

## **US backs Amnesty in sedition case, says it supports 'right to freedom of expression'**

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**Washington:** Amid the rising number of sedition cases in India, including one on Amnesty International India for hosting a Kashmir event where alleged anti-India slogans were raised, the United States has backed the human rights group saying that it supports "the right to freedom of expression and assembly."

### **Amnesty International India event in Bengaluru on August 13, 2016**

"With Amnesty International, I'm sorry. Well, we obviously, as we do around the world, support the right to freedom of expression and assembly, including through civil society," State Department Deputy Spokesperson Mark Toner said here on Monday.

He was asked about the sedition charge against the group in India after they staged an event called "Broken Families" on the situation of different families in Kashmir.

Toner said the State Department was aware of the reports that police in Bengaluru have "initiated preliminary investigation into allegations of sedition against Amnesty International."

"I direct you to the police for more details into this investigation, but certainly we, as I said, respect the right for Amnesty and others to express themselves freely."

The remarks came a day after Karnataka Home Minister G. Parameshwara said he had "not given any clean chit" to the rights group. He had earlier said the group was not involved in anti-national activities though some anti-India slogans were raised by some participants at the event at United Theological College in the city on August 13.

Amnesty organised the programme that had an interactive discussion on peace and justice in Kashmir and where three families from the strife-torn valley shared alleged human rights violations back home.

Police registered the complaint after Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad's (ABVP) alleged that Amnesty representatives and other participants had indulged in anti-national slogans and criticised the role of the Indian Army in Jammu and Kashmir.

ABVP is the student wing of the BJP, which leads the National Democratic Alliance government in New Delhi, and has been at the forefront of several protests against perceived anti-national activities.

Meanwhile, another sedition case popped up in Karnataka today when a lawyer filed a complaint against actor-politician Ramya for her comment that "Pakistan is not hell."

Ramya had referred to Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar's statement that "going to Pakistan is like going to hell" and had said, "Pakistan is a good country, not hell. People are just like us. They treated us very well. Manohar Parrikar's comment is not true."

Advocate Katnamane Vithal Gowda had filed a petition against the 33-year-old former Congress MP at the office of the Judicial Magistrate of First Class Court at Somavarapete in Karnataka's Madikeri, blaming that she has praised Pakistan, which promotes terrorism in India.

The case is scheduled to come up for hearing on August 27.

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