

Arunachal Pradesh must investigate killing of protesters



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Authorities in [Arunachal](#) Pradesh must conduct a prompt, impartial and independent [criminal](#) investigation into the killing of two protesters in police firing in the town of Tawang in the northeastern [state](#).

“Firing live ammunition into a crowd when there is no apparent threat to life amounts to excessive use of force. This loss of life cannot be justified,” said Abhir VP, Senior Campaigner, [Amnesty](#) International [India](#).

On the afternoon of May [2](#), a [group](#) of monks and people from the Save Mon Region Federation (SMRF), a [group](#) campaigning for ecologically sensitive development, gathered outside the Tawang police station to protest [against](#) the [arrest](#) of Buddhist monk Lobsang Gyatso, the secretary of the SMRF.

Lama Jha, a monk from the Tawang monastery who was present at the protest, told [Amnesty](#) International [India](#), “When we were protesting outside the police station, the police called three people and let them inside through a small gate. The police then beat them up. The crowd got angry. We started pushing the gate. Some threw stones. And suddenly the police opened fire at us without any warning. Some of us ran for our lives.”

Lama Pema Gyatso, another eyewitness, said, “There is some distance between the police station and the gate, which is near the boundary [wall](#)...The people started pushing the gate and throwing stones. They broke part of the gate...The police didn’t give us any warning and started firing.”

Two people were shot dead: 21-year old Nyima Wangdi, a monk from Tawang who was shot twice, and 31-year old Tsering Tempa, a 31 year-old resident of Jangda village who was shot in the forehead. Seven others were injured.

The Director General of Police, [Arunachal](#) Pradesh, said that the police fired in self-defence. He told [Amnesty](#) International [India](#), “The police did warn the protesters. We did fire tear [gas](#) shells. When 1,000 to 1,500 protesters storm the police station with stones and beer bottles what do you do?”

Lobsang Gyatso was released on personal bond later on [2](#) May. He told [Amnesty](#) International [India](#), “This is an attempt to tarnish the protests. I was inside the lockup when I heard the police shout about taking the ammunition out.”

The situation in Tawang remains tense. The [state](#) government has ordered a judicial inquiry.

“The police must use lethal force intentionally only [as](#) a last resort, when it is strictly unavoidable and in order to protect life. They must always distinguish between peaceful protesters and those using violence. Any police personnel [found](#) to have used excessive force must be held accountable,” said Abhirr VP.

BACKGROUND:

Authorities have approved the setting up of 160 hydropower projects across [Arunachal](#) Pradesh, including 50 projects between the Tawang and the neighbouring Kameng river basin. [As](#) the secretary of the SMRF, Lobsang Gyasto has been at the forefront of the mobilization [against](#) dams being built in the Mon-Tawang region of [Arunachal](#) Pradesh..

Some of these dams have attracted criticism for allegedly violating environmental impact assessment policies, and for impacting culturally important sites. On [7](#) April, the [National](#) Green Tribunal, a dedicated environmental court, suspended the environmental clearance of the 780 MW Nyamjang Chhu project in response to a [petition](#) filed by SMRF, for not considering its impact on a threatened bird species which is of cultural significance to the locals. It also asked for fresh public consultations.

Lobsang Gyatso was arrested by the police on April 26 for organizing a protest and later released on bail. He was arrested on April 28 for offences including “promoting enmity between different groups” and “outraging religious feelings” for his criticism of the stand of the abbot of the Tawang Monastery on anti-dam protesters. The abbot had asked monks to stay away from protests [against](#) hydropower projects.

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