

# Amnesty UK South Asia

**March 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.

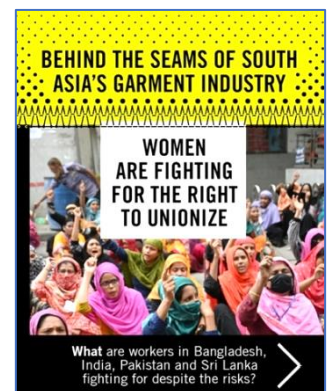
Cherry, Nigina, Jerry, Malaika & Irfan

## Activist Led Campaign: Garment Workers

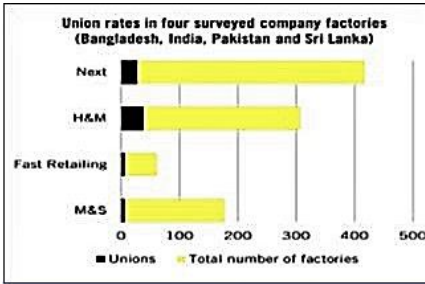
Launch of this Activist Led Campaign is planned very soon. It highlights the denial of the right to freedom of association for garment workers in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. This is not an official AIUK campaign. This trillion-dollar global business employs nearly 100 million people, most of them women. Research reveals systematic violations of the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining. Garment workers, particularly women, endure poverty wages, gender-based violence, harassment, excessive workloads, and poor working conditions. Restrictions on their right to form trade unions and collectively challenge workplace abuses violate their fundamental rights.

Two reports are to be published:

- **'Stitched Up'**, focuses on the state restrictions on the right to organise and collectively bargain.
- **'Abandoned by Fashion'**, documents the ways in which the global fashion brands and companies are proving to be an invaluable ally to such countries.



A petition will urge the governments of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka to ensure that all workers can exercise their right to freedom of association and collective bargaining, in line with international law, including the right to form and join trade unions. The campaign will also include actions targeted at brands and high commissions and creative campaigning. It will need activist support.



The UK is particularly important in this campaign. So AIUK is a key section. Of the 21 brands being focused on, eight are UK brands. The chart shows the proportion of brand factories that have unions.

If you are interested in joining this activist led campaign, or if you would like more information, or if you would like to receive the reports when launched please contact **Jerry Allen**: [jerry.allen@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:jerry.allen@amnesty.org.uk).

## AFGHANISTAN

### Message from Nigina Istanakzai Zarifi, Country Coordinator for Afghanistan

I am pleased to share that I have resumed my duties as the Country Coordinator for Afghanistan at Amnesty International UK following a temporary break for family reasons. I am truly grateful for your patience during my absence. I sincerely apologise for any delays in responding to your requests. If you have reached out to me and not received a response, please do not hesitate to contact me — your messages and collaboration are incredibly important to me. Thank you for your understanding and ongoing support in our collective efforts to advocate for human rights in Afghanistan.

### ICC prosecutor seeks arrest warrants for Taliban leaders over women's rights abuses



The ICC Prosecutor's application for arrest warrants against Taliban leaders Hibatullah Akhundzada and Abdul Hakim Haqqani marks a crucial step towards justice for Afghan women, girls, and LGBTQI+ individuals. The charges of gender persecution highlight the Taliban's systematic oppression, depriving women and girls of education, freedom of movement, and participation in public life. This application signals that the international community

acknowledges the crimes committed by the Taliban. However, pressure must be applied while the decision is pending to ensure the warrants are issued without delay. Justice for Afghan women and girls is long overdue. Amnesty International calls for the ICC to broaden its investigations to include all serious crimes committed in Afghanistan since 2003, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and attacks on ethnic and religious minorities. Recognising gender apartheid as a crime under international law would further strengthen efforts to hold oppressive regimes accountable.

This is a vital step in shining a light on the suffering of Afghan women and girls, but true justice will only be achieved when all those responsible are held to account.

### Pakistan's escalating crackdown on Afghan refugees

Pakistan's recent crackdown on Afghan refugees has raised alarms, particularly regarding the deportation of Zahra Mousavi, a human rights activist and member of the Afghan Women's Justice Movement. Mousavi is currently detained in Islamabad and faces imminent deportation to Afghanistan, where she would be at grave risk under the Taliban regime.



Pakistan's mass deportations, targeting refugees with expired visas, have intensified in recent months. Human rights organizations warn that many deported Afghans, especially women and activists, face persecution, arbitrary detention, or worse upon return. Pakistan's actions violate international law, including the 1951 Refugee Convention's principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits sending refugees back to danger.

The international community must act urgently to stop these deportations and provide protection for vulnerable Afghan refugees. Silence on this issue would be complicit in a growing humanitarian crisis that leaves thousands of people at risk of violence and persecution.

Read more [here](#).

## End human rights violations in Afghanistan: Take action now

Three years into the Taliban's rule, Afghanistan remains trapped in a cycle of severe human rights abuses, particularly against women. Gender persecution, torture, arbitrary detentions, and censorship continue with no accountability. The international community's response has been weak, but we can change that.

Local groups and activists are urged to unite and sign the petition demanding urgent action. This petition calls for stronger accountability mechanisms, pressure on the Taliban to protect women's rights, and concrete measures to end corporal punishment.

Join the global call for justice and stand with Afghan women. Sign the petition today: [Break the Silence: End Human Rights Violations in Afghanistan](#).

You can also read Nigina's blog [here](#).

## Urgent action for Afghan asylum seeker in Turkiye

**Tabriz Saifi**, who is blind due to chronic diabetes and relies on life-saving kidney dialysis three times a week, now faces an immediate threat to his health. His application for asylum was rejected by the Bursa Migration Management Directorate in Turkiye on 28 February, leading to the abrupt termination of his access to essential healthcare. His family has filed an appeal, but Tabriz Saifi's access to medical care and other necessary services must be restored during the appeal process, in line with the suspensive effect of their pending appeal.

Please take action [here](#).

# INDIA

There have been five state-level elections recently, of which BJP has won in three very significant states (Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh), so Narendra Modi's party appears to have bounced back since the national elections almost a year ago after which Modi was forced to form a coalition government at Federal level. Following these recent triumphs Modi posted on X "The results in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan indicate that the people of India are firmly with politics of good governance and development, which the @BJP4India stands for". Although the opposition Congress party won in Telangana state, they generally seem to still be divided. The BJP knows how to win, using their access to huge resources and control of the media.



## But the world's view of India is more nuanced

Narendra Modi's government posts India as 'Vishwaguru' or 'World Leader', but there is increasing criticism from around the world, as monitored by The Wire. One example in the Guardian by Hannah Ellis-Petersen and Aakash Hassan notes significant changes in the Kumbh Mela festival held at the beginning of the year, which is one of the most sacred events in the Hindu religious calendar. The rise of the "Hindutva project" has resulted in an increase in the scale and political prominence of the festival to a level never seen before.

The Wire also features an *Agence France-Presse* article on the voices of Kashmiri farmers who fear the Indian government's ongoing "infrastructure drive" is a push to "Hinduise" Kashmir. Narendra Modi's government is building highways, railways, and housing in Kashmir, while "swallowing swathes of orchards prized for their almonds, apples and other fruit" cultivated by local farmers. The government says "the multi-billion-dollar drive is bringing a "new era of peace" and "unprecedented development". Kashmiri farmers, like Musadiq Hussain, say, "It has affected my sense of who I am and my self-respect". Goldie Osuri, Associate Professor at the University of Warwick (UK), who studies Indian policies in Kashmir, describes the situation as "settler colonial land grab", drawing a parallel with Israel's occupation in Palestinian lands.

An article by former Australian politician and Senator, Lee Rhiannon notes that India is the "largest buyer of Israeli military and surveillance equipment", ranging from drones to interrogation techniques, with weapons tested on Palestinians being used against Kashmiris. She says the "common foundation" of the India-Israel relationship is "extremism" – Zionism in Israel and Hindutva in India.

Read more [here](#).

There are also calls for the EU to address the crackdown on human rights in India during visits to discuss trading. Read the Human Rights Watch article [here](#).

## But trade still drives relations

Britain and India bolstered trade ties during Indian External Affairs Minister Dr Jaishankar's visit to UK to boost a £41 billion trading relationship. The UK also welcomed the opening of two new Indian consulates in Belfast and Manchester. This is aimed at enhancing economic growth and supporting further regional Indian investments in the UK, delivering on the government's Plan for Change.

## Bulldozer injustice



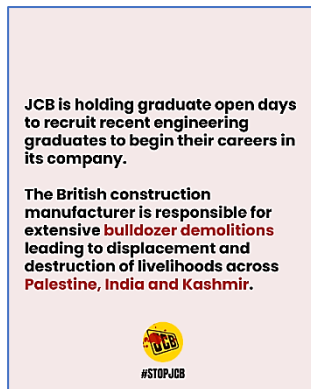
Aakar Patel, Chair of the Board of Amnesty International India, told Frontline magazine that once majoritarian laws take root, reversing them becomes increasingly difficult. Read the article on bulldozer injustice against minorities [here](#).

Aakar Patel also posted that the new Chief Minister of Delhi, Rekha Gupta, must publicly disown the inflammatory statements against Muslims and other religious minorities made by the ministers in her government. The Minister must ensure that her government upholds the rights of people of all faiths.

## JCB campaign in UK

As part of a campaign against the misuse of JCB equipment, launched by South Asia Solidarity Group, materials have been developed encouraging students to think twice before being drawn into a career with JCB because of the

association with human rights abuses. Examples are shown below, available from [cherry.bird@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:cherry.bird@amnesty.org.uk) if you wish to support this initiative.



## BK16 action

The German Amnesty section is running a letter writing campaign under their “Letters against Forgetting” heading until end of March, targeting the six individuals still remaining in prison. Instructions are as follows:

*Please write polite letters to the Indian Minister of Home Affairs by March 31, 2025, urging him to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of Surendra Gadling, Mahesh Raut, Ramesh Gaichor, Sagar Gorkhe, Jyoti Jagtap, and Hany Babu, and to drop all charges against them. Also call for the repeal or abolition of all laws that criminalize the human right to freedom of expression or impose arbitrary or blanket restrictions on it (such as the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act), and for Indian laws to be brought into line with international human rights standards.*

Address to write to: The Union Home Minister, Amit Shah, Ministry of Home Affairs, North Block, New Delhi – 110001, INDIA (Salutation: Dear Minister).

Also cc to the Indian High Commission in London: His Excellency Mr Vikram K Doraiswami, India House, Aldwych, London WC2B 4NA.

**Please do support this action** to flood the in-tray of the Indian Home Minister and High Commissioner in a final push for these prisoners who have been unjustly held for so long.

## Kashmir

On the surface, the situation has been calmer since the state elections in September, although violent incidents still occur and a culture of fear remains. It is likely that Kashmir’s statehood could be restored this year as ordered by the Supreme Court at the same time as elections were mandated. However, article 370 will not be re-instated as the Supreme Court said its revocation was not illegal. This means that although Kashmir would have control over its own internal affairs (health, education etc), it would not recover its special status as a Muslim majority state, with protection of land and business ownership and certain jobs. Security and law & order would remain under Federal control and all matters would remain under the ultimate authority of the Delhi-appointed Lord Lieutenant.

Good news is that journalist **Majid Hyderi** was recently released on bail. Sadly, there is still no progress on Khurram Parvez as his case proceeds slowly through the courts. Despite international attention, prospects are bleak for him because he has been so outspoken against the BJP.

Read more in The Wire [here](#).

## Civilian deaths reported

But civilian deaths are still occurring. Two cases were recently reported by The Wire, one the result of the Army firing at a truck that failed to stop at a new checkpoint and the other an apparent suicide following police torture of a man, Makhan Din, suspected (without evidence) of being associated with militants. Read more [here](#).

A more detailed Al Jazeera report about the suicide says: *Makhan Din stands inside an empty mosque to record his last video message on a mobile phone, saying he is about to "sacrifice" his life so that no one else in the region is subjected to "torture" by the police, who suspected him of "being associated with militants". Din is seen picking up a copy of the Quran and putting it on his head to pledge he had "never seen" any rebels as he recounts the horrors he endured in police custody the night before. He then places the holy book back, saying "I will die so that other people will be saved after me. Oh Allah, accept my sacrifice".*



Read the article [here](#).

A court in Jammu directed the Jammu and Kashmir police to register an FIR (First Information Request) into the custodial torture of Makhan Din, who was allegedly driven to suicide. Read more [here](#).

Aakar Patel, chair of the Amnesty International rights group in India, told Al Jazeera the Indian government has "no interest in the human rights of Kashmiris".

## Journalists arrested for reporting on felling of trees!



It is alleged that journalists were arbitrarily detained for reporting the felling of Chinar trees, considered to be heritage trees in Kashmir and mostly hundreds of years old, in south Kashmir's Anantnag district. Bashir Ahmad Veeri, who represents the Bijbehara constituency, decried the alleged detention of an unspecified number of Kashmiri journalists, saying that instead of acting against those "guilty of environmental vandalism", the district administration had allegedly ordered the detention of

journalists who reported on the issue! He urged speaker Abdul Rahim Rather to ensure press freedom for journalists in Kashmir so that they can carry out their professional duties without fear.

# BANGLADESH

## Feminist Archive Survey

- 70% of women in Bangladesh have experienced physical, sexual, psychological, or economic violence at least once in their lifetime.
- 49% of women experienced such violence in 2024.
- 70% of women have experienced violence by their spouse in their lifetime.
- 41% of women experienced such violence in the last 12 months.
- Women are three times more likely to experience physical violence and 14 times more likely to experience sexual violence by their husbands.
- Women in disaster-prone areas experience more violence from their spouses.
- 64% of women who have experienced violence have never told anyone about it.



- The main reasons for not reporting violence include protecting family reputation, concerns about children's future, and considering such violence as 'normal'.
- The survey, "Violence Against Women Survey 2024", was jointly conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

## Bangladesh has the highest child marriage rate in Asia

A report by UNICEF, Plan International, and UN Women highlights the urgent need for investment and policy changes to empower adolescent girls. Over 50% of girls marry before they are 18 and 24% give birth before that age. This has an impact on their access to education. Only 59% of girls complete secondary education.

[Please see the report.](#)

# PAKISTAN

## Training opportunity in UK for Pakistani journalists



Eight leading journalists from Pakistan's top media outlets are to attend the University of Westminster for an intensive two-month course on holding democratic processes to account. The South Asian Journalism Programme, running since 2012, is a prestigious fellowship offered as part of the UK's Chevening scholarships. It connects journalists with leading media organisations in the UK, including the BBC and Financial Times. This year's cohort come from across Pakistan, including Quetta, Multan, Peshawar, Islamabad and Karachi. Fellows will

undertake a bespoke 8-week fellowship titled 'Good Governance in a Changing World: The Media, Politics and Society', joining counterparts from Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives.

Read more [here](#).

## Authorities pass bill with sweeping controls on social media

Pakistan seeks to pass an amendment to the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Amendment (PECA) Act 2025 prohibiting "false and fake information". The vague language in this could be used to block content, further restricting the Pakistani Media.

In response to the passing of the PECA at the National Assembly, Babu Ram Pant, Deputy Regional Director of Campaigns for South Asia at Amnesty International, said "The latest amendment to the draconian Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act by the National Assembly will further tighten the government's grip over Pakistan's heavily controlled digital landscape, if passed by both houses of Parliament. The amendment introduces a criminal offence against those perpetrating so-called 'false and fake information'. The history of the PECA being used to silence dissent raises concerns that this new offence will chill what little is left of the right to online expression in the country. Presented in the absence of any consultation or debate, the amendment also expands the powers previously available to the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority through the newly created Social Media Regulation and Protection Authority. These provisions grant authorities power to block and remove content, based on vague criteria, which will violate the right to freedom of expression and fail to meet standards of proportionality and necessity under international human rights law."

Read the full statement [here](#).

## Situation for the Ahmadiyya and other minority religions remains critical

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has released a new report, *Under Siege: Freedom of Religion or Belief in 2023/24*, which exposes the alarming scale of state-led and mob-driven persecution against religious minorities, including the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

The report documents a pattern of systemic oppression, including arbitrary arrests, desecration of graves, and violent crackdowns on the community's religious practices. A key finding of the report is the increasing weaponisation of **blasphemy laws** against Ahmadis, often initiated by law enforcement officials themselves. The report notes that at least four First Information Reports against Ahmadis in Punjab were filed by police officers, reflecting an institutional bias against the community. In a disturbing escalation, authorities in Punjab and Sindh conducted mass arrests of Ahmadis under the Punjab Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance, with at least 36 Ahmadi men detained.

The non-profit organisation International Human Rights Desk also reported that "on 14 February 2025, authorities in Karachi sealed the Bait-ul-Nasir Mosque in Malir Colony under pressure from an extremist mob—without legal justification. Instead of protecting worshippers, law enforcement facilitated this violation of religious freedom. This unlawful act is part of a wider pattern of persecution against the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Pakistan. Extremist groups are now demanding the closure of more Ahmadi mosques."

Amnesty International also posted on Facebook: "The disturbing pattern of arbitrary arrests, harassment and violence against the Ahmadiyya community is in violation of their right to freedom of religion and belief. In the past two weeks alone, more than 60 Ahmadis, including children, have been unlawfully arrested in Daska, Sargodha and Karachi cities in Punjab and Sindh provinces, while Ahmadiyya places of worship have been desecrated in Bahawalnagar and Gujranwala. The authorities have filed cases under section 298-C of the Pakistan Penal Code which bars the Ahmadiyya community from calling themselves Muslims or preaching their faith. Amnesty International calls on the Pakistani authorities to immediately release and drop charges against all Ahmadis detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief. Local authorities in Pakistan must provide adequate protection to Ahmadi places of worship and any officials engaged in harassment or destruction of Ahmadiyya property must be brought to justice. Denying the Ahmadis their right to freedom of religion and belief is in violation of Article 20 of Pakistan's Constitution and the country's international human rights obligations.

Read the full Facebook post [here](#).

You can also read Irfan's blog on forced disappearance in Pakistan here: [Forced Disappearances in Pakistan: The Case of Mahrang Baloch](#).

## SRI LANKA

### Agnes Callamard's visit

The Secretary general visited Sri Lanka again recently. Here is an excerpt from her social media report highlighting the tea estate Tamils, garment workers and the families of the disappeared:

"Just finished a short visit to Sri Lanka where I had many conversations and exchanges on the changes that are expected from this newly elected government. There are huge expectations that this government will resolutely drive the country on the path towards justice, accountability and reconciliation. Time is of the essence. Trust is fragile and needs to be handled with utmost care. We got the clear message that people need to see meaningful demonstration that this government means business when it declares it will bring about "systems change". This could mean ensuring emblematic cases are brought to a successful closure;



making public the lists of names of people who surrendered to the authorities at the end of the war; repealing the draconian anti-terror legislation (the PTA); reforming the OMP so that it can be a trusted and effective mechanism. It also means turning the pages on years of government rejection and suspicion of international human rights mechanisms.

"System change" should further involve righting the wrongs for one of the most neglected communities of Sri Lanka, the Malaiyaha Tamils, who for decades have endured the worst possible working and living conditions. It means strengthening labour rights to empower communities like the workers in the garment industry to organise and collectively bargain for their rights.

Amnesty is conducting research on the human rights violations faced by the Malaiyaha Tamil plantation workers from the Southern tea estates. This includes labour law violations and violence and abuse faced by the workers at the workplace. For decades, their daily life and working conditions have been harrowing. I



met young women who have never been to school, others who face daily sexual harassment and threats. They have huge debts linked to borrowing money for school fees, medicine, transport.

The families of the disappeared, from the North, tell me of their fight for justice, and call for greater international commitment and pressure for the victims and survivors of Sri Lanka bloody war."

## UN women's rights committee findings on Sri Lanka

The Committee was concerned about the high prevalence of sexual violence and other forms of gender-based violence, with at least one in five women experiencing physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner, and the disproportionately low prosecution and conviction rates. It also noted with concern that marital rape and intimate partner violence are not specifically criminalised. The Committee called on Sri Lanka to intensify public awareness campaigns on the criminal nature of all forms of gender-based violence against women, including sexual violence. It also asked the State party to amend the Penal Code to explicitly criminalize marital rape in all circumstances. It further recommended strengthening the capacity of law enforcement and judicial authorities to effectively investigate and prosecute cases of gender-based violence against women.

The Committee was deeply concerned about the increasing restrictions on non-governmental organisations, including women's organisations, and women human rights defenders. It also expressed concern about funding restrictions and bureaucratic obstacles that disproportionately hinder the work of women's rights organisations, particularly those operating in conflict-affected areas. It urged Sri Lanka to eliminate funding restrictions and bureaucratic obstacles that disproportionately affect women's rights organisations, particularly in conflict-affected areas, by ensuring unimpeded access to financial resources and streamlining administrative procedures. It further asked the State party to remove the requirement of Ministry of Defence clearance and the respective directive mandating compulsory registration of non-governmental organisations, to ensure that registration procedures are transparent, non-discriminatory, and free from governmental interference.

# NEPAL

## UN women's rights committee findings on Nepal

The Committee remains concerned that, despite the explicit criminalisation of harmful practices such as Chhaupadi (menstrual segregation of women and girls), dowry, witchcraft allegations, caste-based discrimination and child marriage, these violations of women's human rights persisted in many communities. It urged Nepal to effectively enforce national legislation prohibiting such practices. It also recommended strengthening public awareness and education programmes on the harmful effects of such practices, specifically targeting customary and religious leaders and regions where these violations remained prevalent.

The Committee was concerned that the amended Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act (2071) allowed 75% sentence reductions for perpetrators of rape and sexual violence and imposed a statute of limitations on such crimes. It also noted that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP) had lacked leadership since 2014, preventing them from fulfilling their mandate. Additionally, it highlighted the lack of reparations for women and girl victims of the armed conflict. It called for amendment of the Act to remove sentencing reductions and repeal the statute of limitations. It also recommended appointing independent members to the TRC and CIEDP, and ensuring full reparations for women and girls who are victims of armed conflicts.