

INDIA

Attacks on schools continued in Jammu and Kashmir and some eastern states in this reporting period. GCPEA also identified over 55 incidents of attacks on school students and teachers, primarily involving the use of excessive force during education-related protests. Attacks on higher education appeared to decline in 2020 and 2021 compared to a peak in 2019.

Context

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, India continued to experience low-grade violence in Jammu and Kashmir, and the areas affected by the Naxalite insurgency, while tensions over state borders surfaced. The Bharatiya Janata Party retained majority power in parliament.⁷⁸²

Low-grade violence continued in Jammu and Kashmir in 2020 and 2021.⁷⁸³ Cross-border shelling between Indian and Pakistani forces persisted, killing at least ten civilians in one day in November 2020, including an eight-year-old child.⁷⁸⁴ After months of internet shutdown during the security lockdown in India-administered Kashmir, the Supreme Court ruled that the internet was a fundamental right in January 2020.⁷⁸⁵ Although the government reinstated internet to the region as a result, only slow speed access was permitted until February 2021, limiting medical care and children's access to virtual classes, according to local media.⁷⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch and the media also reported that the government arbitrarily detained politicians, activists, and journalists.⁷⁸⁷

Civilians were harmed during the reporting period in the decades-old conflict between the Naxalite opposition group and government forces, in the central and eastern states of Chhattisgarh, Bihar, and Jharkhand, among others, according to International Crisis Group and local media.⁷⁸⁸ Separately, along the border between the states of Assam and Mizoram, tensions reemerged in October 2020 over disputed territorial boundaries,⁷⁸⁹ with huts burnt down in alleged mob violence and stone pelting along the border.⁷⁹⁰ In late 2020, volunteers temporarily established checkpoints to prevent travel between the two states.⁷⁹¹ The government sent central paramilitary forces to the region to ease tensions, as reported by local media.⁷⁹²

In addition to widespread farmers' protests, marches against the 2019 Citizenship Amendment Act continued in 2020 and students demonstrated against education-related grievances throughout the reporting period.⁷⁹³ Human Rights Watch reported that many arrests of students and activists were attempts to silence political dissent.⁷⁹⁴

In July 2021, monsoon rains displaced thousands of families and 375,000 children in Bihar state, some of whom sought shelter in schools.⁷⁹⁵ Southern Kerala also experienced flash floods in October 2021, causing the death of five children.⁷⁹⁶

In March 2020, the government closed schools to limit the spread of Covid-19, affecting over 290 million students, according to the UN.⁷⁹⁷ State governments began to reopen schools in September 2021, although some schools remained closed through May 2021,⁷⁹⁸ with most states providing alternative education programs.⁷⁹⁹ Despite provisions, some students from marginalized communities faced barriers to accessing education, such as lack of awareness about the programs.⁸⁰⁰ According to the UN, only about 15 percent of rural households and 42 percent of urban households had access to the internet, limiting access to virtual learning.⁸⁰¹

Attacks on Schools

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least eight reported attacks on schools. Attacks appeared to decline in comparison to 2019, when GCPEA collected more than 25 reported incidents, some of which occurred in schools used as polling stations during elections for the lower house of parliament that year.⁸⁰² However, the rate of attacks on schools appeared to peak in 2019; in 2018, GCPEA gathered four such reports.⁸⁰³ Across both reporting periods, schools used as polling stations were reportedly attacked, and impacted states or union territories included Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh.⁸⁰⁴

In 2020, GCPEA collected two reports of attacks on schools from local media reports:

- On January 13, 2020, unidentified assailants reportedly threw makeshift explosives at a school bus driving ap-

proximately 20 students from a public school home after classes in Allahabad city, Uttar Pradesh state. According to media reports, two students were injured and bus windows were damaged in the blast.⁸⁰⁵

- On February 18, 2020, alleged armed group members planted explosives in a school in Gaya, Bihar state, destroying the building. The school was reportedly closed at the time of the attack and no injuries were recorded. Local media reported that pamphlets left nearby mentioned that Indian security forces were occupying schools.⁸⁰⁶

In 2021, GCPEA identified six reported attacks on schools in Jammu and Kashmir union territory and Bihar, Jharkhand, and West Bengal states:

- On February 20, 2021, an explosion reportedly occurred at a private school in Haril town, Jammu and Kashmir union territory, injuring a janitor. According to a police officer interviewed by local media outlet *Greater Kashmir*, the incident appeared to result from an unexploded shell on the school grounds.⁸⁰⁷
- On March 1, 2021, one child was killed and two others were injured when they picked up an explosive reportedly planted at the playground of Bhagwan High School, in Gogri Jamalpur area, Khagaria district, Bihar state, according to local media.⁸⁰⁸
- On March 16, 2021, police officers reportedly located and defused seven five-kilogram improvised explosive devices (IEDs) near a school in Chatra town, Jharkhand state. According to local media reports, members of a non-state armed group had planted the explosives there to target state security forces.⁸⁰⁹
- *Hindustan Times* and other local media outlets reported that on June 8, 2021, an explosive detonated at a Madrasa in Nautolia locality, Banka district, Bihar state, killing one teacher. The blast reportedly caused extensive damage to the school, which was closed at the time due to Covid-19 restrictions.⁸¹⁰
- *The Times of India* and *Hindustan Times* reported that on December 19, 2021, unidentified assailants threw bombs near Taki Boy's School and Khanna High School in Kolkata city, West Bengal state. At the time, the schools were used as polling stations in the Kolkata Municipal Corporation elections. Three people were reportedly injured in the Taki Boy's School incident.⁸¹¹

In addition, GCPEA identified four reports of explosions in schools along the Mizoram and Assam state borders in 2020 and 2021,⁸¹² although it remained unclear whether the violence was related to armed conflict. For example:

- On October 22, 2020, unidentified assailants planted explosives at a school near Saihapui V village, in Mizoram state, according to media reports. No injuries were recorded from the blast, although the school building was reportedly destroyed.⁸¹³
- Unidentified assailants reportedly planted explosives at a primary school in Dholai village, Assam state, destroying the school, on November 7, 2020, as reported by local media; no casualties were reported.⁸¹⁴
- On February 3, 2021, unidentified assailants set off two explosives at a primary school in Hailakandi district, Assam state, according to local media reports. The blasts reportedly damaged the main building of the school and the partially built boys' toilet.⁸¹⁵

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA collected at least 55 reported incidents of attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel. These incidents involved the reported arrest or detention of more than 1,600 students or educators. In comparison, GCPEA identified at least 25 and 15 reports of attacks on school students and personnel in 2019 and 2018, respectively.⁸¹⁶ Incidents in 2020 and 2021 generally involved the police using excessive force against student, parent, and teacher protesters, rather than reported injuries or killings perpetrated by non-state armed groups, which occurred with more frequency in *Education under Attack 2020*, which covered 2017 to 2019.⁸¹⁷

In 2020, GCPEA identified four reports of attacks on students, teachers, and personnel from media reports.⁸¹⁸ For example:

- On June 15, 2020, students reportedly protested outside the office of the Deputy Director of Education in Mal-

appuram city, Kerala state, to demand textbooks which were supposed to be distributed at the beginning of the academic year, two weeks prior. Police charged at the students with lathis (martial-arts sticks) to disperse the protest, and arrested 16 students, according to local media outlet *The Hindu*.⁸¹⁹

- On September 5, 2020, in Patiala city, Punjab state, parents of students reportedly protested against school authorities that were demanding full tuition fees during the Covid-19 pandemic, when students were only attending classes online. As reported in local media outlet *Times of India*, the police detained more than 30 protesters.⁸²⁰
- Approximately 150 unemployed members of a teacher's union reportedly marched on the Chief Minister's residence in Patiala city, Punjab state, to demand jobs, on December 20, 2020. As covered in local media, the police lathi-charged the protesters, injuring some, and detained more than 100 teachers.⁸²¹

In 2021, GCPEA collected more than 50 reported incidents of attacks on students, teachers, and education personnel.⁸²² For example:

- On January 27, 2021, non-regularized teachers reportedly staged a protest at the gate of the West Bengal assembly to demand salary and pension equivalent to regular teachers in public schools, in Kolkata city, West Bengal state. Local media reported that the police detained some of the teachers.⁸²³
- According to *The Indian Express*, police reportedly used force to disperse a demonstration by out-of-work teachers in Agartala city, Tripura state, on January 27, 2021. The teachers had reportedly been demonstrating for over 50 days. Police allegedly used lathi charges, teargas, and water cannons, and arrested over 300 teachers. Seven police officers were also reported as injured in the clash and three public vehicles were damaged.⁸²⁴
- On March 28, 2021, unemployed teachers reportedly held a sit-in outside the Chief Minister's residence in Patiala city, Punjab state, demanding jobs. According to local media outlet *The Tribune*, the police detained hundreds of teachers and injured several with lathi sticks.⁸²⁵
- On October 7, 2021, militants shot and killed a principal and a teacher in a government-run school in Srinagar city, in Jammu and Kashmir union territory, as reported by international media outlet *The Guardian*.⁸²⁶
- On October 26, 2021, hundreds of teachers protested in Panchkula district, Haryana state, demanding higher salaries. In response, the police reportedly used water cannons and cane charges to disperse the protest and arrested several teachers.⁸²⁷
- According to *India Today*, students demonstrated against the new National Education Policy in Bhopal city, Madhya Pradesh state, on November 25, 2021. Police reportedly lathi-charged the students, injuring several.⁸²⁸

Military use of schools and universities

The UN verified the use of seven schools for military purposes by government security forces in 2020. The forces vacated the schools before the end of the year.⁸²⁹ In comparison, *Education under Attack 2020* included sporadic reports of military use in 2018 and 2019.⁸³⁰

GCPEA did not identify any instances of military use in 2021.

Attacks on higher education

In 2020 and 2021, GCPEA identified approximately 65 reported attacks on higher education. During the reporting period, the police reportedly detained or arrested more than 500 students and education personnel and otherwise used excessive force against higher education students and personnel in connection with on-campus or education-related protests. Attacks on higher education this reporting period continued a trend from *Education under Attack 2020*, when the majority of reported incidents also involved protest repression, rather than attacks on higher education facilities. Attacks on higher education appeared to decline in 2020 and 2021 compared to 2019, when GCPEA collected nearly 50 reported incidents.⁸³¹

In 2020, GCPEA identified approximately 28 reported incidents of attacks on higher education, almost all of which in-

volved protest repression.⁸³² For instance:

- On January 16, 2020, students reportedly protested at the University of Hyderabad against the Citizenship Amendment Act, in Hyderabad city, Telangana state. Local media outlet *Times of India* reported that police detained several students at the university's main gate to prevent protesters from marching to a nearby statue, and one interviewee mentioned the presence of water cannons.⁸³³
- On February 11, 2020, blind students reportedly protested outside the Department for the Empowerment of Differently Abled and Senior Citizens in Bengaluru city, Karnataka state, to demand laptops the government had agreed to distribute two years prior. Police detained 40 students for protesting without the necessary permit, according to *Times of India*.⁸³⁴ Although the reports did not specify the education level of all students, at least one was a tertiary student.
- Police reportedly arrested approximately 60 students at the main entrance of Aligarh Muslim University, in Aligarh city, Uttar Pradesh state, on March 14, 2020. The students were protesting the Citizenship Amendment Act and holding a vigil for a student who was recently shot during an off-campus protest over the Act, according to *Scholars at Risk*.⁸³⁵
- Police detained more than 100 academics and higher education personnel peacefully protesting for payment of overdue salaries at Delhi University, in New Delhi, on September 5, 2020, according to *Scholars at Risk* and local media.⁸³⁶
- On October 5, 2020, students protested at the main gate of Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University, in Hyderabad city, Telangana state, to demand the administration cancel semester exams during the Covid-19 pandemic, according to local media. Police reportedly took several students into preventive custody and charged at others with lathis to disperse the protests.⁸³⁷
- On December 15, 2020, police reportedly entered Jamia Millia Islamia University and detained several students, in New Delhi. The students and several family members were holding a candlelight vigil to commemorate the anniversary of a protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act held at the same university one year prior, during which police entered the campus and detained students. Students and their family members were released after several hours, according to *Scholars at Risk* and local media.⁸³⁸

In 2021, GCPEA identified more than 35 reported attacks on higher education from media reports, involving both protest repression and attacks on education facilities.⁸³⁹ For instance:

- On February 4, 2021, students reportedly protested outside Guru Nanak Dev University where they clashed with police, in Amritsar city, Punjab state. The students demanded the University hold exams online since courses during the Covid-19 pandemic had been online. Due to obstacles such as poor internet connectivity, the students also contended that it was unfair to test everyone on material that was not equally accessible to all, according to local media. Police reportedly charged at students with lathis, injuring several.⁸⁴⁰
- Local media reported that on April 23, 2021, unidentified assailants threw an IED in a bag towards a police car at Degree College in Shopian district, Jammu and Kashmir. The explosive was later defused, according to reports.⁸⁴¹
- On June 8, 2021, members of an unidentified armed group threw a hand grenade at a student union office on the Dhanamanjuri University campus in Imphal city, Manipur state, according to *Times of India*. The grenade reportedly exploded but caused no casualties among the students present.⁸⁴²
- Local media outlet *The Hindu* reported that on November 8, 2021, Sri Sai Baba National Degree College students peacefully protested the administration's decision to privatize rather than continuing to receive public financial aid, in Anantapur city, Andhra Pradesh state. Police used lathi charges to disperse protesters, injuring three students, one of them female.⁸⁴³
- On November 17, 2021, the police detained approximately 150 students from various universities protesting in Madurai district, Tamil Nadu state, against in-person examinations during the Covid-19 pandemic.⁸⁴⁴

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