Arbitrary action against PFHI

What is the issue?

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Recently, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs invoked the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) to bar the **Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI)** from receiving foreign funds.

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How the action was justified?

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- The government has justified the action on grounds that the **PHFI violated FCRA rules**.
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- But, by all accounts, the NGO was not given a chance to respond to the allegations; it could do so only after its FCRA license was revoked.
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What did the NGO do?

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- According to the government, the NGO's main crime is that **it lobbied with parliamentarians and the media on matters related to tobacco control.**
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- The accusation seems unfair because the PHFI has helped the government build up a cadre of public health officials who can take up anti-tobacco initiatives in different parts of the country.
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- It has been a partner of the government and not a lobbying agency.
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What did the government report said?

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- A report of the Lok Sabha Committee of Subordinate Legislation, tabled last year, notes, “They (PHFI) **highlighted before the committee the serious repercussions of tobacco use** on the health of humans, the effect and impact of printing of big and visible pictorial warnings on different products, cigarette, bidi and pan masala packs on the illiterate and the youth of the country, the position of India vis-a-vis other countries in printing size of pictorial warning on tobacco products.”
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- For the past two years, the government too has been trying to impress the committee about the desirability of a law making it compulsory that **“horrific pictorial warnings”** cover 85% of the package surface area of tobacco products.
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- Principles of natural justice demanded that the PHFI be given a chance to respond to the charges, before revoking its license.
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Source: Indian Express

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