PRESS STATEMENT

Issued by a group of leading Indian scientists against the closure of the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme by the Govt. of Madhya Pradesh

We the members of the Indian scientific community are shocked and dismayed by the recent decision of the Government of Madhya Pradesh to close the 30-year old Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme (HSTP) being implemented in about 1,000 government and private middle (upper primary) schools of Hoshangabad and 14 other districts of the state.

We had closely watched the emergence of this unique effort from the stage of the 16-school experiment in 1972 to its macro-scale expansion to all the middle schools of the Hoshangabad District in 1978 and then onwards to other districts of the state during the eighties. The Government of Madhya Pradesh has justly won national and international acclaim for its unstinted and sustained support to the programme.

HSTP is widely acknowledged as the only macro-scale initiative in the entire country where children learn modern concepts of science through the method of inquiry, experimentation and analysis and relate their newly acquired knowledge to their own environment. Nowhere else in the country, could the children approach the entire science curriculum through the method of science, not even in the elite metropolitan public schools. Thus in HSTP, the scientific community of India saw the hope for better science education for the rest of the country. The decision of the state government has extinguished this hope.

The logic extended by the government that a uniform textbook needs to be used in the whole of the state is questionable. Indeed, the successive governments of Madhya Pradesh established the principle of plural and contextualised learning materials, as also advocated by the National Policy on Education.

Through HSTP, the state government also demonstrated its commitment to allow more than one system of evaluation in consonance with the globally accepted attributes of the scientific mind, instead of imposing the colonial and outmoded examination system. Even if one accepts the logic of uniform syllabus or textbook, we expected the state government to extend the curricular and pedagogic principles of HSTP to the entire state, instead of closing down grassroots initiative of this kind in the district of its birth.

We express our anguish that this retrogressive decision of the government has
undone the gains made in education over the last three decades.

We appeal to the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh to intervene in this matter and re-instate the programme in Hoshangabad and 14 other districts so that more than one lakh children of these districts will not be forced to revert to the rote-learning of science.

We further urge upon the Chief Minister to involve the leading educationists and scientists of the country to extend the principles of HSTP to the entire state of Madhya Pradesh.

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Prof. M.G.K. Menon, FRS,
Former Minister of Science & Technology & Scientific Advisor to the Prime Minister, Govt. of India.

sd/-

Prof. C.N.R. Rao, FRS,
President, Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research, & Former Director, Indian Institute of Sciences, Bangalore,

sd/-

Prof. Yash Pal
Former Chairman, University Grants Commission, Former Director, Space Applications Research Centre, Ahmedabad & Chairman of the famous Yash Pal Committee on School Education.

sd/-

Prof. Obaid Siddiqi, FRS,
Former Director, National Centre for Biological Science (Tata Institute of Fundamental Research), Bangalore.

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Prof. Jayant Narlikar,
Director, Inter University Centre for Astronomy & Astrophysics, Pune.

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Prof. P.M. Bhargava,
Former Director & Professor Emeritus, Centre for Cellular & Molecular Biology, Hyderabad.

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Prof.D.Balasubramanian Former Director, Centre for Cellular & Molecular Biology, & Director of Research, L.V.Prasad Eye Institute, Hyderabad.

sd/-

Prof. V.K.Gaur,
Distinguished Professor, Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Bangalore; Former Director, National Institute of Geophysical Research, Hyderabad & Former Secretary, Deptt. of Oceans Development, Govt. of India.

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Prof. Ashok Jain,
Emeritus Scientist, Institute of Informatics & Communication, University of Delhi & Former Director, National Institute of Science & Technology Development Studies, Delhi.
Prof. Meher Engineer  
Professor of Physics,  
Bose Institute, Kolkata

Prof. H.Y. Mohan Ram,  
Former Professor of Botany, Delhi University & Convenor, Science for School Children, Indian Science Congress Association.

Prof. C.R. Babu,  
Pro-V.C. & Professor of Botany, Delhi University & Director, Centre for Management of Degraded Ecosystems.

Prof. V.S. Varma,  
Dean Planning & Prof. Of Physics, Delhi University

And Others

Released from Bhopal, Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Kolkata & Chennai

Dated September 2, 2002.