



ALL INDIA PEOPLE'S SCIENCE NETWORK (AIPSN)

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Press Release

“May there be light!”

Light came to Iceland in their efforts against the COVID19 disease. Even as the first cases were reported in China, Iceland led by a Prime Minister who is the second woman to hold that post and former chairperson of the Left-Green Movement made preparations to fight the spread of the corona virus (Sars-Cov-2) which all knew was bound to happen. Iceland produced indigenous kits and made testing free and readily available. Daily press briefings were held to update the public on the COVID19 situation since the end of February. Focus was on transparency and taking the people along in a scientific and friendly manner. Of course, Iceland is smaller even than Kerala yet its efforts to fight the epidemic have lessons for all.

On January 30th the first COVID19 case was reported in India. The Union Government set up a Science and Technology Empowered Committee to take speedy decisions on research and development related to the virus causing the disease. In the beginning of April, we are still racing to develop and produce test kits indigenously. Our testing rate is extremely low and far below what is required. Medical personnel and other health workers and allied staff are in dire need of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) which are in severe shortage. Hospital infrastructure to handle severe cases of COVID19 is woefully poor, even in urban areas, and pitiable in rural areas.

Following the ill-planned 21-day nationwide lockdown announced with just 4 hours notice 24th March, there has been huge unanticipated and uncontrolled movement of jobless, desperate and hungry migrant labour, loss of standing crops and other agricultural produce causing huge distress for farmers, who were unable to harvest and sell the produce, as well as to farm workers. Small and medium scale enterprises are facing terrible hardships. About 80% of the Indian workforce in the unorganised, daily wage and self-employed sector face a daunting loss of daily subsistence and livelihood. Essential goods and services including food stuff are paralysed, even after government permitted their movement including across state-borders, and retail shops are running out of stock. Even hospital OPD services are unavailable, and no transport is available even for emergencies.

Unfortunately, through its actions and messaging, responsibility for overcoming the COVID19 hurdle has been thrust on the people, while there have been numerous lapses and missteps on the part of the government such as allowing lakhs of foreign and Indian nationals to enter the country unhindered even in the first half of March, without rigorous tracing, quarantine and testing, resulting in hundreds of infected persons wandering all over the country adding hugely to the rise in cases. Despite this, people were urged to clap, and bang pots and vessels from their balconies and doorsteps, even at the cost of physical distancing, in appreciation of the medical and police personnel who were working to keep people

safe. Immediately many pseudo-scientific theories were floated that sound vibrations will kill the virus, that NASA satellites had recorded evidence of this.

We are being called upon on 3rd April, to switch off all indoor lights and light candles, lamps or shine torches or cell phone lights for 9 minutes starting at 9pm on Sunday 5th April. Spurred on by the imagery mentioned of a Ram Baan to fight the coronavirus, once again there is a spurt of pseudo-science messages including from government sources (which were later deleted) that this light will kill the virus through some mysterious “quantum” process. The Make Noise event, replicating such events in Italy, is now being followed by the Make Light event replicating the “Let there be Light” nationwide event in the US on 1 April 7pm. These were social movements of solidarity, not arising from a government diktat. Efforts to raise the spirits, perhaps even to generate a sense of solidarity, may be appreciated. But it cannot hide the hazards faced by medical professionals in bravely tackling the COVID19 disease in the face of shortage or non-availability of protective equipment, or sometimes even resorting to jugaad motorcycle helmets and goggles, and plastic sheets instead of prescribed coveralls. Solidarity leading to collective action needs empathy with the poor and now severely deprived workers, and bringing all sections of the people together for the common good, above all for effective planning and implementation by the Government keeping in mind the needs of the people.

With this in mind, we call upon the Government to:

Light the life of Health workers with adequate PPEs
Light the life of Covid Patients with adequate Testing
Light the life of Poor with adequate Food
Light the life of the Workers and Farmers with Economic and Medical support.

All India Peoples Science Network and its member organisations and its members will send the following tweet to the Prime Minister and request all other movements also to tweet to make a trending twitter storm:

Let there be light, in people's lives, with food, testing and protection.

सबका जीवन हो रौशन, सुरक्षा, वायरस जांच और भोजन

In addition on 5th April at 9pm for 9 minutes and more, the AIPSN has requested member organisations and its members to sing or play the song Hum Dekhenge by Faiz Ahmed Faiz to show that the people will see the light that gives life.

Released by
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A Network of 40 People's Science Movements working in 23 states