

ALL INDIA PEOPLE'S SCIENCE NETWORK

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AIPSN Press Note on the arrest of Jacob Vadakkanchery

A self-styled “natural healer” Jacob Vadakkanchery was recently arrested, in Kerala, for campaigning against the use of a medicine, doxycycline at a time when the state is recovering from devastation, caused by unprecedented rain. Some have criticized this move, as an infringement on his right to express his opinion about this drug. Such criticism is uncalled for since Jacob Vadakkanchery's pronouncements and actions have posed a threat to the government's and many medical practitioners, who have voluntarily come forward to mitigate the health risks that Kerala's population faces, in the wake of the recent rain and floods.

As is known, in such circumstances threat of epidemic always looms large. It is widely reported that no effort is spared, both by the Government of Kerala and many other organizations, like the KSSP, in meeting this challenge. The fact is, following the floods, there has been an outbreak of epidemic, leptospirosis, for treating which it is essential to administer doxycycline. With such real risks looming large, Jacob Vadakkanchery has gone about, dissuading people from taking the above medicine. In reality, the cases of death due to the epidemic have occurred, precisely due to rejection of this proven antidote, doxycycline by the victims.

It is known that Jacob Vadakkanchery has dubious record and had been punished in the past by the Consumer Redressal Forum, Kozhikode. He advertises himself as a healer, practicing medicine in so called, “naturopathy hospitals”. He is known to have cheated several people by promising cure to even cancer and to serious heart ailments. In doing so, Jacob Vadakkanchery draws public sympathy, as a “crusader”, by speaking against monopoly drug industry and against unfair practices by some doctors. At the same time, Jacob Vadakkanchery uses slanders against the medical profession and also scientific advances in medicine, by publicizing quackery. His propaganda against vaccines, had detrimental effect in many places, and people had to pay the penalty due to outbreak of diphtheria, causing death of many children. Recently, when the Nipah virus claimed seventeen lives in Kerala, Jacob Vadakkanchery declared that the Nipah virus was simply not there and said that it was nothing but an unnecessary scare. Several doctors, health activists and citizens have thus described Jacob Vadakkanchery as a person, who is not a crusader against the commercialization and exploitation by the medical establishment, but a “charlatan who spreads canards about Public Health programmes, like immunization.”

We, the AIPSN, hold the view that it is the duty of the state to protect human life and several plans have to be executed with urgency at the time of natural calamity. Time tested scientific methods, with proven results

have to be followed in order to protect people's lives from outbreak of diseases and threat of epidemic. It is necessary in such circumstances to put restraint on activities of anti science faith healers and their propensity to cause damage to the public has to be checked by firm action by the state and people's movements.

The arrest and detaining of the charlatan Jacob Vadakkanchery is NOT a denial of the democratic right of citizens for dissent. At a critical time of epidemics breaking out following the massive floods, the government and health activists are working overtime educating people on the importance of precautionary measures like personal and social hygiene, waste disposal, sanitation, safe drinking water, vector control and other prophylactic measures accepted all over the world. At this juncture, allowing a well-known fraudster to campaign against prophylactic drug therapy is against the democratic provision of health for the people and the government is to be appreciated for taking steps to reduce risking people's lives in such manner.

Jacob Vadakkancherry's arrest has to be examined in that context and weighed against the damage that many a charlatan's activities cause to public life by promoting falsehood and quackery.

And also the statement of NAPM supporting him as a crusader against pharma exploitation and a naturopathy practitioner is unwarranted and we oppose the position of NAPM in this regard and equating his voice with other voices of democracy is unacceptable. We request NAPM to withdraw the support to him also.

AIPSN fully endorse the statement of Kerala Doctors, other health professionals and activists.



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Attachment: The statement of Kerala Doctors..