



## India

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# Indian police charge army officer with killing three Kashmir civilians

## *Azhar Qadri in Srinagar*

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In a highly unusual move, Indian police have indicted an Indian army officer, accusing him of killing three civilians in [Kashmir](#) in July and staging their deaths as a fake gunfight.

The rare independent police inquiry into extrajudicial killings in the troubled region found that the Indian military officer Capt Bhoopendra Singh, who used the alias Maj Basheer Khan, had conspired with two of his informers to abduct three local labourers. It said they killed the men, planted illegal weapons on the bodies and branded them “hardcore terrorists”.

“They deliberately and purposefully chose not to follow SOPs [standard operating procedures],” found the police investigation, which spanned several months.

“They planted illegally acquired weapons and material on their dead bodies after stripping them of their identities and tagged them as hardcore terrorists in possession of war-like stores,” it said.

The police said the accused officer also deliberately provided false information to colleagues and seniors.

The three killed civilians included Abrar Ahmad, 16, and a 25-year-old man who was father to a 15-month-old son.

The accused officer was part of 62 Rashtriya Rifles, a branch of the Indian army dedicated to counter-insurgency operations in Kashmir. He now faces trial.

For decades the Himalayan state has been a flashpoint of conflict between India and Pakistan, who have fought three wars for its full territorial control. Last year the Indian government [revoked Kashmir's limited autonomy](#), bringing the state under the full control of the central government, and implemented [a paralysing crackdown](#) on civilians.

Allegations of human rights abuses and extrajudicial killings of civilians have haunted Kashmir for decades as the Indian security agencies have sought to crush the ongoing insurgency, which has an allegiance to Pakistan. Indian officers posted in Kashmir are often given rewards for killing militants, either in the form of medals and promotions, or financial payoffs of up to 1.25m rupees (£12,600).

It is very rare for a police or military investigation to follow the killing of an alleged militant, and justice is rarely afforded to families who claim wrongful killing.

The incident this summer took place in southern Kashmir's Shopian, a major apple-producing district that has been the scene of frequent gunfights between Indian security forces and insurgents.

The army had initially claimed that three "hardcore terrorists" were killed in Amshipora village during a search operation that led to a gunfight. It had said the militants were hiding in a "cowshed of a lone house in the orchard".

However, the army's version began to unravel when family members of three missing persons from a remote village in Rajouri district filed a complaint with the police, and local activists raised concerns on social media.

Guftar Ahmad, a social activist and neighbour of the three slain civilians, said it took the family nearly a month to realise they were missing, and only filed a missing persons report with the police on 10 August.

Ahmad then came across photos of the three labourers online and said he realised his neighbours had been wrongfully killed by the military.

"We took up the issue with every authority and finally the DNA sampling was ordered which took two months to match. After 73 days, we were allowed to exhume

the bodies and carry them back to our village,” he said.

“The way things are going from the start, we are hopeful justice will be done.”

This is not the first such incident. A staged gunfight in 2010 in which army officers killed three civilians and passed them off as insurgents led to months of widespread protests, resulting in the killing of more than 100 civilians by police and paramilitary forces.

In 2016, the police and paramilitary forces were accused of using disproportionate force to contain widespread protests in the region - sparked by the killing of a famed militant commander - which led to the blinding of hundreds of young men and teenagers hit by iron pellets.

The Indian army said it was carrying out a separate inquiry into the Shopian killings. “The evidence is being examined by the concerned authorities in consultation with legal advisers for proceeding further,” Col Rajesh Kalia, a Kashmir-based army spokesperson, said. Kalia said the army was “committed to ethical conduct”.

It is undecided whether the accused army officer will be tried in a criminal court or in the army court.

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