

# Amnesty UK South Asia

**May 2025**



## South Asia Coordinator Team

You have been sent this Newsletter because you or your local group opted in to receive Actions, Campaigns and Updates on South Asia. You can opt out at any time by contacting one of us.

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

Thank you for your support.

Cherry, Nigina, Jerry and Irfan



Amnesty International's Annual Report for 2024/5, **The State of the World's Human Rights** has now been published. Unsurprisingly, the "Trump Effect" features strongly as it is seen to be accelerating destructive trends across the globe, such as increasing authoritarian practices and failure to address inequalities, climate collapse and negative effects of tech transformations.

You can read the press release [here](#). And the report [here](#).

May 3<sup>rd</sup> was **World Press Freedom Day**, which this year highlighted the challenges to freedom of expression posed by the rapid growth and use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which is changing journalism, the media, and press freedom in significant ways. AI's impact on information gathering, processing, and dissemination is profound, presenting both innovative opportunities and serious challenges.

Read more [here](#).



# INDIA

## Amnesty's annual report for India

The summary for India is significant, saying that:

- National financial and investigation agencies were weaponized against civil society, human rights defenders, activists, journalists and critics, further shrinking civic space.
- Authorities continued to unlawfully demolish properties belonging to religious minorities as a means of meting out extrajudicial punishment.
- India's colonial-era criminal procedure and penal laws were repealed to bring in new laws that continued to carry problematic provisions such as sedition.
- Travel restrictions were imposed on academics, journalists and human rights defenders by suspending their work visas, denying them entry to the country and cancelling their Overseas Citizen of India status.
- The Election Commission conducted state legislative assembly elections after 10 years in Jammu & Kashmir.
- Manipur continued to reel under ethnic violence.

Read the India section of the report [here](#).

## Good news: Digital access ruled as a part of fundamental right to life

The Supreme Court of India ruled that the right to digital access is an instinctive component of the right to life and liberty, necessitating the state to proactively design and implement inclusive digital ecosystems to serve not only the privileged, but also the marginalised and those who have been historically excluded. The judgment said that digital access to e-governance and welfare delivery systems is a part of the fundamental right to life and liberty. Bridging the digital divide (i.e. the gap between those who have access and those who do not) is no longer a matter of policy discretion but has become a constitutional imperative to secure a life of dignity. This ruling was in response to a petition brought by a woman who was unable to open a bank account because of a visual impairment which affected her ability to provide photo ID needed for the digital process.

## India's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) facing historic downgrade



The United Nations-linked Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions' (GANHRI) Sub-Committee on Accreditation (SCA) report has recommended downgrading India's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) from category 'A' to category 'B', for the first time in its history. Concerns cited included the involvement of police officers in investigations that may impact the NHRC's impartiality, and the ability of the government to make a senior civil servant the secretary general. The SCA recommended

that the NHRC should be able to independently recruit candidates for the position and that there should be transparency and pluralism in the selection process of members of the commission. Concern was also expressed that the NHRS has not addressed the "shrinking civic space and increased instances of targeting human rights defenders, journalists and perceived critics". The downgrading will not come into effect until 2026, but it is a significant statement about India's failure to address previous recommendations.

Read the Wire report [here](#).

## Kashmir Pahalgam attack

There has been widespread coverage of the militant attack on a group of Indian tourists in Indian administered Kashmir, resulting in 26 deaths. India has accused Pakistan of being behind this, or at least giving shelter to the militants, both of which Pakistan denies. World media coverage has focused on the risk of escalation of the simmering conflict between the two nuclear powers, a drama which has boiled up before. However, there has been little



mention of the impact on the lives of local Kashmiris, who are reportedly being heavily targeted by the Indian authorities – the Indian government is said to have given the military a free hand to “bring the situation under control”. This has meant bulldozing and/or bombing of the homes of anyone suspected of having links with the militants, however flimsy the evidence. Whole villages are said to have been affected, with neighbours warned not



to assist anyone whose home has been destroyed by the authorities. Huge numbers of individuals are reported to have been picked up, detained, tortured and sometimes killed.

Tourist destinations have been closed as a result of intelligence threat militants are planning further attacks in response to the destruction of housing. The situation is evolving rapidly.

Read the BBC report [here](#). And [here](#). Also a report by Maktoob Media [here](#).

## Latest press release on the Pahalgam attack: Urgent need to protect civilians as hostilities escalate

**May 8** statement: Responding to the escalating armed engagement between India and Pakistan, Carolyn Horn, Amnesty International’s Programme Director for Law and Policy, said “The escalation of hostilities between India and Pakistan has already taken a toll on civilians. Amnesty is concerned by reports of the loss of civilian lives in both India and Pakistan. In every armed conflict, protecting civilians is paramount - it’s a fundamental principle of international humanitarian law which binds all nations.” She added “Neither security nor justice will be achieved with the senseless loss of more civilian lives”.

Amnesty is calling on the Governments of India and Pakistan to uphold their obligations under both international human rights and humanitarian law. They must take all necessary measures to protect civilians and minimise any suffering and casualties in both countries.

Read the press release [here](#).

## Activism to stop JCB demolitions

AIUK is campaigning against the use of JCB bulldozers, which are known to be used in the destruction of homes in Palestine, India and Kashmir. On Saturday 22 March protesters gathered for a day of action against JCB to highlight the company’s complicity in ethnic cleansing across Palestine and India, including Kashmir. *Parents 4 Palestine* and the *Stop JCB Demolitions Campaign* mobilised for a series of protests at the Royal Festival Hall, Southbank centre, in London to call out the its sponsorship agreement with JCB. The coalition includes a number of organisations including Amos Trust, War on Want, Palestine Solidarity Campaign and AIUK.



Read the report of this event by The Canary [here](#).

We are looking at actions Amnesty members could take to support a campaign against JCB, to raise awareness and call out their role in the destruction of housing rather than construction. If you are interested in participating or just would like to know more, please contact Cherry on [cherry.bird@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:cherry.bird@amnesty.org.uk).

## Two years of violence in Manipur show no sign of ending



Since violence erupted on 3 May 2023 between the Meitei community and Kuki and other tribal hill communities, more than 50,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) from both communities remain in relief camps across the state, living in inhumane conditions with limited access to healthcare, sanitation and food. The violence has directly resulted in 260 deaths.

In a statement released to mark this anniversary, Aakar Patel, chair of board, Amnesty International India said that “It is unacceptable that the Indian government has failed to address the humanitarian needs and implement a comprehensive rehabilitation policy for displaced communities who remain in relief camps two years after the start of the ethnic violence in Manipur. This inaction has left tens of thousands in limbo, forced to endure life in inhumane conditions with no end in sight”.

Read the whole statement [here](#).

You can also share the following messages on X and Instagram:

<https://x.com/aiindia/status/1918223421512585638?s=46>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/DJJRv00sUNA/?igsh=MWE3NjZwYzBnOXhwcg==>

## Possible new Amnesty campaign against anti-conversion laws

Among human rights activists in India there are increasing concerns about harassment faced by couples of different religions who wish to marry, particularly if the woman is Hindu and the man is Muslim. In such cases right-wing Hindu groups often accuse Muslim men of seducing Hindu women and forcing them to convert to Islam.

There are two ways for an interfaith couple to get married in India. The first option is that both retain their religion and marry under the Special Marriage Act. The second is that one of them converts to the other's religion and then marries under the personal law of that religion. In recent years, both ways have been virtually cut off as many BJP-ruled states have cracked down on interfaith marriages.



For the first option, the 1954 Special Marriage Act requires the couple to give 30 days' notice before their marriage, displayed in the office of the marriage registrar for public viewing, to allow any objections to the marriage. It contains personal details of the couple: names, addresses, age, occupation and photos. In recent years, there have been several media reports of harassment from families and Hindutva groups resulting from this public notice. Couples face invasive scrutiny, even violent threats and may be forced to abandon their plans to marry.

The second option has been removed in 12 BJP ruled states which have passed anti-conversion laws, popularly known as 'love jihad' laws. These laws declare that marriages performed after one of the couple converts may be invalid because of vaguely defined factors such as coercion, allurements, undue influence or fraudulent means. Most place the burden of proof on the accused to demonstrate that their spouse's consent for conversion was not obtained illegally.

Launch of this new campaign is planned for May, when further details of actions will be available.



## Human rights violations of indigenous people continue in Chhattisgarh



On 6 May International Solidarity for Academic Freedom (InSAF) and London Mining Network hosted a webinar about the ongoing violence and human rights violations that have been taking place for many years in the region of Bastar, Chhattisgarh state. Around 2.7 million people live in Bastar, of whom two thirds are from ethnic minorities living from the land, as they have for generations. The area is ecologically rich, with extensive bio-diverse forests that form an important part of their livelihoods. However, it is also rich in minerals, such as coal, gold and rare earths, which the Indian authorities and corporate businesses have been exploiting for many years, often displacing people from their lands. As villagers have protested against the destruction and displacement, individuals and communities have been targeted, with arrests, disappearances, rapes and extrajudicial killings reported, and even whole villages burned. It is estimated that over 4,000 people are detained in jails accused of being Maoists (who are active in the region) or having taken part in violent “encounters” which are often faked. Organisations such as the Save the Indigenous Peoples Movement (MBM), have been banned by the government as “terrorists”.

Security camps for the military have been set up every 2-5 km in the conflict areas, with wide roads constructed to enable the military to move around, both of which further erode the land-holdings of local people. The camps have technologically advanced weapons and surveillance and there is estimated to be one security personnel for every nine civilians.

This situation is just one example of the systemic failure of international laws intended to protect indigenous people’s rights and the environment. Natural resource destruction related to mineral exploitation is a global crisis, sadly exacerbated by the drive for green energy, and indigenous peoples are in the frontline. When indigenous lands are seized, eco-systems are vulnerable. Bastar is a victim of a global pattern of state repression, militarisation and weaponisation of laws linked to mineral exploitation and profiteering. You may like to see information [here](#) about a global organisation Yes to Life No to Mining (YLNM).

## Bhopal

A documentary film is now available, “Burial of Dreams” by Indian film director R. Sarath. It highlights that, 40 years after the Union Carbide disaster, the fight for compensation continues, as the effects of the deadly chemical are passed down generations, affecting an estimated more than a million people.

# BANGLADESH

## Amnesty International Annual Report: Bangladesh summary

Freedom of expression continues to be stifled. Student-led protests faced violence from the police, armed forces and groups aligned with the former ruling party, the Awami League. The violence left hundreds dead and thousands injured and sparked pressure for reform. (The government fled the country.) The new interim government began to address the issue of enforced disappearances, however, families of the disappeared were still waiting for truth and justice. Rohingya refugees continued to face dire living conditions in camps, without access to essential services. Religious minorities and Indigenous Peoples face violence. Garment workers continue to suffer intimidation, harassment and repression of their rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly.

Read the report [here](#).

## Rana Plaza anniversary



The 24<sup>th</sup> April marked 12 years since the collapse of Rana Plaza in Bangladesh, which left over 1,100 garment workers dead and thousands injured. The disaster, caused by wholly negligent workplace monitoring, exposed the human cost of systemic lack of regulation of the garment industry in Bangladesh. Despite some progress on health and safety in the industry in the South Asia region, garment workers continue to face innumerable obstacles including harassment, intimidation and violence, as well as legal hurdles when attempting to voice their demands for justice, wages, adequate safeguards and working conditions.

Please see this photo essay marking the anniversary:

<https://theleaflet.in/leaflet-reports/photo-essay-twelve-years-after-the-rana-plaza-tragedy-a-collage-of-unfinished-recovery>

## Bawm Prisoners Case: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) Statement

IWGIA stands in solidarity with the Indigenous Bawm, who are caught in the crossfire between the Bangladesh Military and Kuki-Chin National Front. For more than a year, 27 women and children have been in prison on trumped-up charges. The CHT is effectively a military-controlled area, there has been a media blackout regarding the human rights situation of the Bawm community.



The safety situation for the Bawm continues to deteriorate exponentially. In April 2024, 126 Bawm individuals were imprisoned, more than triple the number of those imprisoned in all of 2023. This puts the current number of imprisoned Bawm individuals at 161. Additionally, more than 17 others remain in military custody and have yet to be handed over to the courts or police.

“We urge the duty-bearers in Bangladesh to immediately set the innocent Bawm women and children free, and compensate them for their unjust suffering.”

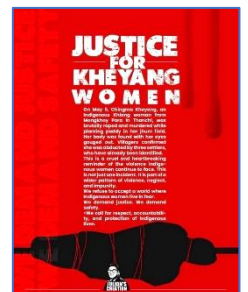
## Another indigenous woman raped and killed



On 4 May in the Chittagong Hills, a Khyang indigenous woman, Chingmang Khyang, was gang raped and killed by three settlers as she worked in the fields. According to confirmed local reports, her eyes were gouged out and her head smashed. She was the mother of three children, the youngest only 18 months old.

See the attachment for the full-sized poster.

As usual, we cannot expect reports in the national papers or any police investigation, but the story has been thoroughly verified by the Country Coordinator. This is a racist as well as sexual attack. Protests by indigenous students have already started in Dhaka.



## Last minute update

Protests about this incident have been widespread, in particular because of efforts by the authorities to cover it up. <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/women-student-orgs-protest-gang-rape-murder-khiyang-woman-bandarban-1135541>

[https://www.newagebd.net/post/country/264219/protest-erupts-after-kheyang-woman-raped-murdered?fbclid=IwY2xjawKH6A1leHRuA2FlbQlxMAABHtQp3BxcHkdJB5yHkVWo6zyiZOMfOxcUqVsHhg1xy-JifJrtSE2VhlrEDh-0\\_aem\\_wl-Vflcy1hG\\_FTEPXL3-A](https://www.newagebd.net/post/country/264219/protest-erupts-after-kheyang-woman-raped-murdered?fbclid=IwY2xjawKH6A1leHRuA2FlbQlxMAABHtQp3BxcHkdJB5yHkVWo6zyiZOMfOxcUqVsHhg1xy-JifJrtSE2VhlrEDh-0_aem_wl-Vflcy1hG_FTEPXL3-A)

## Meghna Alam

Amnesty International is deeply concerned about the use of the Special Powers Act for the arrest of model Meghna Alam. The legislation, with vague, overbroad provisions, has historically been used to arbitrarily detain people for long periods of time, without charge, and without judicial oversight. These all constitute gross violations of due process safeguards and international human rights standards and best practices. Meghna's detention was shrouded in secrecy, and was allegedly carried out without a warrant, which are alarming violations of procedural safeguards. We call on the authorities to either charge Meghna with an internationally recognisable crime or release her. They must also end the use of and repeal the Special Powers Act.

# AFGHANISTAN

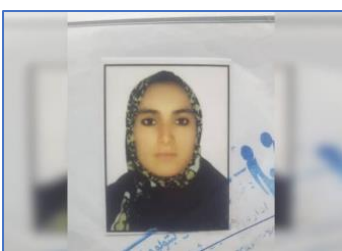
## Activism plans

A group of Amnesty activists, including the Oppressed Minorities group of the Amnesty Central England Network, particularly Reading and Banbury local groups, are planning to campaign on Afghan women, with support from Amnesty Feminists Network. This will start with a webinar and possibly at some point a showing of a new film “Rule Breakers”, which tells the story of Afghanistan's first all-girls robotics team, based on the true story of Roya Mahboob and her team. It is available on [Angel Studios](#), though not yet on Netflix, and highlights the girls' journey and their determination to compete on the world stage.



If you are interested in joining forces with this group, please let Cherry know on [cherry.bird@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:cherry.bird@amnesty.org.uk).

## Abida's last stand: A fire no-one could extinguish



In the mountains of Ghor, Afghanistan, 20-year-old Abida chose fire over a life stolen by force.

On a quiet Sunday, as a Taliban commander detained her father and brothers, and a man she had never chosen stormed her home to claim her as his bride, Abida saw no escape. She poured petrol over her body, lit a match, and said no, the only way she could. By the time neighbours reached her, her body was engulfed.

Taliban member Haji Mohammad Rahmani insisted Abida had been promised to his brother at the age of two—an allegation her family firmly denies. A Taliban court initially ruled in Rahmani's favour. The decision was eventually overturned, but not in time to save her. Abida's death is one of many under Taliban rule, where forced and underage marriages are rising, and silence is enforced with fear. According to the Afghanistan Human Rights Centre, over half of these marriages involve Taliban fighters.

Abida didn't die because she was weak—she died because no one protected her. Her final act was one of resistance, not surrender. Let us remember her not as a victim, but as a young woman who dared to fight back in the only way left to her.

## Nowhere to run: Afghan refugees in Pakistan face mounting pressure and forced deportation

In the shadows of global diplomacy and policy paralysis, the suffering of Afghan refugees in Pakistan is reaching a breaking point. Stripped of hope, protection, and clarity, many are now facing the unimaginable choice between death in exile or persecution under Taliban rule.

Osman, a former major-general in the Afghan National Army, epitomises the deepening crisis. Having once fought shoulder to shoulder with international forces against the Taliban, he fled to Pakistan after the fall of Kabul in 2021. But last month, overwhelmed by the threat of deportation and abandoned by the very systems he once supported, he died by suicide in a small, rented room in Rawalpindi.



Osman's story is tragically common. He was one of an estimated three million Afghan refugees in Pakistan, many of whom are now facing forced expulsion. Over the past month alone, Pakistani authorities have deported more than 100,000 Afghans. The pace of removals has sharply increased since early April 2025, and the pressure is growing by the day. While Pakistan hosts a complex population of Afghan refugees—some with Proof of Registration (Por) cards, others with Afghan Citizen Cards (ACC), and nearly a million with no documentation at all—this distinction has offered little clarity or protection. Confusion over differing deadlines, inconsistent enforcement, and rising fear among families with mixed statuses have left people in an impossible bind.

Among those trapped in this uncertainty are individuals who were approved for resettlement in the United States after working with Western governments and NGOs. But since Donald Trump's decision to halt refugee admissions earlier this year, at least 20,000 Afghans have been stranded mid-process. Osman was one of them. His suicide was not just a personal tragedy, but a glaring indictment of a broken international promise.

The crackdown, which began in October 2023, has now pushed over 845,000 Afghans out of Pakistan in the past 18 months. It has drawn widespread condemnation from human rights groups, the United Nations, and even the Taliban authorities in Kabul. Yet the Pakistani government insists on its objective: the removal of three million Afghan nationals.

Voices from within the refugee population echo a rising sense of fear and desperation. "For me, going back to Afghanistan is like buying death," says Jamileh Akbari, a former Afghan armed forces member now in hiding in Islamabad. Like Osman, she knows that her past affiliation with the Afghan government makes her a target for Taliban retribution. Shahnaz, 42, fled to Pakistan after narrowly escaping a forced marriage and later became a grassroots activist in rural Afghanistan, helping women choose love over custom. For her, deportation is not just a return—it is a death sentence.

The situation is particularly bleak for women and girls, former military personnel, journalists, human rights defenders, and LGBTQ+ individuals, all of whom face persecution under Taliban rule. Yet these are the people most at risk of being forced back. This is not just a refugee crisis—it is a human rights crisis. And it has been met with indifference and inaction by the very states that once called these Afghans allies.

As the international community debates politics and priorities, the lives of thousands hang in the balance. The question is not whether these deportations will continue—they already are. The real question is whether the world will respond before more lives are lost.



# SRI LANKA

## Amnesty International Annual Report: Sri Lanka summary

The government continued its use of draconian legislation and crackdowns on freedom of expression and association. It passed new laws to stifle dissent, without adequate consultation and in contravention of international human rights laws and standards. Minorities, activists and civil society continued to be intimidated and harassed. The government failed to make meaningful progress on truth, justice and reparations for those affected by the internal armed conflict that ended in May 2009. Proposed legislative amendments to ensure the rights of LGBTI people and Muslim women and girls were not carried out.

Minority communities, particularly Sri Lankan Tamils and Muslims in the Northern and Eastern provinces, reported continuing surveillance, intimidation and reprisals by the police and intelligence agencies. Families of the disappeared reported harassment, including late-night calls from state actors questioning them about their work and funding. Civil society members and journalists, particularly those working on land rights, enforced disappearances or with former combatants, were also subject to harassment and intimidation.

Read the report [here](#).

## Repealing the Prevention of Terrorism Act



The pre-election manifesto of the National People's Power (NPP) pledged the "abolition of all oppressive acts including the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA)". Seven months later in April, the Government has appointed of a committee to review it. In place of the PTA, a new law is to be introduced to combat terrorist activities. The Minister of Justice and National Integration said that the PTA would not be repealed until the new law was introduced.

Amnesty International Annual report says that "The Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) continued to be used against minorities, activists and critics of the government, despite the government pledging a moratorium on its use. According to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL), between January 2023 and April 2024, authorities reported 46 cases of arrests and detention under the PTA."

# PAKISTAN

## Report on climate change related deaths in Pakistan



Amnesty's new report 'Uncounted: Invisible deaths of older people and children during climate disasters in Pakistan' finds that Pakistan's healthcare and disaster response systems are failing to meet the needs of children and older people who are most at risk of death and disease amid extreme weather events related to climate change. It urges the Pakistani authorities to protect the rights to life and to health, saying that while Pakistan has made some notable improvements in disaster responses since 2022, it still falls short of protecting these rights for many people.

However, it should be noted that this is not Pakistan's burden to bear alone. "The tragic fact is that those who contribute least to the climate crisis are bearing the largest burden of its harmful consequences," said Laura Mills, Amnesty International researcher for crisis response. "Climate change doesn't stop at international borders.

Responsibility for the preventable deaths in Pakistan lies not just in Islamabad, but also with those countries that continue to burn, produce and supply fossil fuels at unacceptably high rates." Plans for a major campaign on this issue will be available soon.

Read Amnesty's latest report on climate injustice in Pakistan [here](#).

## Pakistan's Supreme Court rules in favour of the military

On 7 May Pakistan's Supreme Court ruled that civilians can be tried in military courts, overturning its previous decision from October 2023 that had declared such trials unconstitutional. The 5-2 majority verdict reinstated key provisions of the Pakistan Army Act, allowing military courts to try civilians accused of attacking military installations during the [May 9, 2023](#), riots following former Prime Minister Imran Khan's arrest.



The court's decision has been met with criticism from human rights groups, who argue that military trials lack transparency and due process. The Supreme Court has urged Parliament to amend the Army Act within 45 days to provide an independent right of appeal for [military court convicts](#) in the high courts. This ruling has significant implications for Pakistan's legal system and civil-military relations, as it expands the military's jurisdiction over civilian matters.

## Another targeted killing of an Ahmadi

Muhammad Asif, a 19-year-old Ahmadi, in Bhulair, District Kasur, was shot dead as he rode his motorbike home on 24 April 2025. This is the second killing of an Ahmadi within a week and appears to be part of an alarming pattern of violence and harassment faced by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Pakistan.

# NEPAL

## Amnesty's annual report for Nepal

The initial summary for Nepal says that:

- Authorities used unlawful force against protesters and restricted freedoms of expression and assembly.
- A key step towards advancing transitional justice nonetheless contained significant gaps that could allow impunity.
- Violence against women and girls and caste-based discrimination persisted across the country.
- Forced evictions continued.
- Illegal recruitment of migrant workers continued.

Read the Nepal section of the report [here](#).

# BHUTAN

## EU should press Bhutan to free political prisoners

### New report from UN experts finds fair trial violations, inhuman conditions



The European Union should press the Bhutanese authorities to release dozens of political prisoners held for decades in dire conditions, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have said. An EU human rights dialogue with Bhutan is scheduled, just weeks after UN human rights experts issued a communication raising concerns over reports that the prisoners were “denied due process and fair trials, including access to lawyers,” and allegedly subjected to torture.

The communication by six UN human rights experts, published on 4 April, raises concerns that “the broad and vague definitions [of “treason”], combined with the severity of the punishments, have a severe chilling effect on the enjoyment of human rights... and consequently on democratic life and civic space in the country.”

“Bhutan portrays itself as a land of ‘mindfulness’ and ‘gross national happiness,’ but UN reports paint quite a different picture,” said Smriti Singh, Regional Director for South Asia at Amnesty International. “Dozens are still detained, mistreated and tortured solely for peacefully dissenting against the government’s policy, an ordeal Bhutan’s King could end at the stroke of a pen.”

Read the Amnesty statement [here](#).