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**THE TIMES OF INDIA**

# Scientists raise concern over Minister Harsh Vardhan's comment

TNN | Mar 20, 2018, 08.52 PM IST

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: A section of Scientists from across Kerala have raised their concerns against Union Ministers making statements without verifying facts. They have also voiced their protest against Science and Technology Union Minister Harsh Vardhan who claimed citing renowned astrophysicist Stephen Hawking that Vedas might have a theory which was ahead of the Einstein's equation of special theory of relativity. It is an unscientific claim made by the Minister, the scientists point out.

It was while addressing a galaxy of scientists at the Indian Science Congress in Manipur on March 16, that Minister Harsh Vardhan claimed that the recently deceased astrophysicist Stephen Hawking “emphatically said on record that our Vedas might have a theory which is superior to Einstein’s theory of  $E=mc^2$ .” When questioned, he failed to cite the source of this information.

It is well known that German-born physicist Albert Einstein’s theory of special relativity with the equation  $E=mc^2$  expresses the fact that mass and energy are the same physical entity and can be changed into each other. In the equation, the increased relativistic mass ( $m$ ) of a body times the speed of light squared ( $c^2$ ) is equal to the kinetic energy ( $E$ ) of that body.

“The Minister is entitled to his beliefs in private, but holding a constitutional office, it is inappropriate to propagate statements without cross-checking the facts. In fact, Prof. Stephen Hawking was a staunch believer of scientific rationality, and never said any such thing. The claim apparently originated in the website of an organization called “Institute of Science Research on Vedas” based in Hyderabad, and the minister was propagating a fake news created by that organisation without verifying that,”

Breakthrough Science Society (BSS) coordinating committee general convenor Francis Kalathunkal told TOI.

“We strongly protest against such unscientific claims made by people in political leadership. Recall that on 19 January, the Minister of State for Human Resource Development Satyapal Singh had claimed that Darwin's theory of evolution was wrong and should be dropped from school and college curricula. Such claims go directly against inculcation of scientific temper among the people, which is a responsibility of the government as per Article 51A of the Indian Constitution,” he said.

The claim that all the discoveries of modern science were there in the Vedas is not new. Eminent scientist Prof. Meghnad Saha and many others after him launched a serious effort to debunk this myth. Noticeable is that fact that such claims are never made before a discovery is made by a scientist—which could have acted as pointer to the discovery. Only after a scientific fact is discovered, the peddlers of superstition claim that the ancient sages discovered it thousands of years back!

What is more worrisome is the repeated use of the Indian Science Congress (ISC) to propagate unscientific views and ideas. In the Indian Science Congress of 2015, some Captain Bodas claimed that aircraft were invented in the Vedic age, and that these could fly in all directions and could even travel to other planets! In the ISC of 2016 an IAS officer presented a paper, without any background research work, on the health benefits of blowing conch shells! The forum is routinely being used to propagate personal beliefs. Now the S&T minister has capped it all by making a false claim regarding the great scientist Stephen Hawking, he said.

“It is an erroneous claim in the name of Stephan Hawking, based on fake news posted on a website of an organisation and on the fake Facebook page in the name of Hawking. It is unfortunate that the Minister had quoted it without looking into the veracity of facts. It is not the first time that Ministers are making statements without scientific backing or documentary proof,” P Rajeevan, scientist from Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology (IIST) and BSS district coordinator told TOI.

The scientific community of India strongly protests such attempts to malign science and calls all rational minded people to

participate in the March for Science on April 14 that is being organized all over the world to defend science and scientific outlook against such attacks, the BSS members said.

CSIR- National Institute of Science and Technology (NIIST) senior scientist maintaining anonymity said, “Generally, Science has to be looked at from a scientific, rational perspective and not linked to religion and beliefs”.