

HUMAN RIGHTS HIGHLIGHTS 2025: PART I - South and East Asia

Alexa Sporner, Alexandra Posta, Dominik Miklósi, Nabil
Ruhaizat, Pauliina Majasaari, Roberta Moisuc

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Riviermark 5, 2513 AM The Hague, Netherlands



+ 31 62 72 41006



info@ghrd.org



<https://www.ghrd.org>

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GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENCE

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AIPP	Asia Indigenous People Act
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICDP	International Commission Against the Death Penalty
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IWGIA	International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on the Climate Change

UNICEF United Nations Children’s Fund

US United States

1. INTRODUCTION

This annual report of 2025 is divided into two parts, covering different regions within the regions of Asia and Oceania. The first part will highlight the pressing human rights issues taking place in the South and East Asia region. The following countries were selected under assessment: Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Japan, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, North Korea, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Tibet. Issues covered include, women's rights, children's rights, labour-related issues, challenges faced by minorities from ethnic, gender, sexual, and religious individuals and communities, environmental matters, refugees rights, as well as matters relating to political instabilities. Moreover, two thematic issues, sustainable development and statelessness are analysed. The understanding of these issues will cover a multitude of events restricting human rights and occurring within the region, and it will showcase the variety of struggles faced by affected populations as well as possible improvements made towards these issues by respective governments.

The basis of this report is structured on desk research, analysing both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include international human rights instruments to set out the legal framework for the occurring human rights violations. Furthermore, secondary sources, such as human rights organisations' reports, international organisations' publications, as well as news articles were analysed to provide deeper substance to the issues taking place in the region. The report covers human rights issues, which took place in the year of 2025 within the specified countries in South and East Asia.

2. COUNTRY OVERVIEW

2.1. BANGLADESH

In 2025, Bangladesh has faced issues regarding the suppression of freedom of speech, while civic freedoms have been limited and the protection of minorities' rights has declined due to their underrepresentation in government affairs. Progress has been made within strengthening the protection of children's and women's rights. Despite this progress, challenges still remain in the realm of children's and women's rights protection in the country.

Bangladeshi authorities have focused on children's rights: as of December 1st, 2025, according to a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) press release, several political parties signed a manifesto focusing on child rights and their well-being. The manifesto drafting involved children and young adults and specifically aimed to create a safer environment for children with increased social protection and inclusive education (UNICEF, 2025b). Additionally, Bangladesh has achieved a significant decrease in child marriages and child mortality rates in 2025. However, despite the landmark action in children's rights, many children are still constricted to work: according to UNICEF, more than one million children

are still victims of child labour in 2025, making it a urgent matter for authorities (UNICEF, 2025a).

In 2025, freedom of speech faced several challenges in Bangladesh. According to a joint statement by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other international human rights organisations, several activists, human rights defenders, and journalists were targeted for speaking out about medical negligence, actions of politicians, such as claims on extortion, and other human rights related issues (Amnesty International, 2025a). In May 2025, the interim government imposed a temporary ban on the Awami League political party, prohibiting any online support, meetings, or publications on the party. This raised serious concerns about potential violation of fundamental human rights standards. The interim government “justified” its actions by stating that members of the party have committed widespread abuses for which they are going to be subjected to trial: throughout the trials, the ban will be imposed (Human Rights Watch, 2025a). In October 2025, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) called upon the interim government and urged them to strengthen the protection of journalists and freedom of expression ahead of the Bangladeshi elections in 2026 (CPJ, 2025).

In 2025, the rights of minorities remained a key concern in Bangladesh, due to the underrepresentation of the country’s indigenous community in state affairs. During the interim government’s efforts to reform its political system, the indigenous representation was excluded from the process, undermining indigenous cultural preservation, land rights, and social justice. According to the International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), indigenous communities are also subject to various types of violence (IWGIA, 2025). In a press release in December 2025, the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) emphasised the struggles faced by indigenous people, such as discrimination, arbitrary detentions, intimidation, and other forms of harassment and violence, particularly in Chittagong, Khagrachari, Dhaka, and Rajshahi areas (AIPP, 2025).

In 2024, the interim government of Bangladesh focused on the rights and empowerment of women, and they established the Women’s Affairs Reform Commission. The Commission is focusing on, among others, the equality of women and their inclusion in education, women’s representation in the parliament, and ending gender-based violence. According to Human Rights Watch, in May 2025 Hefazat-e-Islam, an Islamist organisation, launched protests against the reforms of the Commission, stating that these suggestions are not aligning with Islam and the government should disband them (Saha, 2025). Human Rights Watch called for a fast response from the interim government to denounce these attacks to protect women’s and girls’ fundamental human rights (Saha, 2025). In July 2025, in a United Nations (UN) Women led consultation, the representatives of the Bangladeshi authorities emphasised the country’s commitment to closing the gap in gender inequality, and ending widespread violence against girls and women (UN Women, 2025).

2.2. BHUTAN

In 2025, Bhutan dealt with issues relating to statelessness of the Lhotshampa minority, placing the minority group in a dire situation in relation to having no access to their basic human rights. Unlawful imprisonment based on restrictions to freedom of expression has additionally been present for the minority.

The Lhotshampa, a Nepali-speaking ethnic minority group originating from Bhutan, were deported back from the United States (US), beginning in March 2025, and consequently have been denied entry to Bhutan due to the loss of their Bhutanese citizenship (Harvey & Ghimire, 2025). In the late twentieth century, Bhutan underwent ethnic cleansing policies, aiming to create a unified nation. A new Citizenship Act was introduced, leading to the revocation of the Bhutanese citizenship of the Lhotshampa ethnic minority, as they were not seen as Bhutanese, due to having different culture, ethnicity, and religion (Chettri-Gadde & Gadde, 2024). This resulted in the forced mass migration of thousands of Lhotshampa communities to refugee camps in Nepal and resulting in the loss of their Bhutanese citizenship (Chettri-Gadde & Gadde, 2024). With the aid of a joint resettlement programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organisation for Migration, the Lhotshampa communities were resettled, amongst others to the US. However, due to recent political changes in the US, many Lhotshampa were deported back to Bhutan (Harvey & Ghimire, 2025). They currently live as refugees in displacement camps in Nepal, without citizenship, and fear imprisonment upon returning to Bhutan. Without identification, they also cannot work and access essential services in Nepal. Statelessness contradicts with the right to nationality, placing individuals in extremely vulnerable circumstances.

Furthermore, the freedom of expression of the Lhotshampa minority group has been significantly restricted, and members of the community have reportedly been subjected to unlawful imprisonment for decades, due to their participation in peaceful protests against the mistreatment of minorities in Bhutan (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 2025a). Activists, journalists, and international organisations have been repeatedly calling for the release of the political prisoners.

2.3. CHINA

In 2025, China systematically restricted the rights of ethnic minorities and limited fundamental civil and political freedoms through state policy and judicial measures. Forced labour, censorship, arbitrary detention, and denial of access to international human rights mechanisms continue to be recurring tools used for control and suppression.

The Chinese government continued policies that severely restricted the rights of ethnic minorities, such as Uyghurs, Tibetans, and other non-Han groups. The Uyghurs suffered from state practices that include arbitrary detention, forced labour, intrusive surveillance and

digital control, enforced disappearances, displacement, and cultural suppression. (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2025). Legislative developments further institutionalised these practices through the introduction of a new ethnic unity law, which aims at strengthening ideological control by prioritising the use of Mandarin, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) ideology, and a singular national identity over minority autonomy in areas such as education, media, and economic development. The law enables the criminalisation of peaceful expression of minority identity, particularly in regions such as Xinjiang and Tibet (Human Rights Watch, 2025c).

The CCP continues to deny fundamental civil and political rights systematically. Censorship and surveillance of civilians are frequent, and any criticism of the government and discussion of sensitive political topics is strictly prohibited. Access to information, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press are tightly controlled through monitoring and censorship of all books, internet media, movies, and radio and television broadcasts (House Select Committee on the CCP, 2025). Chinese courts also systematically convict human rights defenders under vague national security charges, with widespread denial of fair trial rights, universal guilty verdicts, and severe punishments for peaceful expression and activism (Amnesty International, 2025b).

State-imposed labour continued to repress ethnic minorities, particularly Turkic Muslim groups, in China. Government labour transfer programmes relocated minority populations into factories and industrial work through threats of detention, surveillance, and restrictions of movement (US Department of Labor, 2025). These policies integrated forced labour into the local and national economic structure, generating goods for both domestic and international markets while ensuring it remained a mechanism of control (The Rights Practice, 2025).

China has continued to deny any meaningful accountability for serious human rights violations by denying full access to independent international investigators and restricting civil society engagement and UN mechanisms. Authorities blocked independent non-governmental organisations and human rights defenders from submitting reports or providing statements on rights issues. Requests for participation in the Human Rights Council meetings and other forums were denied, preventing independent actors from presenting evidence and restricting international human rights mechanisms (David, 2025).

2.4. INDIA

In 2025, India faced concerns regarding state violence, including torture, as a tool to suppress protests in the nation and intimidate individuals belonging to minorities. Labour regulations' amendments have led to weakened labour protections for workers. Progress has been made in the realm of women's rights and effects of climate change have been brought to the forefront in national legislative action. However, challenges remain within both areas of progress.

State violence, police brutality, and the possibility of torture have been keeping many people in India in terror in 2025 (Redress, 2025). According to a report published in June 2025 by Redress, torture has been normalised in India, as police officers often use it as a means of interrogation, intimidation, or punishment of suspects. In many cases, torture in custody has led to the death of the individuals (Redress, 2025). In September 2025, Human Rights Watch reported that the police had killed four citizens during a protest in the Ladakh region. Although legal provisions allow police to use force as a form of self-defence or in order to protect the public safety, legally they must warn people about the shots beforehand. According to the report, Indian authorities have been targeting activists and blaming them for possible violent outcomes of protests, even if they did not initiate them (Human Rights Watch, 2025d).

India's minorities are currently facing a major step-back. India's Christians, Muslims, and Kishmiris are targeted for their religious beliefs and differences, forcing them to live in fear. Muslim and Christian communities report several incidents of intimidation, police raids, and in certain cases even physical violence (Munir, 2025). In June 2025, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in a press release called on the Indian authorities to end the arbitrary demolition of homes of families of minorities, and highlighted that the State's obligation to provide access to shelters and alternative housing for those who were affected by such atrocities (OHCHR, 2025d).

In 2025, a positive shift occurred for women's rights in India. According to the World Economic Forum, 97.1 per cent of women received education, while health and survival index have also increased leading to increased life expectancy for both women and men (World Economic Forum, 2025). However, despite the progress on the academic and health sectors, 40 per cent of women, specifically from the urban areas, report that they do not feel safe in the country. Many Indian women report that they feel very unsafe both during the days and the night especially on the streets of big cities such as Delhi, and they often face sexual harassment (Kundu, 2025).

In November 2025, the Indian authorities imposed four new codes that would implement new labour regulations, leading to several demonstrations in the Indian capital, Delhi. The new laws focus on easing the restrictive labour regulation for companies, however many believe that this will have a very negative effect on employees. New laws will also make it easier for companies to fire their workers, and they significantly restrict the possibility of workplace strikes (Inamdar & Mukharji, 2025). According to Al Jazeera, Indian authorities aim to encourage businesses to expand their practices without the fear of bureaucratic restrictions. However, members of the trade unions of India expressed their concerns that the new laws will gravely affect the rights of workers in the country (Al Jazeera, 2025a).

In April 2025, the Indian Supreme Court decided that the protection from the effects of climate change is a fundamental human right connecting to the right of equality and the right to life. The Court emphasised how climate change can affect women and marginalised communities (Chhapolia, 2025). Regardless, climate change has imposed many

environmental dangers in India throughout 2025. In August 2025, major floodings were recorded in India, damaging Bihar, Punjab, and Uttarkashi regions, where countless families were displaced. This created an outstanding emergency of food insecurity, shelter emergency, and disrupted education (Plan International, 2025).

2.5. JAPAN

In 2025, Japan continued to face issues with women's rights and gender equality, with an alarming withdrawal of funding from the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the present underrepresentation of women in politics. The Japanese Court system and criminal justice system have been under scrutiny from a human rights perspective, where lawsuits have been filed due to lack of fair trial principles, the use of execution in a criminal trial as well as the High Court's ruling on affirming the ban on marriage between same-sex couples being constitutional.

On January 27th, 2025, Japan informed CEDAW that the country was ceasing its voluntary funding of the UN body (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2025). CEDAW is in charge of overseeing the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which Japan ratified in 1985 (OHCHR, n.d.; United Nations Treaty Collection, n.d.). The withdrawal likely stemmed from a CEDAW report that called for reforming the male-only succession rule of Japan's Imperial House Law to enable female inheritance (Yamaguchi, 2025). Halting funding in response to an unwelcome recommendation weakens the independence and functioning of the UN body, hindering the safeguarding of women's rights (McKernan & Kasai, 2025). This is particularly important in the East Asian country's case, where gender equality is a long-persistent challenge (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2023). This is also evident in politics, where women are significantly underrepresented (Geddie & Murakami, 2024). Based on a 2024 report, only one in every ten legislators in Japan's House of Representatives is a woman, showing an alarming imbalance in this aspect (Geddie & Murakami, 2024).

On March 24th, 2025, the constitutionality of Japan's Code of Criminal Procedure (CCP) was challenged through a lawsuit filed by survivors of the "hostage justice system" (Yoshioka, 2025). The CCP permits indefinite detention based on ambiguous grounds, allowing the authorities to impose extended custody on detainees for claiming innocence or remaining silent (CALL4, 2019). As a part of the "hostage justice system", individuals are deprived of their fair trial rights (Yoshioka, 2025). This is particularly problematic as Japan ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1979 (United Nations Treaty Collection, n.d.). Specifically, Article 9(3) of the ICCPR stipulates bringing the accused promptly before a court, and states that pre-trial detention is not to be regarded as a general rule (ICCPR, 1966). Article 14(2) also upholds the right to the presumption of innocence, and Article 14(3)(g) prohibits compulsion to self-incriminate (ICCPR, 1966). However, Japan appears to be resolute about the concurrent existence of the right to silence

and the obligation to be subjected to lingering interrogation (Johnson & University of Hawai'i at Manoa, 2025). According to one of the plaintiffs' legal representatives, "In this country, the basic rule of a modern civilised country – the right to be treated as innocent until proven guilty in a fair trial – does not exist" (Yoshioka, 2025).

Furthermore, Takahiro Shiraishi (widely known as the "Twitter killer"), murdered eight women and one man, as by his own words, he had found individuals who were contemplating suicide on the X social media platform and offered to help them die (Al Jazeera, 2025b). On June 27th, 2025, he was executed, which marked Japan's first application of capital punishment since 2022 (Al Jazeera, 2025b). Amnesty International deemed the execution a "[...] callous attack on the right to life in Japan and a major setback for the country's human rights record" (Amnesty International, 2025d). The Delegation of the European Union to Japan strongly condemned the move, while the International Commission against the Death Penalty expressed its deep regrets regarding it (Press and Information Team of the Delegation to Japan, 2025; International Commission against the Death Penalty (ICDP), 2025). Despite their secrecy, revealed facts about executions in Japan are subject to widespread criticism by the international community and reflect that the State does not adhere to its international law obligations (The Death Penalty Project, 2025).

In addition, on November 28th, 2025, the Tokyo High Court ruled that Japan's legal framework restricting marriage to opposite-sex couples did not violate the Constitution, marking a significant step back concerning the rights of LGBTQIA+ communities in Japan (Speed, 2025). The ruling was considered discriminatory towards same-sex couples, substantially undermining marriage equality among citizens of the East Asian country (Amnesty International, 2025e). Japan remains the sole G7 member that neither fully recognises same-sex partnerships nor provides them with transparent legal safeguards (Khalil, 2025). Boram Jang, East Asia researcher, urged Japan's administration "[...] to be proactive in moving towards the legalisation of same-sex marriage so that couples can fully enjoy the same marriage rights as their heterosexual counterparts" (Khalil, 2025).

2.6. MALDIVES

In 2025, Maldives encountered challenges regarding freedom of speech through close monitoring of media and activists as well as restricted rights of the LGBTQIA+ community, including discrimination. However, improvements have been made in relation to migrant labour equality and improving women's equality in the society. Despite the improvements in the realm of women's rights, gender-based violence and health issues remain pressing issues.

Migrants in the Maldives faced many challenges throughout 2025, although the government made some relevant steps towards equality. According to an announcement from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in June 2025 the Maldivian government approved new policies that grant better access to healthcare to migrants, as well as reformed and "modernised" the so-called "quota trading" of migrant

workers. This decision limits employers' capacity to exploit the vulnerability of migrant workers, while enabling authorities to exercise greater oversight over migrants' legal and economic status (OHCHR, 2025b).

In 2025, freedom of speech also faced challenges in the Maldives, especially in September when the new Media Regulation Bill resulted in a massive outcry of journalists and activists. The new Bill established a monitoring commission that would oversee the work of media outlets with the power to suspend media if it violates religious norms or is a threat to public security (Rasheed, 2025). This decision alarmed many international organisations and human rights activists. The OHCHR called on the Maldivian authorities to withdraw the new Bill, as it is in violation of the ICCPR and it endangers free and diverse media, which are basic pillars of democracy (OHCHR, 2025e).

LGBTQIA+ rights are still highly restricted, as the Maldives criminalises same-sex relationships and sexual activity, which are punishable by at least eight years of imprisonment. Members of the LGBTQIA+ community also face discrimination and potential harassment by religious groups (Human Dignity Trust, 2025).

Concerning women's rights, in 2025 the Maldivian government has demonstrated a strong commitment to gender equality and made it a national priority. In April 2025, the country was elected to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women for the period between 2026 and 2030. In 2025, 39.5 per cent of the governing positions in the parliament were filled by women, making it a landmark for the country (Embassy of the Republic of Maldives to the Kingdom of Belgium, 2025). However, challenges persist as gender-based violence is still one of the largest problems in the country, as well as healthcare issues still remain highly alarming. Many women struggle with health problems due to complications during and after pregnancy. Additionally, around 13 per cent of young girls have to undergo female genital mutilation, a process that is dangerous for young girls' health and deeply in contradiction with human rights, such as the rights to bodily integrity, health, equality, life, safe development and freedom from torture and cruel treatment (Mohamed, 2025).

2.7. MONGOLIA

In 2025 Mongolia faced many crucial issues: environmental and climate change challenges stemming from mining practices, which strongly affected nomadic herders' rights, as well as concerns relating to ethical business operations and human rights.

The mining industry's practices have intensified climate change, caused environmental degradation, and significantly damaged natural resources, including contamination and decrease of water sources and destroyed pasture lands (Chuluunbat, 2025). This has forced nomadic communities to relocate, resulting in the incapacity of accessing ancestral homelands as well as growing tensions between nomadic herder communities over land use. Mongolia has therefore been prioritising economic growth and expansion of the mining

industry over sustainability (Dovchin & Dovchin 2024). However, by overlooking the grave effects of the mining industry, the agricultural sector, where the nomadic herders play a major role in, will suffer, consequently leading to economic losses for Mongolia (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, 2021). The enforcement of environmental laws and indigenous rights is also lacking due to corruption and heavy economic reliance on the mining industry.

Moreover, the adoption of a National Plan on Business and Human Rights shows the wish of aligning international human rights with Mongolia's national corporate standards (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2023). Despite its adoption, instances of fraud, mistreatment of foreign investors and repression of environmental activists have occurred in business dealings, raising concerns on the human rights abuses taking place within Mongolian business sector. As an example, five Mongolian environmental activists were subjected to criminal charges after criticising practices of Mongolian iron ore mining company, Altain Khuder (Mind the Gap, n.d.). While charges were ultimately dropped, this highlights a greater problem where lawsuits are used as a tactic to silence the critics to shield the presence of corporate abuses taking place. Therefore, gaps remain within implementation of legislation to achieve ethical corporate compliance.

2.8. NEPAL

In 2025, Nepal encountered challenges relating to the right to housing, leaving hundreds of people in vulnerable situations, as well as concerns regarding the mismanagement of protests rooted in political instability. Despite these challenges a major step was taken forward through the appointment of Nepal's first female prime minister, highlighting improvement in gender equality and inclusive governance.

A July 2025 report detailed hundreds of Nepalese individuals becoming homeless due to forced evictions, stemming from the government's inability to enforce the Right to Housing Act and the local authorities' failure to comply with the law (Amnesty International, 2025f). The report showcased that the basic right to adequate housing is under substantial threat in the South Asian country. According to Nirajan Thapaliya, Director at Amnesty International Nepal, "Without urgent and coordinated action to implement the right to adequate housing and establish regulatory frameworks, the cycle of forced evictions and human rights violations will persist in Nepal" (Amnesty International, 2025f).

In September 2025, Nepal's nationwide Gen Z protests gained international attention. Youth-led crowds flooded the streets to protest against corruption, the mismanagement of monetary resources, nepotism, and posting of unexplained wealth on social media by public officials and their family members (Parajuli, Pariyar, & Ng, 2025). On September 8th, the Nepalese authorities were ordered to use lethal force and opened fire on the protesters, leading to the death of at least 19 people and over 300 injuries (Human Rights Watch, 2025e). On September 9th, the authorities failed to prevent arson attacks targeting government

buildings, strikes on educational and business sites, and assaults against individuals including politicians and journalists (Human Rights Watch, 2025f). Those responsible for the severe human rights violations amid the protests are yet to be held accountable (Human Rights Watch, 2025f). As a result of the protests, the demonstrators managed to topple the government within 48 hours (Parajuli, Pariyar, & Ng, 2025). The events that unfolded in Nepal constituted part of the larger wave of Gen Z protests that erupted worldwide, including in Indonesia, Morocco, Kenya, Peru, and the Philippines (Saaliq, 2025).

Following the deadly unrest, the new administration of the Himalayan nation brought a major change. Former Supreme Court chief justice Sushila Karki was appointed on September 12th, 2025, making her Nepal's first female Prime Minister (Dhakal & Lukiv, 2025). This marked a significant step in the country's gender equality and inclusive governance, a development that was explicitly welcomed by several UN bodies (Mishra, 2025).

2.9. SOUTH KOREA AND NORTH KOREA

North and South Korea's relations have remained tense within 2025: the information war has continued, where South Korea has attempted to spread information from the 'outside world' to the North Korean population. In turn North Korea has tried to shut these initiatives down, due to its tight policy on restricting access to information for its citizens. Furthermore, the location of detained South Korean individuals in North Korea has remained untraced. Additionally, North Korea has been faced with issues on gender inequality as well as with North Korean soldiers sent to the Russia-Ukraine war.

North Korea has severely restricted its citizen's right to information by tightly monitoring the internet and media usage as well as the spread of internal political communications to maintain the control held by the governing party (Hitkari, 2023). South Korea has tried to intervene by spreading propaganda through loudspeakers, USB drives and SD cards to show North Koreans what life is like outside of the country. The information war has resulted in North Korea strengthening its rules on monitoring and control over access to information as well as severing the already tense ties between the two nations (Nolan, 2025; Power, 2025).

Moreover, South Korean families have been seeking information about their detained and disappeared loved ones, for participating in conduct, which the North Korean government has regarded as a threat to the regime. Concerns have been raised on detainees' conditions, where they are subjected to long-term imprisonment and forced labour (Kim, 2025). However, the North Korean government denies any instances of wrongful imprisonment or the mistreatment of prisoners (Kim, 2025). While South Korea has expressed its concern over the disappearances, the situation remains challenging due to the tense diplomatic relations between the two countries.

While North Korea's government claims to be committed to gender equality, the reality is strikingly different as state policies and social norms severely restrict women's rights and

equal participation in society (Kim, 2024). Women predominantly work in low-status and low-paying jobs, where career advancement is gravely limited by gender-based discrimination. Confucian gender norms push women into traditional domestic roles, and their social status is largely defined by their roles as mothers and wives, limiting possibilities of financial independence (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Moreover, women in North Korea often face gender-based violence, including domestic and sexual violence. However, due to societal norms, cases often go underreported and legal protection is lacking (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

The deployment of North Korean soldiers to fight alongside Russia in the Russia-Ukraine war further illustrates the country's authoritarian system, with reports indicating some soldiers have taken their own lives rather than risk capture (Il Post, 2025). North Korean soldiers fear the consequences of being imprisoned to be relayed on their families living in North Korea, where family members would be subjected to torture, shame, or even death. Moreover, as the North Korean soldiers have not been trained for modern warfare, their suitability to be deployed as soldiers has been widely questioned (Gardner, 2025).

2.10. SRI LANKA

In 2025, Sri Lanka has faced issues with enforced disappearances, including the intimidation of families of disappeared individuals, while a major issue, Sri Lanka has shown initiative by its willingness to ratify an international human rights instrument on the issue. Minority religious groups have been surveilled and harassed, while the LGBTQIA+ community continues to face violence and discrimination. Progress has been made in relation to strengthening children's rights and well being as well as addressing the effects of climate change.

Enforced disappearances have been a great concern throughout 2025 in Sri Lanka. In August, many reports showed that Sri Lankan security forces abused their powers in the country, resulting in the disappearance of many people from military detention. According to Human Rights Watch, military authorities also target the families of disappeared by threatening them and even resorting to violence (Human Rights Watch, 2025g). In September 2025, the Committee on Enforced Disappearances reported that Sri Lanka plans to ratify the United Nations' International Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, making a step towards bringing justice to the victims and families. Many experts welcomed the decision, still emphasising concerns regarding enforced disappearances. On a positive note, the government assured the Committee and the experts that they are monitoring the work of the police, applying a zero-tolerance policy for officers ignoring any complaints on the matter (OHCHR, 2025c).

Although freedom of religion is constitutionally guaranteed in Sri Lanka, certain policies and acts of the State have undermined this freedom throughout 2025. According to Minority Rights Group, at least 49 arrests were made in 2025 that were targeting the Tamils and

Muslims, often subjecting them to surveillance and harassment (Minority Rights Group, 2025).

Additionally, Sri Lanka's LGBTQIA+ community continued to face widespread violence and discrimination in 2025. The country's legal provisions on sexual orientations and gender diversity from the colonial era are still criminalising and stigmatising the LGBTQIA+ community as "unnatural". Although after the 2024 elections the current government made promises to decriminalise homosexuality, no steps towards it have been made since, with the lack of adequate legal protection and equality of the LGBTQIA+ community still resulting in increased violence (Ravindran, 2025).

In 2025, Sri Lanka made significant progress in protecting the rights and the wellbeing of children. In June, the government announced stronger regulations on child labour, banning any forms of begging and street vending under the age of 16, and banning children's involvement in any forms of hazardous work under the age of 18 (Xinhua, 2025). Additionally, in October the Parliament amended Sri Lanka's Children and Young Persons Ordinance, prohibiting corporal punishment by parents and teachers, thus aligning with international children's rights standards (Kekulawala, 2025).

Additionally, Sri Lanka has focused on environment related issues throughout the year, after the 2024 International Court of Justice (ICJ) advisory opinion on climate change. Sri Lanka has focused on State responsibility, as well as its obligations regarding climate change, as it not only affects the environment, but it also has countless negative effects on human life (Rhysa, 2025). On September 22nd, 2025, the Sri Lankan Ministry of Environment published its Nationally Determined Contributions for the 10 year period between 2026 and 2035, that is focusing on decreasing greenhouse gas emissions and creating a protection for the vulnerable sectors in line with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (Sri Lanka's Ministry of Environment, 2025).

2.11. TAIWAN

Throughout 2025, Taiwan remained a multiparty democracy with generally strong civil liberties and respect for human rights, but experienced several setbacks. The resumption of executions, gaps in legal protections for refugees and migrant workers, and delays in implementing anti-discrimination reforms highlighted ongoing shortcomings in the legal human rights framework.

On January 16th, 2025, Taiwan executed Huang Linkai, the first execution since April 2020 (Motazed, 2025). The decision generated considerable controversy, given that in September of 2024, the Constitutional Court had established that the death penalty be enforced only by a unanimous judgement, and the defence counsel must be informed of the decision. In Huang's case, his attorney had not been informed, and a day prior, on January 15th, the Taiwan High

Court upheld the death penalty for Liang Yu-chih, the first sentence since the Constitutional Court decision in 2024 (Motazed, 2025).

Migrant workers in Taiwan continue to confront several structural issues, despite being a significant part of the labour force in the state. They face limited freedom of transfer between workplaces, as regulations require employer consent, and many workers live without guaranteed minimum wage or social benefits. As of September 2025, approximately 94,000 undocumented immigrants were at risk of deportation and lacked access to basic services (Li, 2025). Additionally, many migrant workers are restricted to a time limit, often leading to many workers being forced to return to their home countries despite living in Taiwan for 12-14 years, or causing them to become undocumented migrants, thereby depriving them of legal protections (Lai et al., 2025).

Throughout 2025, Taiwan continued to lack appropriate legal protections against the discrimination that affects several communities. Despite formal recognition of 16 indigenous groups, 11 communities remain unrecognised, limiting their access to rights and state programs (IWGIA, 2025). While efforts for equality protections were attempted, Taiwan has yet to adopt the Anti-Discrimination Act announced in 2024. Additionally, the draft was found to contain substantive gaps, leaving many marginalised groups without clear legal safeguards (Amnesty International Taiwan, 2025). The LGBTQIA+ community faced digital abuse and online harassment (Amnesty International Australia, 2025). Transgender reforms also faced delays, as rules requiring surgery for legal gender recognition are still in place (Taipei Times, 2025).

2.12. TIBET

In 2025, Tibet continued to face severe interference from Chinese authorities, where the religious freedom of the Tibetans is restricted, a pressing issue which has been continuing for decades. However, the interference has not stopped at restricting religious freedom, ethnic minority human rights activists have been targets of Chinese authorities, showcasing the government's efforts to suppress advocacy for Tibetan rights.

On March 10th, 2025, Tibetans across the world commemorated the anniversary of the 1959 uprising in Tibet against Chinese rule, holding different events across the globe (Wang, 2025). The 2025 commemoration marked close to 70 years of Chinese oppression affecting Tibetans, which has resulted in the absolute suppression of autonomous civil society, freedom of religion, expression, and assembly (Wang, 2025). On May 8th, 2025, Members of the European Parliament explicitly condemned the Chinese government's repressive assimilation policies and human rights infringements targeted at systematically eroding Tibetan religious and cultural practices (Delegations European Parliament, 2025). Due to Beijing's policies, the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism and the Dalai Lama's free exercise of religious authority is subject to continuous threats and the survival of the religion in Tibet is in serious danger (International Campaign for Tibet, 2025). People are victims of religious persecution and

arbitrary arrests for even the slightest association with Tibetan Buddhism (International Campaign for Tibet, 2025). Additionally, the Chinese administration has often aimed to interfere in the selection of the next Dalai Lama, thereby intervening in the independent religious process of Buddhist Tibetans (International Campaign for Tibet, 2025).

However, the Chinese government does not target only Tibetans and their rights advocates *en masse*. Zhang Yadi, a university student in Paris and human rights advocate, went missing in China upon her return to the East Asian country on July 31st, 2025 (Amnesty International, 2025c). Reportedly, the activist for Tibetans' rights was arbitrarily arrested and held incommunicado, charged under Chinese law with the offence of "inciting separatism", which carries a maximum prison sentence of five years (Amnesty International, 2025c). China's persecution of pro-Tibetan activists and others aiming to promote the state of ethnic minorities has been a long-persistent issue (Human Rights Watch, 2025b). According to Yalkun Uluyol, China researcher at Human Rights Watch, "The authorities seem fearful of people building bridges across ethnic lines that deviate from the official Chinese Communist Party line" (Human Rights Watch, 2025b). Zhang Yadi's story reflects the danger of returning home for Chinese nationals who are critical of state practices, and showcases how governmental control is intensifying *vis-à-vis* sensitive matters, including Tibet (Hong Kong Free Press, 2025).

3. THEMATIC ISSUES

Sustainable development remains a pressing matter in ensuring the well-being of the planet and human beings in the long term. Therefore, an assessment of the status of sustainable development in Asia was brought forward in 2025. While Asia has differing income-level countries, steps towards sustainable development have been made, however major issues still remain in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), due to financial constraints and monitoring gaps amongst others. Moreover, the Rohingya crisis remains the largest and most critical humanitarian emergency in Asia, where statelessness creates varying grave risks for human rights realisation. The emergency calls for a united effort, from neighbouring countries sheltering Rohingya refugees and international actors alike. Therefore, highlighting the root causes and current status of the Rohingya crisis is of pivotal importance to pave the way for the human rights protection of the Rohingya population.

3.1. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Addressing sustainable development is pivotal in ensuring the well-being of the planet and ecosystems alike, as well as the equity and welfare of human beings for current and future generations ("Why sustainability matters", 2024). The 17 separate SDGs, as set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, have been unevenly implemented within Asia's national policies.

Improvements have been made regarding: a) Goal 4 on quality education by improving educational access and decreasing illiteracy rates; b) Goal 3 on good health and well-being, through improving rates of maternal mortality; c) Goal 1 on poverty eradication, d) Goal 7 on improving energy efficiency and transitioning towards clean energy through the introduction of various programs; and e) Goal 16 by promoting peace, justice, and stronger institutions (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific, 2017; Islam, 2024).

On the other hand, nations have faced challenges relating to environmental issues and Goals 14 and 15, where sustainable practices are lacking, such as in mining practices, waste management, and the use of non-renewable energy sources, resulting in air and water pollution (Islam, 2024). Furthermore, Goal 11 on sustainable communities is hindered by human rights violations, social inequalities, and a lack of access to basic needs for marginalised communities (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific, 2017). Through innovative financing solutions, forming partnerships, sharing knowledge and addressing monitoring gaps, nations could intervene on emerging challenges and efficiently tackle the current issues.

3.2. STATELESSNESS

The Rohingya, an ethnic minority group originating from Myanmar, are the largest stateless group in the world (Rahman, 2014). The Myanmar Citizenship Act (1982) has been criticised to be discriminatory and violating the right to nationality, due to its reliance on ancestry and its requirement of a multi-generational connection to the country, resulting in statelessness for certain ethnic groups. Due to systemic discrimination faced by the Rohingya, they have been forced to flee to other countries, such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Thailand, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia: among them, Bangladesh hosts the largest Rohingya population (Rahman, 2024).

Resulting from their stateless status, the Rohingya population has been denied basic fundamental rights, such as right to healthcare access, right to education, right to vote, and the ability to seek legal redress, which can ultimately hinder other human rights such as the right to life. The Rohingya are forced to live in refugee camps, where living conditions are harsh, and have reported lack of safety, overcrowding, cross-border recruitment into organised crime, and unemployment (United Nations Refugee Agency, 2025). Myanmar has been evading its responsibilities for the persecution and genocide of the Rohingya population, ignoring international norms that should protect its minority communities (Rahman, 2023). Therefore, a more decisive approach is urged from the international community to stop the harm and suffering of the Rohingya.

4. CONCLUSION

The first part of the 2025 report highlights both the progress made and the remaining challenges across South and East Asia.

In 2025, women's rights developments saw both progress and challenges. In Bangladesh, progress was observed through legal protections, despite the anti-feminist protests. India had a positive shift, however women still reported feeling unsafe in the public and therefore this remains a serious concern. The Maldives showed promise for further progress, as more women were represented politically, however challenges about gender-based equality persist. In contrast, Japan halted the CEDAW funding, which weakened gender equality, as women still remain underrepresented in politics. In North Korea gender-based violence, domestic abuse, and low-status labour persist.

Minority Rights in 2025 remained one of the most pressing issues in Asia. Ethnic cleansing, oppression of freedoms, and mistreatment of minority groups represented a big challenge in Bhutan, Tibet, and Sri Lanka. Moreover, systematic restriction and state imposed ideological control and forced labour is one of China's remaining concerns, while in India minority rights faced a major step-back as a result of lesser legal protections and state-imposed intimidation.

Last year, refugee rights faced a major step-back in the region. In Bhutan, the Lhotshampa minority group continued to face the loss of citizenship and was forced to leave its homes and reside in refugee camps in Nepal. Due to the loss of citizenship, Lhotshampa refugees are afraid to return to Bhutan as fears of imprisonment upon return linger.

LGBTQIA+ communities and individuals kept facing barriers to their rights in 2025. Even though Sri Lanka's current government made promises to decriminalise homosexuality, no steps have been taken towards change. In Taiwan and Sri Lanka, LGBTQIA+ individuals still have to face widespread discrimination, harassment, and exclusion. Moreover, Japan's High Court ruled that the ban on same-sex marriages was in line with the Constitution, leading to a lack of legal recognition and protection for LGBTQIA+ individuals. Similarly, the Maldives continues to lack legal recognition and protection for LGBTQIA+ individuals.

With regards to children's rights, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have shown commitment to strengthen their legal protections through 2025. Sri Lanka has focused on improving conditions related to child labour and Bangladesh has aimed for better overall well-being of children and social protection. While a significant decrease in child marriages and child mortality rates have taken place in Bangladesh, child labour remains a persistent problem.

State violence has also been one of the biggest challenges Asian countries have faced. In India state violence, police brutality, and torture of the detained people is still one of the most pressing problems. In addition, labour rights in Asia have shown serious challenges in 2025. Forced labour is one of the largest problems in North Korea, due to weak enforcement and legal protections. In India, the major concerns regarding labour rights have been the new

labour regulations which raise the concern for weakened legal protection over the employees, leading to widespread protests by workers.

Finally, freedom of speech and media rights have also faced back-step in many countries in the last year. In Bangladesh many journalists and activists who criticised the government and its politics were targeted. In China authorities monitor and control the media landscape by using unclear regulations and censorship, as well as in the Maldives, one of the main concerns was the new Media Regulation Bill, which gives more power to the authorities to control the media.

Overall, this report presents remaining challenges in the South and East Asian countries, underscoring the necessity for clear human rights protections. While many countries showed progress in protecting certain human rights, significant gaps remain. The report highlights the importance for strengthening the legal protection and enforcement of human right regulations in order to ensure the protection of human rights.

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