



US foreign aid freeze sends shock waves around the world



Donal Trump file pic

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He told DW that the phone call had come early this week, announcing an end to all US-funded programs in Nepal.

“The programs in nutrition and in maternal health will certainly be affected. It’s definitely a worrying sign to us,” Pokhrel said.

US President Donald Trump signed an executive order suspending US development aid on his very first day in office. Funds have been frozen for 90 days while his administration reviews whether projects are “aligned” with US interests, making the country “safer, stronger and more prosperous.”

The Nepal National Vitamin A Program (NVAP) is just one of the projects affected. It involves tens of thousands of health workers who travel to the most remote parts of the country on the southern edge of the Himalayas to administer vitamin A capsules to more than 3 million children.

The US has been funding the campaign, which is estimated to have saved the lives of 45,000 children below the age of 5, since the 1990s.

Vitamin A deficiency can contribute to blindness, but also makes people more susceptible to diseases such as measles, malaria or diarrhea.

‘America First’

Trump’s “America First” agenda requires that only projects that can be proven to be making the US itself more secure and prosperous be funded in the future.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt accused the previous administration under Joe Biden of spending money “like drunken sailors” and said that Trump would be a better manager of state funds.

“That’s what this pause is focused on: being good stewards of tax dollars,” Leavitt said.

She also claimed that “there was about to be 50 million taxpayer dollars that went out the door to fund condoms in Gaza,” providing no evidence. Fact checkers have expressed doubt about the assertion

providing foreign aid was also a means of shaping the policies of other countries to serve one’s own interests

‘Wake-up call’

Some viewed the freeze of US foreign aid as a chance

“Let us be self-reliant,” said the former Kenyan president, Uhuru Kenyatta, at a health conference in the Kenyan coastal city of Mombasa. “Why are you crying? It is not your government; it is not your country. He has no reason to give you anything. You don’t pay taxes in America. This is a wake-up call to you to say: ‘OK, what are we going to do to help ourselves?’”

“We definitely know that this is the US people’s taxpayers’ money,” said Pokhrel from the Nepali Health Ministry. “We know that it’s very hard-earned money. But we in third world countries like Nepal definitely would like to continue utilizing these resources properly.”

He expressed hope that the US-funded projects in his country would resume after 90 days. This, he said, would help the world and thus the US.

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