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## Foreign-funded consultants get marching orders from Modi govt

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**NEW DELHI:** Foreign-funded consultants working with the Union government for more than three years have to quit by December 2016, a move seen as an effort to reduce the influence of international agencies and NGOs on public policy.

The clampdown on professionals who draw salaries from foreign agencies but employed by government departments was part of a push to plug data leaks in various ministries, which was flagged by the cabinet secretariat last May. The secretariat asked the finance ministry to compile a list of such consultants.

Besides, there are fears of global agencies using consultants on their rolls to influence Indian policy.

India hires professionals because of a shortage of experts to run signature programmes, especially in the health ministry where more than 200 experienced consultants risk losing their jobs after the new rules were issued.

"In the health ministry, such consultants are spread across programmes. Since there is a directive now, we will abide by it," said CK Mishra, additional secretary (health) and mission director, National Health Mission.

The ministry oversees the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) and programmes such as tuberculosis and malaria control, immunisation, and family planning.

Almost half of the 90 health ministry consultants have been around for three years or more and will leave at the end of June.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

from page one

### Foreign-funded

"Of the 215 consultants in the health ministry drawing salaries from foreign aid groups, roughly 125 work with NACO," a source said. Many of these professionals are funded by the World Bank, UK's Department for International Development (DFID), USAID, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and UN agencies such as the WHO.

"WHO Country Office for India has not been approached by the government on this subject, but we are aware of the matter. It is too early for us to comment..." said Dr Henk Bekedam, WHO Representative to India.

The Gates foundation, which works in health, education, financial services and agriculture sectors, saw the directive as a sign of the government's commitment to ensure "critical functions and skills required for the planning and delivery of key health and development initiatives are retained within the government system".

The government came up with a stringent and streamlined procedure for such hiring consultants, saying they should be employed for a limited period and for specific purposes. But extensions will be allowed after approval from a government committee before the three-year term ends.

Any consultant will have to sign a "confidentiality clause" and they are barred from sharing information and data with agencies or person outside the government.

The new guidelines say consultants will have a limited role involving only "presentations and analysis of possible options with supporting data and best practices" and "should not be engaged for policy formulation".

The rules will effectively block any possibility of interaction with

and access to policy-makers and classified information. The directive does not apply to consultants working directly with and for global agencies.

The environment ministry has consultants from World Wide Fund of India while experts from Britain's DFID worked for the housing and urban poverty alleviation ministry until their contract ended December. A dozen representatives from USAID and Gates foundation are working with the urban development ministry to oversee the Swachh Bharat Mission.

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