

ALL INDIA PEOPLE'S SCIENCE NETWORK (AIPSN)

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AIPSN deplores harassment of organisations that criticise the government

On July 10, 2024 the [Ministry of Home Affairs](#) (MHA) revoked the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) registration of the parent entity (CACIM) of the non-profit Centre for Financial Accountability (CFA), an organization that critically examines the role of financial institutions in development, human rights, and environmental issues. Earlier in January, the MHA had also cancelled the FCRA registration of the [Centre for Policy Research](#) (CPR), a leading public policy research institution in New Delhi. These are only a very few cases from the hundreds of NGOs whose FCRA registrations have been cancelled in an arbitrary and non-transparent manner. An unmistakable common thread is that many of these organizations are known for their stout defence of civil rights, government accountability, democratic norms and people's interests, and have often been critical of government policies and actions. In several cases of [FCRA cancellation](#), reasons given by the government include positions taken against certain development projects or support for people's struggles against specific industrial projects perceived by locals as being against tribal rights or destructive of the environment. If there are indeed any actual procedural or other "violations" of the regulations by any of these Organizations, they should be afforded the opportunity to take corrective action, institute measures to avoid repetition, and resume operations. But the government's misuse of FCRA provisions and cancellation of permissions smacks of vindictiveness, intolerance towards criticism and manipulation of regulatory institutions and mechanisms. The government has clearly [weaponized FCRA](#) to silence dissenting [civil society voices](#) and intimidate others. [AIPSN](#) calls upon the government to stop harassing organisations that criticise actions and policies of the government.

AIPSN [has earlier noted](#) similar trends of selectively targeting journalists, [online news](#) outlets, cultural personalities, academics and public intellectuals, and even stand-up comics and Youtubers, who have been active in raising public awareness on a variety of civic, governance and policy issues. These trends have serious [implications for democracy](#) in India, freedom of expression, and for pluralism. As a network of people-centred science movements, AIPSN is acutely aware that science and a [scientific temper](#) cannot thrive if critical thinking and pluralism are suppressed in all spheres.

AIPSN is aware that there are differing opinions in India as to the role of foreign financial assistance to civil society organizations. AIPSN itself does not receive foreign funds nor is it registered under FCRA. Yet AIPSN works with many progressive civil society organizations who do receive such funding, and recognizes their positive contributions to

perspectives on development, environment, civic rights and governance. AIPSN will steadfastly defend the right of these Organizations to conduct their activities in accordance with regulatory frameworks in the country. AIPSN recognizes the need for some regulation of fund flows to civil society organizations as exist for commercial activities too. However, the FCRA as it currently operates is totally non-transparent, allows for arbitrary decisions, and gives a dominant role to the bureaucracy and its political masters, with poor oversight and even less accountability. FCRA as it stands requires thorough re-examination, institutional mechanisms for independent oversight and provisions for quasi-judicial appeals and arbitration, beside full recourse to the justice system.

It is indeed ironic that even while this vindictive and [partisan crackdown](#) on civil society recipients of foreign developmental funds is underway, several NGOs, so-called [“socio-cultural” organizations](#) and even political parties with close ties to the ruling establishment have been [quietly receiving foreign funds](#) without scrutiny, exposing the hypocrisy of the [on-going onslaught](#) on NGOs receiving foreign assistance. Why is there no level playing field? This is yet another reason for an independent regulatory mechanism, oversight and quasi-judicial review processes.

A Network of 40 People’s Science Movements working in 25 states
