

Greenpeace face expulsion from India for “anti-development” activities

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Among Greenpeace’s targets is Gujarati industrialist Gautam Adani, centre with Martin Ferguson.
Picture: Graham Crouch. Source: Supplied

Greenpeace is facing expulsion from India after the government stepped up its campaign against the group yesterday, cutting off access to all its bank accounts and giving it 30 days to show why it should not be deregistered for “anti-development” activities.

It is the fourth time in less than a year the government has acted against the group, including the freezing by the Home Affairs Ministry of foreign accounts that was overturned by the High Court in January.

Greenpeace India has vowed to contest the latest restrictions, which it says amounts to a “smear” campaign aimed at silencing criticism of policy.

Under previous restrictions, Greenpeace was able to operate because 70 per cent of its funding came from local donors. It claimed then the government’s action against it had prompted a sharp spike in contributions. But the latest move has frozen foreign and domestic accounts.

The government’s focus on Greenpeace sharpened last June with the release of an Intelligence Bureau report alleging the group, along with other NGOs, was damaging India’s economy by campaigning against power projects, mining and genetically modified food.

Among Greenpeace’s targets has been mining company GVK and Gujarati industrialist Gautam Adani’s private Mundra Port facility, declared a special economic zone by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his time as Gujarat chief minister.

Mr Adani, an associate of Mr Modi, is seeking funds for his \$16.5 billion Galilee Basin coal mine, rail line and port in Queensland. Though the project has received approvals, Australian environmentalists are concerned about its impact on the Great Barrier Reef.

Greenpeace executive director Samit Aich was not surprised by the latest action, and the group would challenge the shutdown that has left it with no money to pay its 200 staff or bills for its seven India offices.

“This feels like a revealing moment; one that says a lot more about the Ministry of Home Affairs than it does about Greenpeace. A campaign is being waged against dissent, but we will not back down,” Mr Aich said.

New Delhi’s High Court last March quashed a travel ban on Greenpeace campaigner Priya Pillai who in January was removed from a flight bound for London where she was to address a parliamentary committee hearing into British mining company Essar’s activities in the Mahan forests of Madhya Pradesh.

In doing so, the court found the government claim that Greenpeace was fomenting protests in the country was not valid, and that the ministry had violated Ms Pillai’s constitutional right to freedom of speech and liberty.

In a four-page public order obtained by local media late Thursday, the ministry cited breaches of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, including alleged under-reporting of funds, as well as moving

by Greenpeace of its head office from Chennai to Bangalore and replacing more than half of its executive committee without prior approval.

“The central government ... is satisfied that the acceptance of foreign contributions by the said association has prejudicially affected the public interest and economic interest of the state ... which violates the conditions for grant of certificate of registration,” it said.

Mr Aich said the New Delhi High Court had in January ruled in Greenpeace’s favour on these matters.

“The onus is now on us to prove we should exist in India. I think the world is watching this and realising that Greenpeace is being unfairly targeted,” he said. “For God’s sake, this is a very powerful government versus an NGO. Who do you think is going to win? But let’s see how this goes. I am not talking of that possibility (of an Indian shutdown) yet.”

Rich, godless find it easy voting Green

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The appeal of the Greens to the rich and godless has been underlined by an analysis of voting patterns in the NSW election.

The Greens picked up three lower house seats — Balmain, Newtown and Ballina — and two members of the upper house.

The party’s statewide vote was unchanged at 10.3 per cent, but it achieved solid increases in the inner city — and big jumps in its support on the north coast of NSW, due to concerns about coal-seam gas.

Analysis of election results by The Australian using 2011 census data compiled by the NSW parliamentary library reveals the secret of the Greens’ success appears to be the party’s appeal to atheists and the well-off.

In the top 10 electorates ranked by the proportion of households with income of \$3000 a week or more, the Greens’ primary vote averaged 17 per cent.

In the 10 electorates with the lowest proportion of such families, the Greens vote averaged 10.9 per cent.

And this figure was inflated by the Greens’ outstanding results in the north coast seats of Tweed and Lismore, driven by the CSG issue.

The electorates ranked one and two for people who nominate no religion, agnosticism, atheism, humanism or rationalism are Newtown and Balmain in inner Sydney.

The No 3 godless electorate is Sydney, which is held by the Clover Moore-backed independent Alex Greenwich, who captures much of what would otherwise be the Greens vote.

Even with him getting 39.6 per cent of the vote, the Greens still managed a respectable 9.7 per cent primary vote. The Greens’ other seat, Ballina, which includes Byron Bay and Mullumbimby, is ranked four for the number of atheists.

Conversely, in electorates where the proportion of Christians is highest, Greens did relatively poorly.

In the most Christian seat in NSW — Cootamundra in the Riverina — the Greens managed just 3.5 per cent of the vote.

Although the Greens proclaim an emphasis on social justice and equity, working class people appear unconvinced. In electorates with the highest proportion of labourers, the Greens averaged only 4.8 per cent. Greens MLC John Kaye said education, rather than income, was a better predictor of a likely Greens voter. “As a progressive party, we appeal to people who have been formally trained to look at alternatives and assess them,” he said.

Dr Kaye said it was a mistake to lump Balmain and Newtown together, because they were quite different electorates. Balmain was wealthier and had more families while Newtown had more students and public-sector workers.

ABC election analyst Antony Green studied the demographics of the Greens vote in the 2010 federal election, concluding Labor and the Greens are not engaged in a battle over Labor heartland but that the Greens were concentrated in the inner cities and among the “knowledge elite.”

He remarked that “high Green support basically disappears at the end of the tram lines” in Melbourne.

This underlies the breakthrough the Greens scored in winning the seat of Ballina on the back of concerns about CSG. History suggests that when Greens win a seat they tend to retain it. They fell just short of winning the neighbouring north coast seat of Lismore.

In Sydney’s inner west, the next most likely Greens target is Summer Hill, where they received 27.3 per cent of the vote, finishing ahead of the Liberals.

They also poll very well in safe Liberal north shore seats such as Manly, North Shore and Pittwater, finishing ahead of Labor, as they did in the blue-ribbon seat of Vaucluse.

The Greens also did well in the seat of Newcastle, which has some of the characteristics of an inner-city seat.

The three seats where the Greens recorded their lowest vote are all in western NSW — Tamworth, Murray and Cootamundra. They also did poorly in western Sydney, with the next worst results being Macquarie Fields, Mulgoa and Liverpool.