

Amnesty UK South Asia

January 2025



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, Jerry, Malaika & Irfan

Call to action: The importance of cards to prisoners

In a BBC World Service programme about prisoners released last August in the Russia prisoner swap, the husband of one of the journalists who had been held by the Russian authorities emphasised how much his wife had appreciated the cards sent by well-wishers. He urged everyone to send cards to political prisoners as many do arrive and they are a real morale boost, especially if they are bright and colourful.

Qatar World Cup legacy fund

Responding to the launch of the FIFA World Cup Qatar Legacy Fund, Steve Cockburn, Amnesty International's Head of Labour Rights and Sport said "It is shameful that FIFA and Qatar have launched their long-awaited legacy fund without any recognition of their clear responsibility towards the vast number of migrant workers who were exploited and, in many cases, died, to make the 2022 World Cup possible. While providing money to global efforts to support refugees and protect workers from the impacts of extreme heat is important, the fund currently does absolutely nothing for the families who lost loved ones in Qatar and were plunged into poverty as a result." Many workers from South Asia, especially Nepal, suffered in this way.

Read the full statement [here](#).

INDIA

India republic day



26 January is India's republic day, a national holiday that commemorates the adoption of the current Indian constitution on 26 January 1950. The theme this year is "golden heritage and development" to highlight India's rich cultural legacy and planned development projects. While this is obviously an important source of national pride, it is also an opportunity for activism, reminding the world and Indians in particular that, while India has much to be proud of, it is important that the liberal, secular and inclusive principles of the constitution are maintained for everyone, and not just those of a particular religion or

status. The BK16 prisoners have striven for this throughout their lives, so please use this time to send a card or letter to them in prison, highlighting your support at this time. Contact Cherry for names and addresses if you don't have them already.

Death of an Indian journalist in Chhattisgarh

Mukesh Chandrakar, 32, went missing on New Year's Day and his family registered a complaint with the police. His body was found 2 days later in the newly floored septic tank in the compound of a road construction contractor in the Bijapur town. Police said it showed severe injuries consistent with a blunt-force attack. Mr Chandrakar, a freelance journalist, had reported widely on alleged corruption in public construction projects. He also ran a popular YouTube channel, Bastar Junction.



One of the main suspects - compound owner Suresh Chandrakar - is on the run. Local journalists have held a protest demanding action against the alleged perpetrators. Attacks on journalists reporting on corruption or environmental degradation are not uncommon in India. For example, in May 2022, Subhash Kumar Mahto, a freelance journalist known for his reporting on people involved in illegal sand mining, was fatally shot in the head by four unidentified men outside his home in Bihar. Media watchdog, Reporters Without Borders, has said that an average of three or four journalists are killed in connection with their work in India every year, making it among the world's most dangerous countries for the media.

Read the BBC report [here](#).

Manipur



The Chief Minister of Manipur, N Biren Singh, has said "sorry" for developments in the north-eastern state, adding that he is optimistic that things will improve in 2025. On New Year's Eve, he said "This entire year has been very unfortunate. I want to say sorry to the people of the state for what's happening till today since last May. Many people lost their loved ones. Many people left their homes. I feel regret. I apologise. But now, I hope after seeing the last three to four months progress towards the peace, I believe by 2025, normalcy will be restored in the state." He appealed to all the

communities to forgive and forget the past mistakes and start a new life (towards) a peaceful and prosperous Manipur, adding that all 35 tribes in Manipur should live together in harmony. It remains to be seen whether this can be achieved.

The violence in Manipur has claimed around 250 lives since May last year, when violence erupted over the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status and the tribal Kuki opposition to this. The Meitei account for about 53% of Manipur's population and live mostly in Imphal Valley. The tribal people, including Nagas and Kukis, constitute 40% of the population and live mainly in the hills. The Indian authorities have been criticised for their lack of effective action to stem the violence.

Read the report on NDTV [here](#).

Call for review of India's National Human Rights Commission

Amnesty International has joined other human rights organisations in an open letter raising serious concerns regarding the National Human Rights Commission of India (NHRCI) ahead of the 2025 review of its accreditation status by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) Sub-Committee on Accreditation (SCA). In March 2024, several of these organisations wrote to the SCA expressing concerns about the functioning of the NHRCI. In response to these concerns and other civil society submissions, GANHRI-SCA deferred the NHRCI's re-accreditation by 12 months for a second consecutive year. The SCA noted that the majority of its previous and often repeated recommendations remained unaddressed, indicating an unwillingness on the part of the Indian government to comply with the Paris Principles. The SCA report said that grounds for the deferral were the NHRCI's failure to effectively respond to the escalating human rights violations in India, lack of pluralism in selection and appointment of its chairperson and other members, insufficient cooperation with human rights bodies, and concerns over its ability to function independently of the government.

The open letter concludes by strongly urging the SCA to evaluate the NHRCI's rating carefully during the upcoming accreditation process, taking into consideration the NHRCI's failure to implement the SCA's recommendations made in 2006, 2011, 2016, 2017, 2023, and most recently in 2024.

Read the full letter [here](#).

Action on JCB over bulldozer demolitions



The South Asia Justice Campaign is filing an official legal complaint with the UK Department for Business and Trade against JCB for violation of OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises on responsible business conduct. This is based on “the use of heavy machinery manufactured and sold by its Indian subsidiary JCB Industries Private Limited in demolitions of Muslim-owned property in India, which were carried out without due process and in a discriminatory manner to punish minorities”. The case will use reports produced by Amnesty

International as part of its evidence. While the case is likely to be lengthy, it is an important step towards accountability of JCB for human rights violations caused by activities involving their machinery.

“Lit-washing”? Two days before the announcement of the winners of the JCB prize for literature, over 120 writers, translators and publishers wrote an open letter accusing the company of hypocrisy, saying it played a “major role in the horrifying destruction of homes across India and Palestine”. Read more [here](#).

Public meeting planned South Asia Solidarity Group and Amnesty UK are collaborating in the organisation of a hybrid public meeting in London about JCB in India and Palestine on 25 January from 3.00pm to 5.00 pm. There will be a number of high-profile speakers on the situation in both regions. Contact Cherry if you are interested in receiving details when they are available.

SRI LANKA

Human Rights Watch letter to the new Sri Lankan government regarding human rights recommendations

[The letter](#) congratulates President Dissanayake on the election victory, but details Sri Lanka's many pressing human rights concerns.

It sets out some of the concerns and urges the new government to take steps, including:

- Repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act.
- Take steps to assist those most harmed by the economic crisis.
- End policies and practices by the security forces that target minority communities, especially in the north and east.
- Work to bring those responsible for rights violations and corruption to justice.
- Ensure truth, reparations and accountability, or engage in systemic law enforcement reforms that would help prevent future violations.
- Reform or replace the Office of Missing Persons and ensure a new body has the trust of victims' families and technical capacity to identify remains discovered in mass graves.
- End the security forces' harassment and intimidation of relatives of the disappeared who are campaigning for truth and justice.
- Allow robust and independent criminal investigations and prosecutions of people accused of responsibility for enforced disappearances.

[Please see the full letter and report.](#)

New government considers deporting Rohingya refugees

The Sri Lankan government is in discussion with the government of Myanmar about the refoulement of 103 Rohingya asylum seekers.

[Please see the report.](#)

BANGLADESH

Are human rights eroding under Muhammad Yunus?

[DW reports on the state of human rights in Bangladesh](#), including:

- Rising violence and persecution of minorities
- Custodial deaths raise alarm
- Press freedom: more than 354 journalists harassed, 74 cases of violence reported, 113 criminal charges filed, and press credentials revoked for 167 journalists,
- police demoralization

Attacks on minorities

According to government estimates, at least 97 cases have been filed and 75 people arrested for alleged attacks on religious minorities between August 4 and December 10. The authorities must act swiftly and impartially against anyone inciting or committing such crimes. India's disinformation campaign fuels anti-India sentiment and consequently exacerbates insecurities among Hindus. Recent incidents of violence complicate efforts to counter propaganda.

[Please see the report.](#)

Tripura home burnt

The International CHT Commission is deeply alarmed by the arson attack on the Tripura community. On the 24 December 2024, 17 homes of the Tripura community were burnt to ashes. The attack occurred while the residents were celebrating in a neighbouring village. Media reports allege that associates of former Inspector General of Police were involved in the arson attack. These individuals have made repeated attempts to evict the Tripura families, using threats, coercion, and violence to force them off their ancestral lands.

[Please see the report.](#)

Court rejects bail for Hindu leader charged with sedition

Krishna Das Prabhu led rallies demanding better security for minority groups and was arrested for allegedly disrespecting the Bangladeshi flag. Minority groups continue to criticise the interim government, but misleading news from India aggravates the situation.

[Please see the Aljazeera report.](#)

Questions over deposed Bangladeshi elite's £400m UK property empire

Bangladeshi authorities believe a handful of powerful families and businesses linked to Hasina's Awami League party acquired billions of pounds by illicit means, including huge loans from state-owned banks that have never been repaid. Associates of former Prime Minister have spent millions buying up top-flight property assets in the UK. Sheikh Hasina escaped from Dhaka aboard as crowds were storming her palatial residence. About 1,000 Bangladeshis lay dead and countless more injured, the toll of a brutal crackdown by her security forces on student-led protests.

[Please see the Guardian report on the extent property empire.](#)

UN investigation team fails to provide accurate information on human rights violations and deaths

The interim government of Bangladesh has not yet been able to provide the UN team with any information on the human rights violations committed against students and the public in July and August.

[Please see the report.](#)

Michael Chakma files complaint against Hasina at the ICT

Michael Chakma has filed a written complaint against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and eight others to the International Crimes Tribunal. Michael was abducted in 2019 and held by the former government. He was freed on 7th August.

[Please see the report.](#)

AFGHANISTAN

Amnesty feminists campaign for Afghan women

Over three years into the Taliban rule, Afghanistan remains a hotbed of unchecked human rights abuses – gender persecution, torture, arbitrary detentions, and censorship – all with zero accountability. The world’s response? Tepid at best. Join the Amnesty Feminists campaign, Rise With Afghan Women, to call on the UK Prime Minister to make Afghanistan a foreign policy priority, and demand the UK work with the international community to ensure that Women’s rights are protected in Afghanistan. You can help fundraise for Afghan women journalists, watch the lunchtime webinars featuring powerful Afghan speakers and keep up to date with new developments. It may seem as though nothing is happening, but brave women are working for change, some hidden and at high risk in Afghanistan, others from a base in the West, where they have been forced to take refuge.



Click [here](#) to find out more.

‘The Taliban have made life for Afghan women and girls intolerable. They have erased them from all spheres of life’ *Agnès Callamard*

And now they’re banning windows!

Just when you think it is not possible to restrict women’s lives any further, the Taliban’s latest edict stipulates that new buildings should not have windows from which “the courtyard, kitchen, neighbour’s well and other places usually used by women” are visible. Existing windows through which women can be seen must be walled in or covered.

Yet it seems this edict is still not sufficient evidence of the Taliban’s gender apartheid for the English cricket authorities to cancel their match against the Afghan cricket team in Lahore next month. This despite women’s organisations explaining that gender apartheid in Afghanistan is as egregious as the racial apartheid that once made the ICC end fixtures with South Africa’s team. Notably, the Afghan cricket team’s coach, Jonathan Trott, former England cricketer, has never even visited Afghanistan since taking the job in 2022, and therefore appears to have little idea or care about the realities of life for half the population. The team plays home matches in UAE.

Also, rather unbelievably, specialist travel companies are promoting trips to Afghanistan where one can experience “fascinating cultural differences”! Google “Adventure travel in Afghanistan” to find out more.

Isn’t it time sports and travel organisations played a role in addressing the serious violation of the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan? **Action:** In your own capacity you can write to some of these travel companies.

Read more in the Observer piece [here](#).

So, anyone for cricket?

A strongly worded letter has emerged from the UK parliament, signed by more than 160 MPs, urging the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) to boycott next month’s Champions Trophy match against Afghanistan. The England men’s side are due to face Afghanistan in Lahore on 26 February. The International Cricket Council (ICC) still allows the Afghanistan men’s team to compete, despite the women’s side being disbanded when the Taliban took power in 2021 and women players being forced to flee overseas or go into hiding for their own safety. The outlawing of

female participation in sport puts the Afghanistan Cricket Board in direct contravention of ICC rules, which require full members to organise a women's national team.

However, the ECB has so far rejected calls for a boycott. Richard Gould, the ECB chief executive has said that, while the ECB strongly condemns the Taliban's treatment of women and girls in Afghanistan, and is calling for a coordinated global response, England will not boycott international tournament matches against Afghanistan, arguing that cricket is a "source of hope and positivity for many Afghans". He obviously has not noticed that the "many Afghans" does not include the female half of the population. **Action:** Ask your MP to support the letter.

Read the Guardian article [here](#).

Establishment of an independent international accountability mechanism for Afghanistan



A document signed by a number of human rights organisations, including Amnesty International, calls for the establishment of an independent international accountability mechanism for Afghanistan. Since the Taliban take over in August 2021, Afghan and international civil society organisations have emphasised the need for such a mechanism with the mandate to investigate and collect, preserve and analyse evidence of grave violations and abuses, in order to advance accountability. This document provides details of how the mandate would build on and complement existing efforts.

It is noted that the Taliban have imposed ever-more extreme restrictions on a range of human rights. Women and girls have been barred from education beyond sixth grade and many forms of employment, and banned from singing, reading aloud, or even being heard outside their houses. LGBTQI+ people face arbitrary detention, extortion, torture and other ill-treatment and unlawful killing. Taliban forces have summarily executed and forcibly disappeared former government employees, especially security officers. Ethnic and religious minorities face significant risks of persecution and discrimination. Journalists, human rights defenders, and protesters, particularly women, face harassment, arbitrary detention, and violent reprisals. Cruel and inhuman punishments have been imposed, including public executions, flogging and other forms of corporal punishment. The ongoing humanitarian crisis, compounded by economic collapse and the Taliban's ban on women aid workers, has led to widespread poverty and food insecurity.

The latest resolution on Afghanistan (57/3), adopted by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) by consensus in October 2024, provides a blueprint for the action needed, stressing the "urgent and imperative need to ensure accountability"

Read more [here](#).

PAKISTAN

Trial of civilians in military courts continues

A Pakistani military court sentenced 85 civilians who had taken part in protests in May 2023 about the detention of former Prime Minister Imran Khan, to terms of between two and ten years of "rigorous imprisonment". Imran Khan's nephew and two retired army officers were among those jailed. Pardon petitions were accepted for 19 of those convicted. Amnesty believes that military courts should not be used for the trial of civilians. The convictions were condemned by both the US and EU. The UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office noted that trying



civilians in military courts “lacks transparency, independent scrutiny and undermines the right to a fair trial”. The European Union said the sentences are “inconsistent with the obligations that Pakistan has undertaken under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, under which every person is entitled to a fair and public trial in a court that is independent, impartial and competent, and has the right to adequate and effective legal representation”. The US expressed concern at the sentencing of Pakistani civilians by a military tribunal as these courts “lack judicial independence, transparency, and due process guarantees”, calling on Pakistani authorities to respect the right to a fair trial and due process, as enshrined in Pakistan’s constitution.

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

Calls for release of Idris Khattak



The UN has also called for the release of Idris Khattak, who has been in custody for the past 5 years and was sentenced to 13 years imprisonment by military courts. A group of independent experts said “We are dismayed by the continued apparent arbitrary deprivation of liberty of Mr Khattak, which clearly appears to be a direct retaliation for his human rights work, including documenting and reporting on enforced disappearances and repression against ethnic minorities in the Pakistan north-west region”. They also noted that as a result of harsh prison conditions, being made to work in poor conditions and denied access to adequate medical treatment, Mr Khattak’s health has been seriously compromised and he should be immediately released “before it is too late”. See [here](#) for details.

Amnesty International has consistently campaigned for his release and his daughters continue with their online activism for his release. See [here](#) for details.

Amnesty calls for an independent investigation of violence against protesters

Over a year later, the authorities have again used violent methods to control civilian protests. Amnesty International has called for a transparent and independent investigation of violence against protesters during PTI's 26 November rally, during which at least 12 protesters were killed.

Read the statement [here](#).

Amnesty calls for withdrawal of the anti-terrorism act amendment bill

Amnesty International has written an open letter to the Minister of Law and Justice raising concerns regarding the Anti-Terrorism Act Amendment Bill 2024 and calling on the Federal Minister of Law and Justice and Human Rights and the Parliamentary Standing Committees on Interior to immediately withdraw it, as it does not comply with international human rights law and standards, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The letter urges the authorities to engage in meaningful consultation with civil society organisations to conduct comprehensive reform of the country’s anti-terrorism laws to ensure compliance with international human rights law and standards.

Read the statement [here](#).

Pakistan government repeals protest restrictions in Pakistan-administered Kashmir

The Peaceful Assembly and Public Order Ordinance 2024 introduced in November 2024 in Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir was withdrawn by the Pakistan government after a four-day wheel-jam strike and the shutdown of markets and civic activities. The presidential ordinance restricted “unregistered organisations” from holding protests without permission and was widely criticised by protesters in the region, who called it a state tactic to suppress demonstrations. The climbdown in the geopolitically sensitive region comes amid growing anger against the administration. Amnesty International had previously stated that the Ordinance places onerous and unlawful restrictions on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and called for it to be repealed: <https://x.com/amnestysasia/status/1859968488703750210>.



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

How Pakistan’s VPN ban undermines rights



Amnesty's Tech Team has written an op-ed advocating for the government to withdraw its plans to regulate VPNs in the country. ‘Anonymisers’, such as VPNs and Tor Project, hide the identity of a user on the internet. They are essential tools for protecting human rights online, particularly in a context like Pakistan, where censorship, targeting, intimidation, and harassment of political dissidents, human rights defenders, and journalists are rampant. They enable secure access to information and facilitate the sharing of ideas. Over the past year, Pakistan has teetered on the edge of digital oppression, and the proposed ban on ‘unregistered’ VPNs could be the tipping point toward becoming a fully mass-surveilled state.

Read the article [here](#).

Amnesty campaign for protection of transgender persons in Pakistan

This campaign was launched during the 16 days of activism, in commemoration of 12 transgender persons killed in Kyber Pakhtunkhwa in the last year. A series of tweets notes that gender-based violence against khwajasira and transgender individuals has resulted in at least 140 deaths in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province since 2016. The situation is dangerously compounded by the harassment from police officers and discrimination from health workers often faced by khwajasira and transgender survivors. Please see and share the tweets below.

<https://x.com/amnestysasia/status/1859570600546795585>

<https://x.com/amnestysasia/status/1868560964096000148>

<https://x.com/amnestysasia/status/1876528499303100481>

