

Challenging India's Neoliberal Agenda: Greenpeace India Faces Imminent Shutdown

"Every Indian civil society group is now on the chopping block"

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The Executive Director of Greenpeace India, Samit Aich, today addressed his staff to prepare them for the imminent shutdown of the organization after 14 years in the country.

He said:

"I just made one of the hardest speeches of my life, but my staff deserve to know the truth. We have one month left to save Greenpeace India from complete shutdown, and to fight MHA's [Ministry of Home Affairs] indefensible decision to block our domestic accounts."

Greenpeace India has one month left to fight for its survival with the threat of an imminent shutdown looming large. The NGO has been left with funds for staff salaries and office costs that will last for just about a month. Calling it "strangulation by stealth," Greenpeace India challenged the Home Minister to stop using arbitrary penalties and confirm that he is trying to shut Greenpeace India down because of its successful campaigns.

The Home Ministry's decision to block Greenpeace India's domestic bank accounts could lead to not only the loss of 340 employees of the organization but a sudden death for its campaigns which strived to represent the voice of the poor on issues of sustainable development, environmental justice and clean, affordable energy.

Following allegations over foreign funding, Greenpeace India has been the subject of a string of penalties imposed by the MHA, all of which have been overturned by the Delhi High Court. The latest is blocking access to domestic bank accounts funded by donations from over 77,000 Indian citizens.

While, Greenpeace India is currently preparing its formal response to this decision as well as a fresh legal challenge, Aich is concerned that the legal process could extend well beyond 1st June when cash reserves for salaries and office costs will run dry.

Aich continued:

"The question here is why are 340 people facing the loss of their jobs? Is it because we talked about pesticide-free tea, air pollution, and a cleaner, fairer future for all Indians?"

Priya Pillai is a senior campaigner with Greenpeace India. Her overseas travel ban was overturned by the Delhi High Court in March. She said:

“I fear for my own future, but what worries me much more is the chilling message that will go out to the rest of Indian civil society and the voiceless people they represent. The MHA has gone too far by blocking our domestic bank accounts, which are funded by individual Indian citizens. If Greenpeace India is first, who is next?”

Greenpeace India has asked the MHA to recognize the impact of its decision.

Aich says:

“The Home Minister is trying to strangle us by stealth, because he knows an outright ban is unconstitutional. We ask him to confirm that he is trying to close Greenpeace India and suppress our voice. His arbitrary attack could set a very dangerous precedent: every Indian civil society group is now on the chopping block.”

Since coming to power in 2014, the new Modi-led administration has promised to remove ‘blockages’ to ‘development’. In pushing through a strident neoliberal agenda, this was originally taken to mean regulatory obstacles. But it is increasingly clear that protest and dissent are to be regarded in a similar light.

A 2014 leaked Intelligence Bureau report stated that foreign NGOs and their Indian arms were serving as tools to advance Western foreign policy interests in various areas. Greenpeace was singled out for particular attention and was deemed to be working against the ‘national interest’.

Greenpeace responded at the time by saying:

“We believe that this report is designed to muzzle and silence civil society who raise their voices against injustices to people and the environment by asking uncomfortable questions about the current model of growth.”

At a time when the administration is opening up the economy to Western interests, which could impact the livelihoods of hundreds of millions, the hypocrisy of blaming certain individuals and NGOs for working to further Western foreign policy objectives has not been lost on observers and campaigners alike.

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