

INDIA TIGHTENS RULES FOR FOREIGN NGOS

NEW DELHI: A leading global charity has frozen \$4 million in funding to India, squeezing aid to the poor, after a clampdown by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on donors deemed to be meddling in domestic politics that has raised concern in Washington.

The government restrictions on the U.S.-based Ford Foundation relate to a \$250,000 grant to a vocal Modi critic, but a top official at the charity said the fallout has hit projects that fight child marriage, provide clean water in slums and feed pregnant women.

"We don't want to move ahead until the time we are clear about the rules and nothing we do is viewed as illegal," the official said, requesting anonymity as he did not want to jeopardise talks with the government. The Ford Foundation has donated more than \$500 million to India since opening its first overseas office in Delhi in 1952.

Its headquarters in New York did not respond to requests for comment about the decision to hold back funds.

India has toughened rules governing charities, and this year the government cancelled the registration of nearly 9,000 groups for failing to declare details of overseas donations. Modi's government has accused foreign charities of trying to hamper industrial projects on social and environmental grounds, and he has criticised what he called "five-star activists."

Greenpeace India is among those affected, with bank accounts frozen and travel restrictions on some workers after it campaigned against issues including coal mining and nuclear power, areas Modi sees as key to economic growth.

Under a proposed law, foreign-funded NGOs face more regulatory hurdles and

must agree their work will not be "detrimental to the national interest." Activists say the term is not clearly defined, leaving it open to abuse.

'Chilling effect'

Amid the crackdown, the home ministry put the \$12.5 billion Ford Foundation on a watch list this year over funding it gave to activist Teesta Setalvad in 2009.

At the time she was pursuing legal cases against Modi, accusing him of failing to stop anti-Muslim rioting that killed at least 1,000 people when he was chief minister of Gujarat. Modi denies the charges and was exonerated in an Indian Supreme Court inquiry in 2012.

On Tuesday, federal investigators raided Setalvad's home after filing a criminal case against her last week for allegedly misusing

the Ford Foundation grant. She could not be reached for comment on Tuesday.

B.K. Prasad, the official overseeing the home ministry's new approach, told Reuters the government had no intention of forcing NGOs to close.

"But we have every right to streamline their work," he said. "This attitude that nobody can question influential foreign donors must be put to an end."

U.S. Ambassador Richard Verma has said the United States was in dialogue with India on the matter, and he warned that the tougher approach may have a "chilling effect" on civil society and democratic traditions. There are signs that may be happening already. At a meeting in New Delhi a week ago, the Ford Foundation told groups it funds to avoid words like "governance," "advocacy" or "human rights" in reports and

proposals, said a person who attended.

Among NGOs hit by the Ford Foundation's funding freeze is the Joint Women's Programme, which campaigns for the empowerment of women and children.

Last year, Ford Foundation accounts show it gave \$30,000 to the NGO, run by a 77-year-old retired professor of English, that helped set up a computer training centre and hire three teachers for 160 children in a slum near Delhi.

This year the NGO was due another tranche that has not come through, so it halved the number of children it looks after and can no longer afford to provide kids with fruit and milk. "I have told the parents there is a possibility we have to close down," said Jyotsna Chatterji, director of the organisation. "It is a shame that the children are the ones having to suffer." — Reuters



DHAKA: Bangladeshi protesters carry a banner during a demonstration against the lynching of a 13-year-old boy in Dhaka yesterday. Outrage over the lynching of a 13-year-old boy mounted in Bangladesh, with more protests over the murder which was captured on video, as one of the suspects confessed after being arrested in Saudi Arabia. — AFP

BANGLADESHIS DEMAND KILLERS HANG OVER BOY'S LYNCHING

ONE OF THE SUSPECT ARRESTED IN SAUDI ARABIA

DHAKA: Protestors took to the streets across Bangladesh yesterday to demand the death penalty for the killers of a 13-year-old boy as anger mounted over the sickening lynching which was captured on video and then went viral.

Bangladeshi police have now arrested five people over the July 8 killing of Samiul Alam Rajon, who was tied to a pole and then subjected to a brutal assault in which he pleaded for his life.

One of those arrested was detained in Saudi Arabia after outraged members of the large Bangladeshi expat community there shopped him to police. The 28-minute video of Samiul, which was widely circulated after being posted on social media, has prompted deep soul-searching among Bangladeshis as well as a

series of mass protests.

Nearly 2,000 people demonstrated in a downtown plaza and at the scene of the murder in Samiul's home city of Sylhet on Tuesday demanding that the killers be sent to the gallows.

"There were around 1,500 people in the main protest. The protesters were peaceful and they demanded public execution of the killers," local police chief Akhter Hossain told AFP.

Samiul's father, a van driver, passed out at the protest and was rushed to a hospital, local media said.

Protests were also held in the capital Dhaka where hundreds shouted "Hang them, hang them" as they massed outside the national press club, an AFP photographer at the scene said.

There were also protests in nearly a dozen other cities and towns across the country where protesters held placards and banners calling for immediate arrest of the killers and their quick trial.

Although executions are rare in Bangladesh, several Islamist leaders have been hanged in recent months over their role in the 1971 independence war. Thousands of demonstrators held similar protests on Monday, venting their anger at police for not doing enough to hunt down the killers.

Samiul was accused by his attackers of stealing a bicycle although his family insist that the youngster was innocent.

Police said officers had arrested three people overnight, including the wife of one of the suspects and two men who were at the scene. A court remanded one of them to five days in custody. Police were also hunting for "two others who directly took part" in the beating, police chief Hossain told AFP. "It's a brutal and heinous murder and we won't spare anyone," he added.

Saudi arrest

The latest arrests bring the number of people in custody to five, including the alleged ringleader Muhi Alam and his main accomplice Kamrul Islam who was arrested in Saudi Arabia, according to Bangladesh's foreign ministry.

Islam fled to Jeddah in the immediate aftermath of the attack but reports said he was arrested by the Saudi authorities after members of the large Bangladeshi expat community in Jeddah reported him to police.

In a video filmed by an expat TV station as he was led away to a waiting police car in handcuffs, Islam said that he had "made a mistake, please forgive me," before bursting into tears.

An autopsy on Samiul found 64 separate injuries had been inflicted on the teenager during the assault in which he could be seen begging for water. In the video, the terrified youngster can be heard screaming in pain and repeating: "Please don't beat me like this, I will die."

Samiul's attackers can be heard on the footage trying to force him to confess his involvement in the theft. At one stage he is told to walk away. But as he tries to get to his feet, one of the attackers shouts: "His bones are okay. Beat him some more."

It is not clear who filmed the video although police initially said they believed it was captured on smart phone by one of the attackers. Police said dozens of people witnessed the murder but none tried to stop the killers or report the incident to police.

"It's unfortunate that none of them came to us. Some 20-25 people witnessed the horrible crime and they did nothing," deputy commissioner of Sylhet police Faisal Mahmud said. — AFP

MYANMAR NAVY FINDS 102 STRANDED BANGLADESH MIGRANTS

BANGKOK: Myanmar's navy has discovered more than 100 Bangladeshi migrants stranded for nearly a month on a southern island, state media said yesterday, following a regional migrant crisis in which people smugglers abandoned thousands at sea.

It was the first major rescue reported by Myanmar since May, when its navy found a boat packed with more than 700 migrants in the Andaman Sea at the height of Southeast Asia's migrant boat crisis.

The crisis blew up after a crackdown by Thailand on trafficking camps along its border with Malaysia made conditions too risky for people smugglers to land their human cargo, so they simply set them adrift.

The state-run Global New Light of Myanmar said the most recent group of 102 migrants was found late in June, after spending nearly a month on the island in Taninthayi, the southern-most region of Myanmar bordering Thailand.

The migrants, all men, were rescued between June 30 and July 12 and hailed from neighbouring Bangladesh, the paper said. They had been left on the island in early June.

"The navy is searching the areas and the victims will be sent back to their home country," it added, but gave no details of where the men were being held.

Officials at the Bangladesh embassy in Yangon said the Myanmar government had not contacted them about the migrants.

"We have just received the news from the media," Tareque Mohammed, the deputy chief of mission, told Reuters. "We have received no confirmation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs."

The military-owned Myawaddy newspaper said officials in Myanmar found a man on June 30 around two miles off the coast of Saung Gauk Island, prompting a search of the island early in July, which led to the discovery of the rest.

It said the men had left Bangladesh after being persuaded they could earn more abroad and that those who refused were forced aboard a vessel. They were among the thousands, many Bangladeshi or Muslim Rohingya from Myanmar, who ended up in dangerously crowded boats run by people-traffickers, heading for other southeast Asian countries.

Previously, Myanmar has said nearly all the migrants were Bangladeshis seeking better economic prospects, rather than Rohingya, a group who complain of severe discrimination and mistreatment at home. Most of the castaways landed in Indonesia, Malaysia and Myanmar, their passengers sick and thirsty. At least 1,200 remained adrift, the United Nations said in a report on June 16. — Reuters

CHINA SLAMS HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYERS AS RABBLE-ROUSERS

BEIJING: China's state media yesterday accused more than two dozen human rights attorneys rounded up in recent days of being troublemakers intent on illegal activism, as foreign governments and rights groups expressed growing concern over the crackdown.

In its latest tally late Monday, the human rights watchdog Amnesty International said 25 human rights lawyers and civil activists had been detained or were missing in the crackdown since last Thursday. Dozens more have been warned not to speak up or act on behalf of those detained. The crackdown targets Chinese lawyers who have joined hands with civil activists in publicizing alleged unlawful practices by police and courts, drawing public attention to wrongful cases, disputing official narrations of controversial events and challenging authorities to follow the letter of the law.

Human Rights Watch researcher Maya Wang said the human rights lawyers had helped build a civil society in China over the past decade to hold authorities accountable, and that the crackdown was part of a "methodological dismantling" of that civil society since Chinese President Xi Jinping came to power.

The US state department condemned the detentions earlier this week and called for the release of the lawyers, who it said were "seeking to protect the rights of Chinese citizens."

China's nationalist newspaper Global Times responded Tuesday by calling the US criticism uncomfortable but inconsequential - like having "chewing gum stuck to your shoe" - and said it was up to Chinese courts to decide whether the lawyers acted illegally.

Self promoters

State media reports have depicted the lawyers as a group of self-promoters intent on spreading half-truths and arranging illegal protests outside court venues. The official state Xinhua News Agency said lawyers should uphold the law, not engage in "rabble-rousing" and "mob rule."

Many of the detained lawyers belong to Beijing law firm Fengrui, which has defended human rights activists and practitioners of the banned spiritual group Falun Gong. Other

detainees have defended dissident artist Ai Weiwei and Uighur (WEE-gur) scholar Ilham Tohti. Uighers are a Muslim minority community in China's far western region of Xinjiang.

The Public Security Ministry accused the lawyers of disrupting public order, seeking illicit profits, illegally hiring protesters and trying to unfairly influence the courts, Xinhua said, saying there have been more than 40 such controversial incidents since July 2012. The group of human rights lawyers and civil activists has been defined as a major crime gang, which the ministry claimed to have destroyed through a coordinated operation, Xinhua said.

Authorities have considered human rights lawyers a thorn in the side of the state for some time. Last year, state media began to question the reputations of many of the lawyers, saying they were more interested in seeking publicity than practicing their trade inside the courtroom.

A trigger for the crackdown may have been a May police shooting case in which members of the Chinese public questioned whether an officer acted properly in drawing a gun and fatally shooting an unarmed but irate man inside a train station in northeastern China. Wu Gan, an activist with ties to the Fengrui firm known for his raucous but effective methods,

was able to obtain a video clip showing the police officer beating up the man. Rights lawyers offered legal opinions, and liberal intellectuals wrote commentaries demanding that the authorities be held accountable in conducting an investigation. To defend the police officer, authorities released further video footage of the incident highlighting the erratic and violent behavior on the part of the man prior to the shooting. Still, public doubts about the incident lingered, showing the power of activists to thwart the official narrative.

Wu was detained on May 20 when rallying public support for a separate case in southern China. He's been arrested on charges of inciting to overthrow state power as well as libel and provoking trouble. Wu was nominally an employee of Fengrui, as an administrative assistant, though it's unclear — AP

PAKISTAN COURT GRANTS BAIL TO SUPERMODEL

LAHORE: A Pakistani court granted bail yesterday to a supermodel jailed for four months on charges of attempting to smuggle out of the country more than half a million dollars in cash, her lawyer said. Aayan Ali's famous grey eyes have fronted campaigns for designer clothes, ice-cream and mobile phones. But her career crashed down after the 21-year-old singer of "Making Dollars" was detained at Islamabad airport on March 14 with a case stuffed with hundred-dollar bills.

By law, no more than \$10,000 in cash may be taken out of Pakistan. Ali says she was waiting to give the funds from a property sale to her brother, who was arriving on a flight. "She will be out of jail, probably by tomorrow evening," said her lawyer Khurram Latif Khosa, after the Lahore High Court granted bail.

The case shone a spotlight on the lax enforcement of laws against money laundering and smuggling in the nuclear-armed nation of 180 million people that is plagued by drug trafficking, militancy, corruption and crime. Politicians frequently accuse each other of smuggling large sums of ill-gotten cash abroad, but the crumbling justice system is rarely able to investigate or prove such claims in court. Ali's case has riveted Pakistanis, many of whom feel she was unfairly singled out. A Facebook page demanding her freedom has attracted more than 87,000 fans.

Commentators have speculated on Ali's ties to the powerful after several politicians and one of Pakistan's most famous tycoons publicly denied any connection with her. Ali made her first court appearance in an all-concealing traditional burqa, but later wore large sunglasses, jeans and hooded sweatshirts.



RAWALPINDI: In this Monday, June 1, 2015 file photo, Pakistan's top model, Aayan Ali leaves a court in Rawalpindi. Pakistan's state television said yesterday a court has granted bail to Aayan Ali, who has been held since March after being caught trying to fly to Dubai with half a million dollars in cash stashed in her luggage. — AP

"She was a bit disturbed behind bars, but she never showed that she was getting demoralized," Khosa said. "She always attended the court's proceedings with a fresh look." — Reuters



HONG KONG: Nathan Law (L) and Joshua Wong (R) stand on the steps of the Western District police station in Hong Kong yesterday. Wong, 18, the teenage face of the city's pro-democracy movement, and Nathan Law, leader of the major university student union, visited the station for a scheduled meeting with police. — AFP