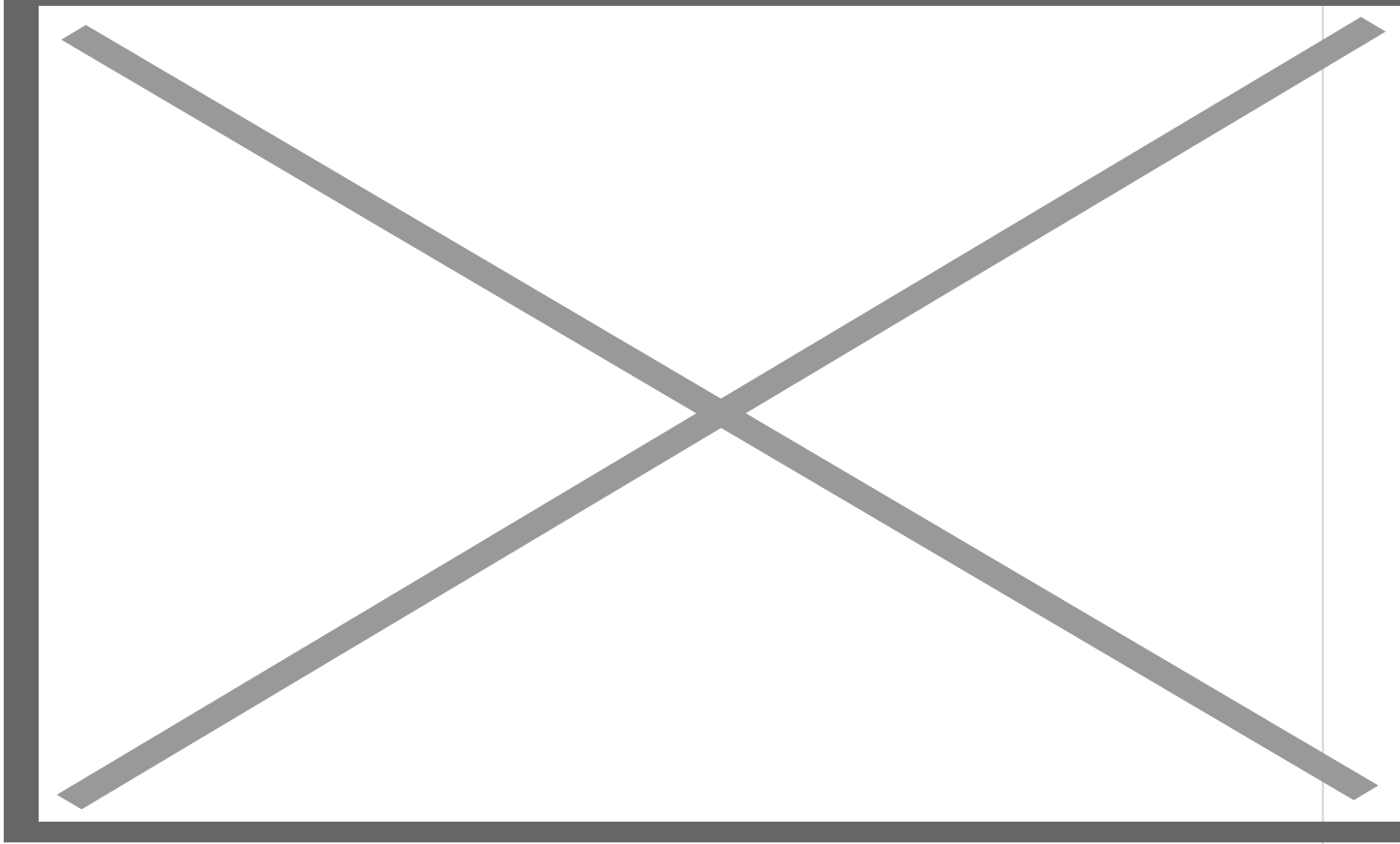


India doctors protest against Ramdev's claim that yoga-beats- COVID

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Resident doctors of the AIIMS hold placards as they observe a 'Black Day' to protest against Ramdev's remarks [Rajat Gupta/EPA]

New Delhi, June 3 (RHC)-- Thousands of doctors across India are putting on black armbands and calling for the arrest of a hugely popular guru who has claimed yoga can prevent COVID-19 and that conventional medicine has killed thousands of coronavirus patients.

Baba Ramdev, the creator of a successful traditional medicine empire, said last month the pandemic showed modern pharmaceuticals to be “stupid and failed science” and claimed hundreds of thousands “have died because they had allopathy (conventional) medicines.”

On Tuesday’s “Black Day” of protests, photos on social media showed doctors with banners demanding the arrest of “Quack Ramdev” while others wore PPE suits with #ArrestRamdev written on the back.

The doctors’ association at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), one of Delhi’s biggest government hospitals, called Ramdev’s comments “disgraceful”. Doctors also changed their social media profile pictures to black squares, Al Jazeera’s Elizabeth Puranam said, reporting from capital New Delhi.

“In a country like India where people tend to follow spiritual gurus, yoga gurus and that too blindly, when people like that, they spread mistrust, misinformation, it becomes very difficult for us as science-based people, as doctors to wipe that misinformation out,” Dr Mehak Bhushan of the Federation of Resident Doctors Association told Al Jazeera.

Ramdev, a keen supporter of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, retracted his comments after an appeal by India’s Health Minister Harsh Vardhan and the guru said he had been merely reading out other people’s WhatsApp messages.

But he then caused a further outcry by saying that he did not need a coronavirus vaccine because he was protected by yoga and traditional medicine, or Ayurveda.

Ramdev’s company Patanjali Ayurved is worth hundreds of millions of dollars, selling everything from toothpaste to jeans at its ubiquitous stores. Earlier this year, it launched a herbal remedy called Coronil that Ramdev, who also has a TV channel, said would cure coronavirus. The launch event was attended by Vardhan, himself an allopathic doctor and chair of the executive board of the World Health Organization (WHO).

Doctors say Ramdev is “taking advantage of the pandemic and his large public following to persuade people to buy his unapproved products”, Puranam reported. Ramdev had claimed Coronil was approved by the WHO, but the global health body denies the claim.

A senior journalist who had his car tyres slashed while investigating Ramdev’s business interests says the yoga guru is protected by Modi’s right-wing government.

“His vested interest in businesses, which is really what he is behind the sham of being a yogi... it has been documented to some extent... So in some sense, he has a political sanction and therefore has a large degree of impunity in getting away with what he does,” Nitin Sethi told Al Jazeera.

Patanjali is India’s 13th most trusted brand, according to rankings published last year [File: Harish Tyagi/EPA]

Patanjali – which ranks 13th in India’s trusted brand rankings published last year – has previously claimed it had cancer remedies, while Ramdev has also said he can “cure” homosexuality and AIDS.

Ramdev’s spokesperson did not respond to Al Jazeera’s request for an interview.

But the yoga guru counts millions of Indians as followers, including Anil Sabharwal who sells his range of products. “I don’t sell Patanjali products just for business. This is a matter of faith. Guru Ramdev shows us the way,” shop owner Anil Sabharwal told Al Jazeera. “I had some ailments, but the moment I started hearing his sermons, the healing process had already begun.”

Many people in India have a deep trust in gurus and alternative medicine. But doctors say Ramdev’s claims cannot be substantiated, and he must be held to account for his statements, especially during a pandemic. Coronavirus has left at least 330,000 people dead in India, including more than 1,200 doctors, according to the Indian Medical Association.

<https://www.radiohc.cu/en/noticias/internacionales/259515-india-doctors-protest-against-ramdevs-claim-that-yoga-beats-covid>



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