will be publishing a detailed report on research carried out in five Indian states. There are plans to use this as the basis for a major campaign and advocacy thrust over the coming months, both here in UK and in India. Meanwhile Amnesty is in correspondence with JCB about their responsibilities under

international law and norms for due diligence on the use of products they supply and service. The JCB brand has been weaponised and become a symbol of hate and of power. Expect more on this soon.

Read the 2022 [BBC article](#). Also, the Feb 2023 [Amnesty Press release](#).

BJP win in India's 2024 general election 'almost an inevitability'

Concerns are being raised over what a third term for Narendra Modi would mean for the country amid rising Hindu-Muslim tensions, stoked by his Hindutva agenda.

As his BJP swept three major state elections (Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh) in December, Narendra Modi predicted that "this hat-trick has guaranteed the 2024 victory". With only a few months to go before the general election, in which Modi will be seeking a third term in power, the campaign season has begun with gusto. In India's current political landscape, the consensus among political analysts is that a win for Modi and the BJP is the most plausible outcome.



The prime minister's popularity as a political strongman, alongside the BJP's Hindu nationalist agenda, continues to appeal to the large Hindu majority of the country, particularly in the populous Hindi belt of the north, resulting in the widespread persecution of Muslims. At state and national level, the apparatus of the country has been skewed heavily towards the BJP since Modi was elected in 2014. He has been accused of overseeing an unprecedented consolidation of power, muzzling critical media, eroding the independence of the judiciary and all forms of parliamentary scrutiny and accountability and using government agencies to pursue and jail political opponents.

Campaign messaging in the recent state elections combined an emphasis on the BJP's paternalistic welfare schemes – which provide large amounts of free food and cash handouts – with nationalistic and religiously communal

rhetoric, offering a glimpse of how the BJP intends to fight the election on a national scale. Modi's role in elevating India as a global power – be that in international politics or in the recent its moon landing in August (it was the first country to successfully land a spacecraft near the lunar south pole) was also prominent.

Read the *Guardian* article [here](#).

SRI LANKA

18-year anniversary of the 'Trinco 5' killing

On 2 January 2006, Ragihar Manoharan and four other Sri Lankan Tamil students were killed by security forces in the city of Trincomalee, in north-eastern Sri Lanka. 18 years on, Sri Lankan authorities have failed to deliver truth, justice, and reparations for the killings of the five youth and the resulting coverup despite considerable evidence.

While a criminal case was filed on 3 July 2019 against 13 Special Task Force members suspected of executing the youth, the suspects were acquitted, reportedly due to "lack of evidence". The Attorney General directed police to recommence investigations, however no further progress has been made available into the case so far.

As we enter the year that marks 15 years since the end of Sri Lanka's internal armed conflict, it serves as a grim reminder that accountability for serious human rights and humanitarian law violations has rarely been forthcoming in the domestic criminal justice system.

WATCH: ['Tell the Truth'](#) (2011), to see Dr Manoharan's journey fighting for years to bring his son's murderers to court.

PAKISTAN

More than 5,000 people are missing in Balochistan

Enforced disappearances in the Balochistan province is a decades-old issue, from when the Balochistan nationalist movement began in the early 2000s with relatives attempting to find their loved ones being harassed, abused and endangered by the police and government.

Salia Marri has called on political parties, activists, human rights organisations, media and the Baloch nation in a five-day-sit protest in front of 10 Downing Street (London) to release Baloch missing persons, including her husband, Taj Muhammad Sarparah, who was abducted in July 2020 and has not been heard of since.



For more information read [here](#).

Pakistan extends deadline for Afghans awaiting third-country resettlement

More than 450,000 Afghans have left the country since Pakistani authorities launched a deportation drive in October 2023. Now, the Pakistan government has announced that undocumented Afghans awaiting paperwork to resettle to a third country will be allowed to stay in Pakistan for two more months. The extension of the deadline occurred from Wednesday, 13 December, to Thursday, 29 February, in their drive to expel more than one million foreigners living in



the country without paperwork. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) have estimated that more than 450,000 people have returned to Afghanistan since the deportation campaign began, most citing fear of arrest as the primary decision to leave. Since announcing the extension, the interim information minister Murtaza Solangi stated that anybody overstaying the new deadline would be fined \$100 monthly, with a cap set at \$800.

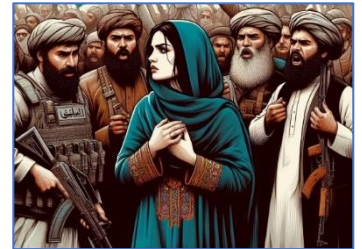
For more information see the [al Jazeera article](#).

AFGHANISTAN

Taliban detains dozens of women in Afghanistan for breaking hijab rules

On January 11, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said the Taliban authorities in Afghanistan have been detaining and arresting women for noncompliance with the dress code rule, namely wearing the headscarf or hijab.

UNAMA said, it “fears the current crackdown is pushing women into even greater isolation due to fear of arbitrary arrest and creating a permissive environment for men to enforce repressive measures at home.” UNAMA documented numerous cases of girls and women being detained across Afghanistan, some held incommunicado, and others reportedly ill-treated.



The operations to enforce the hijab mandate are carried out by the Taliban’s Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, which the U.N. body described as the “*de facto* police.” The Taliban denied any prosecution of women based on the hijab rule.

These oppressive measures have led to a surge in women committing suicide, increased violence against women, and a rise in early and forced marriages.

See [UNAMA Press Release](#).

Fight for Survival: Afghan people navigate displacement, repatriation, and border crossings in gruelling journeys



The desolate landscapes of eastern Afghanistan tell a tale of struggle as hundreds of thousands of people, displaced from neighbouring Pakistan, navigate a challenging journey back to their homeland. This vast encampment near the Torkham border crossing is just the latest chapter in Afghanistan's enduring quest for a stable home, shaped by over 40 years of war, violence, and poverty.

The economic collapse following the Taliban's takeover two years ago has left Afghanistan reliant on international aid, with over two-thirds of the population depending on it for survival. The displaced, among the most impoverished, inhabit camps nationwide, struggling to afford necessities like food and firewood. Women and children resort to begging, and some marry off their young daughters for financial support.

Pakistan's recent deportation of Afghans, who had lived there for decades, intensified the crisis, prompting hundreds of thousands to flee back to Afghanistan. The Torkham camp becomes their initial refuge, where they face sickness and harsh conditions before being relocated by Taliban officials.

See the [Independent article](#).