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On equinox today, measure the earth

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NEW DELHI: Today (Friday) is the autumn equinox, when the length of the day and night is nearly equal and the sun casts no shadow at noon along the equator. To celebrate this biannual celestial event (the spring equinox happens around March 20), a city NGO will conduct a public experiment to measure the Earth's circumference.

SPACE, an NGO devoted to popularizing astronomy, has invited Delhiites, particularly schoolchildren, to take part in Project Paridhi - a simple international experiment based on the length of shadows at various spots on Earth. The event will take place at Jantar Mantar from 10am onwards.

"The experiment aims to show that science is best learnt by doing and that science is all around us," said C B Devgun, president of SPACE.

The experiment is simple and also proves that the Earth is round, he said. At noon, participants will measure the angle of the sun's shadow at the various spots on the same longitude, which are imaginary lines connecting the North and the South Poles. Delhi, Bhopal, Bangalore and Alma Ata (in Kazakhstan), all fall roughly on the same longitude.

"If the Earth was flat, the angle of the shadow would have been the same all along a particular longitude. But since the Earth is curved, the shadow angle would vary according to the distance of the spot from the equator. The difference of the shadow angle at various places will then be used to calculate the circumference of the Earth," Devgun said.

The experiment will be simultaneously conducted in other parts of India, SAARC countries and places like Alma Ata, and the data used for the final calculations.


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