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'Lights out' campaign to throw light on global warming

CHENNAI London, Paris and Mumbai have all done it. Sydney got more than half its population to take part. And now it's Chennai's turn to plan a one-hour, city-wide, "lights out" campaign to promote awareness about global warming.

Exnora International is co-ordinating the effort for a symbolic switching off of Greater Chennai's lights, fans, air-conditioners and electrical appliances between 7 and 8 p.m. on May 1.

Former Chief Election Commissioners T.N. Seshan and T.S. Krishnamurthy, FICCI vice chairman Jawahar Vadivelu and former BHEL and ONGC director J. Jayaraman switched on environment-friendly LED and compact fluorescent light bulbs to kick off the campaign on Wednesday.

For the next three months, Exnora volunteers and Residents Welfare Associations will partner with 200 other organisations and educational institutions to promote awareness about the event.

Exnora is launching an online signature campaign, aimed at getting residents to sign an Petition and pledge to turn their lights off on May 1 and lead an environment-friendly lifestyle during the

other 364 days of the year. School children will be encouraged to participate in a lifestyle contract, which uses a report card format to monitor their accountability to their pledges.

Other planned activities include street dramas, tree-planting ceremonies, soap-box speakers, yoga demonstrations, participatory art, music concerts (strictly acapella or acoustic to keep the power consumption down), a vintage cycle rally and a marathon (to promote non-polluting transport methods).

"We will reach 99.9 per cent of Chennai's population by May 1," promised Exnora founder M.B. Nirmal. Exnora is even providing a list of things to do while the lights are out: have candle-lit dinner with family and neighbours, enact shadow plays and hold anaktshari contests.

"There are so many things that don't need electricity," said project co-ordinator Miriam Chacko.

When other cities tried this experiment last year, landmarks such as the Eiffel Tower, Sydney Opera House and Buckingham Palace joined in the voluntary black-out. In Mumbai, the mayor's home and Raj Bhavan showed dark windows for an hour. So will Chennai's heritage landmarks such as Ripon Building or the sa-

madhis on Marina Beach turn off their lights as well?

That would require government involvement and organisers say that while Local Administration Minister M.K. Stalin has promised his support, they are not roping in government or industry players yet.

When 57 per cent of Sydney's population participated in "Earth Hour" on March 31 last year, power consumption fell over 10 per cent — an effect equivalent to taking 48,000 cars off the roads. On Midsummer Night's Eve in London, 2 million light bulbs went out, saving 750 megawatts of power. France attempted to draw in the whole nation, not just a single city, for a five-minute switch-off in February, leading to an 800 MW drop in consumption — just about 1 per cent. In Mumbai, the response to last month's "Batti Bandh" was termed lukewarm, but estimates suggest that 105 MW, or 5 per cent of the city's usual demand, was saved.

The organisers in Chennai are not putting any numbers on their expectations here yet.

"It is not just about how much power is saved in that one hour. We want people to realise this is a powerful symbolic gesture that will raise awareness levels," said Ms. Chacko.