

Indian govt sending 'chilling message' on environment: Greenpeace

November 10 2014, by Annie Banerji



Greenpeace International's director Kumi Naidoo speaks with AFP during an interview in New Delhi on November 10, 2014

Moves by India's new right-wing government to block Greenpeace funds and weaken environmental protection laws send a "chilling message", the head of the lobby group said Monday, as he urged the prime minister to release the money.

Kumi Naidoo also called on India not to lose sight of the environment in

its campaign to boost economic growth, saying the country of 1.2 billion had a leading role to play in saving the planet.

New Delhi tightened controls on foreign fund transfers to Greenpeace India in June after the Intelligence Bureau accused activist groups of "stalling development projects" by protesting against power projects, mining and genetically modified food.

The new government has also been accused of watering down environmental rules after it allowed polluting industries to operate closer to national parks, and said small coal miners could expand production by 50 percent without seeking public approval.

"It's been a little bit of a shock to see the allegation being made that civil society is acting against the national interest," said Naidoo in an interview with AFP in New Delhi.

"The clampdown of Greenpeace on the one hand as well as the watering down of certain aspects of the current environmental legislation does send a very chilling message."

The Greenpeace executive director urged against governing "in a way where we pretend as if we don't have children and their children coming afterwards" and said leaders should not be driven purely by "the tyranny of quarterly reporting cycles where businesses have to show profit".



Kumi Naidoo defended Greenpeace's record in India, citing a solar energy project in the eastern state of Bihar and a campaign against Indian energy group giant Essar's plans to mine coal in central Madhya Pradesh state

"India has a leadership role to play if we are to succeed in securing this planet for future generations," he said, adding that he hoped to meet the environment and home ministers before leaving the country on Wednesday.

Naidoo defended Greenpeace's record in India, citing a solar energy project in the eastern state of Bihar and a campaign against Indian energy group giant Essar's plans to mine coal in central Madhya Pradesh state, which he said would damage one of India's oldest forests.

India's biggest corporate groups have flocked to business-friendly Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose right-wing government swept to power in May elections on a pledge to revive the ailing economy.

Since coming to power, his Bharatiya Janata Party has pushed through a series of long-awaited moves that will make it easier for companies to win approval for new projects.

But it has faced criticism over the environmental impact of these moves.

Naidoo, who is South African, said he had appealed personally to Modi to release Greenpeace's funds after the Delhi High Court recently directed authorities to unblock them.

Greenpeace India says it has not received any money in the past six months. A final hearing on the matter is expected on January 22.

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Citation: Indian govt sending 'chilling message' on environment: Greenpeace (2014, November 10) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-11-indian-govt-chilling-message-environment.html>

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