

Rajnath asks Gates to adopt 1,000 Maoist-hit villages

Bill Gates

Home Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday asked Microsoft founder Bill Gates to adopt 1,000 villages affected by violence due to Left-wing extremism in Odisha, Bihar and Jharkhand and make them “model villages” by focussing on sanitation and cleanliness.

Mr. Gates, co-chair and trustee of the Gates Foundation, met Mr. Singh at North Block.

The meeting comes amid the Home Ministry’s recent order to cancel the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) licence of Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), a health advocacy group, majorly funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF).

The licence, which lets an NGO or association receive foreign funds, was cancelled days after Swadeshi Jagran Manch, the economic arm of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) had brought out a ‘white paper’ on the BMGF’s influence in India’s health sector.

A Gates Foundation spokesperson said the cancellation of the FCRA licence of the PHFI was not discussed in the meeting.

“Mr. Gates’s meeting with the Union Minister of Home Affairs focused on the progress made in our partnership with the government across the foundation’s priority focus areas — health, urban sanitation, digital financial inclusion and agricultural development. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is committed to working collaboratively with the Government of India in providing global and local technical expertise to advance the country’s ambitious development goals,” the spokesperson said.

Mr. Gates is learnt to have apprised Mr. Singh of a new cheaper sanitation technology for treating “faecal sludge”. An official who was present in the meeting said that Mr. Gates also suggested that new guidelines should be issued by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to include mandatory levels of “salts and oils” in foods served under universal health programmes.

“He wants India to introduce handheld spectrometers for dry spectral soil analysis that can be used by farmers in India,” the official said.

“The Home Minister appreciated the welfare works being undertaken by the BMGF. He requested Mr. Gates to initiate health awareness programmes in India and suggested that the Foundation should concentrate on developing villages and make them Model Villages so that the local people get inspired,” a Ministry statement said.

END