

# **Jan Swasthya Abhiyan**

**(Peoples Health Movement – India)**

**Health for All - Now!**

**Health is a Basic Human Right!**

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All India People's Science Network (AIPSN)  
All India Drug Action Network (AIDAN)  
Asian Community Health Action Network (ACHAN)  
All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA)  
Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti (BGVS)  
Breast Feeding Promotion Network in India (BPNI)  
Catholic Health Association of India (CHAI)  
Centre for Community Health and Social Medicine, JNU  
Christian Medical Association of India (CMAI)  
Community Health Cell (CHC)  
Forum for Creche and Child Care Services (FORCES)  
Fed. of Medical Representative Assns. of India (FMRAI)  
Health Watch  
Joint Women's Programme (JWP)  
Medico Friends Circle (MFC)  
National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM)  
National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW)  
National Association of Women's Organisations (NAWO)  
Public Health Resource Network (PHRN)  
SAMA – Resource Group on Women's Health  
SATHI – CEHAT  
Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI)

*Participating Organisations:*

Over 1000 organisations concerned with health care and health policy from both within and outside the above networks.

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## **Press Release**

### **Removal of Sri Keshav Desiraju from MoHFW Government must answer allegations of malafide intent**

The Jan Swasthya Abhiya expresses grave concern at the manner in which Sri Keshav Desiraju, Secretary in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, has been transferred out in a summary and precipitate manner, barely 11 months after being appointed. In an interaction with the media, Minister of Health Sri Ghulam Nabi Azad, has termed it a "regular affair" and further that the public and media need not concern itself with such transfers.

It is inconceivable that a routine transfer would be effected in such a precipitate manner, especially when no replacement for Mr.Desiraju appears to have been decided upon. Nor is there any evidence that Mr.Desiraju's services were urgently required in the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, to which he has now been transferred. The honourable Minister in the interaction with the media has observed that Mr.Desiraju was a "capable officer". It is then a matter of public concern that a capable officer, heading the Ministry of Health has been shunted out, thus leaving a key ministry concerned with peoples' health and welfare without an executive head. It is precisely such cavalier transfers that undermine the ability of public institutions to perform their tasks in an honest, transparent and efficient manner. The transfer of M.Desiraju, in fact, is a violation of the spirit of the Supreme Court's ruling of October 2013 where the honourable Court had asked the Centre and all state governments to take steps within three months to insulate the bureaucracy from political pulls and pressures, and further to ensure fixed tenures for serving officers.

Of even greater concern are media reports that Mr.Desiraju's transfer is linked to some of his decisions. Key among these, as reported in sections of the media, is his unwillingness to accept Dr.Ketan Desai as a key functionary of the Medical Council of India (MCI).

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Dr. Ketan Desai's has attracted the attention of criminal investigative and income tax agencies on several occasions in the past. A prima facie case was established against him in December 2000 following investigations by the Income Tax Department, which had raided his house. In 2002, Dr Desai was removed from the post of chairman of MCI following a Delhi High Court order (dated 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2002) that accused him of turning the MCI into a "den of corruption". While he managed to get himself acquitted of these charges, he was charged again in 2010 by the CBI, while serving as the Chairman of the MCI. He was arrested by the CBI on April 22, 2010 on charges of disproportionate assets and for allegedly receiving a Rs.2 crore bribe to give recognition to a private medical college based in Patiala (Gyan Sagar Medical College). The MCI had also suspended Dr.Desai's license to practice medicine as a consequence of these charges.

Dr.Desai, media reports suggest, is presently out on bail. In October 2013 the Gujarat University nominated him as a member of the MCI and there have been speculations that he would again offer himself for the post of Chairman of the MCI. It may be recalled that after Dr.Desai's arrest, in May 2010 the MCI was superceded by a Board of Governors whose term expired on May 14, 2013. After passage of the Medical Council (Amendment) Bill in 2013 the MCI is being constituted afresh. Reports suggest that, despite pressures, after having consulted with the CBI Mr. Desiraju did not want to sanction the re-entry of Ketan Desai into the MCI.

It has also been reported in a section of the media that there were other areas of differences between Mr.Desiraju and the Government. It is reported that he was charged of being 'inflexible' in his reluctance to license a foreign manufacturer of stents (which are devices used in procedures such as angioplasty for heart patients).

It is a matter of grave concern if these indeed are the actual reasons behind Mr.Desiraju's removal. It may be recalled that the Supreme Court had also observed in its October 2013 order that: ""We notice that much of the deterioration of the standards of probity and accountability with the civil servants is due to the political influence or persons purporting to represent those who are in authority". The country's public health system is widely seen as one of the poorest performing in the world. The system has been brought to this pass as a result of systematic and callous neglect of public health care institutions. Actions such as in the present instance, that appear to defend corrupt practices and commercial interests, can only make things worse. The JSA demands that the Government of India clarify why a 'capable officer' (in the government's own words) was asked to relinquish charge in such an unseemly way. The people of the country have a right to know whose interests the Government of the day seeks to preserve.



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