

# ANTAR RASHTRIYA SAHAYOG PARISHAD BULLETIN

Monthly Newsletter of Indian Council for International Co-operation

MAY, 2020

## A RIFT IN THE LUTE

(Continued from the previous issue)



**M K Gandhi**

The first of July 1907 arrived, and saw the opening of permit offices. The community had decided openly to picket each office, that is to say, to post volunteers on the roads leading thereto, and these volunteers were to warn weak-kneed Indians against the trap laid for them there. Volunteers were provided with badges and expressly instructed not to be impolite to any Indian taking out a permit. They must ask him his name, but if he refused to give it they must not on any account be violent or rude to him. To every Indian going to the permit office, they were to hand a printed paper detailing the injuries which submission to the Black Act would involve, and explain what was written in it. They must behave with the police too with due respect. If the police abused or thrashed them, they must suffer peacefully; if the ill-treatment by the police was insufferable they should leave the place. If the police arrested them, they should gladly surrender themselves. If some such incident occurred in Johannesburg, it should be brought to my notice. At other places the local secretaries were to be informed, and asked for further instructions. Each party of pickets had a captain whose orders must be obeyed by the rest.

This was the community's first experience of that kind. All who were above the age of twelve were taken as pickets, so that there were many young men from 12 to 18 years of age enrolled as such. But not one was taken who was unknown to the local workers. Over and above all these precautions people were informed by announcements at every public meeting and otherwise, that if anyone desirous of taking out a permit was afraid of the

pickets, he could ask the workers to detail a volunteer to escort him to the permit office and back. Some did avail themselves of this offer.

The volunteers in every place worked with boundless enthusiasm, and were ever alert and wide-awake in the performance of their duties. Generally speaking there was not much molestation by the police. When sometimes there was such molestation, the volunteers quietly put up with it. They brought to bear upon the work quite an amount of humour, in which the police too sometimes joined. They devised various diversions in order to beguile their time. They were once arrested on a charge of obstruction to the public traffic. As non-co-operation did not form a part of the Satyagraha struggle there, defence could be made in courts, though as a rule advocates for defence were not paid from public funds. The volunteers were declared innocent and acquitted by the court, which still further exalted their spirit.

Although the Indians who wanted to take out permits were thus saved from rudeness or violence from the volunteers in public, I must admit, that there arose a body of men in connection with the movement, who without becoming volunteers privately threatened those who would take out permits with violence of injury in other ways. This was a most painful development, and strong measures were adopted in order to stamp it out as soon as it was found out. The holding out of threats nearly ceased in consequence, though it was not quite rooted out. The threats left an impression behind them, and as I could see, thus far injured the cause. Those who were threatened instantly sought Government protection and got it. Poison was thus instilled into the community, and those who were weak already grew weaker still. The poison thus grew more virulent, as the weak are always apt to be revengeful.

These threats created but little impression; but the force of public opinion on the one hand, and on the other, the fear of one's name being known to the community through the presence of volunteers acted as powerful deterrents. I do not know a single Indian who held it proper to submit to the Black Act. Those who submitted did so out of an inability to suffer hardship or pecuniary losses, and were therefore ashamed of themselves. This sense of shame, as well as a fear of loss in trade following upon the displeasure of big Indian merchants, pressed heavily upon them, and some leading Indians found a way out this two-fold difficulty. They arranged with the permit office, that an officer should meet them in a private house after nine or ten o'clock at night and give them permits. They thought that in this case no one would know about their submission to the law for some time at least and that as they were leaders, others would follow suit, thus lightening their burden of shame. It did not matter if they were found out afterwards.

But the volunteers were so vigilant, that the community was kept informed of what happened every moment. There would be some even in the permit office who might give such information to the Satyagrahis. Others again, though weak themselves, would be unable to tolerate the idea of leaders thus disgracing themselves, and would inform the Satyagrahis from an idea that they too could face the music if others were firm. In this way the community once received information that certain men were going to take out permits in a certain shop on a certain night. The community therefore first tried to dissuade these men. The shop too was picketed. But human weakness cannot be long suppressed. Some leading men took permits in this way at ten or eleven o'clock at night, and there was a rift in the lute. The very next day their names were published by the community. But a sense of shame has

its limits. Considerations of self-interest drive shame away and mislead men out of the strait and narrow path. By and by something like five hundred men took out permits. For some time permits were issued in private houses, but as the sense of shame wore out, some went publicly to the Asiatic Office and obtained certificates of registration.

(To be continued)

## Democracy on Trial



✉ **Amb. Virendra Gupta**  
**(President-ARSP)**

The Democracy in Guyana continues to be on trial. So far, there is no indication that the government is in a mood to pay heed to the international community's unequivocal call for fair and transparent vote count in upholding the democratic principles. This is fraught with dangerous consequences due to likely isolation and prospects of sanctions

Serious irregularities in the elections held in the Caribbean nation Guyana last month have attracted worldwide attention. The global outrage and condemnation is perhaps reflective of the diminishing tolerance of attempts by manipulative rulers in subverting democratic and constitutional practices to sustain themselves in power at any cost.



People queue to vote in Guyana's Presidential election in Georgetown, Guyana March 2, 2020

The USA has been at the forefront in condemning the present Guyanese Government of David Granger for election malpractices and fraudulent declaration of his victory. Secretary of State Pompeo has himself expressed deep concern at the developments in Guyana warning it against electoral fraud urging that due processes laid down in the Guyanese constitution for vote count and tabulation must be followed in a credible and transparent manner before any declaration of results. The US Government officials have cautioned that no candidate should declare victory or be sworn in "while serious questions remained" and have also hinted at economic sanctions against Guyana if the issue was not

resolved satisfactorily. Given USA's strong stand concerning election malpractices in Venezuela, which is next door, and the fact that it has invested considerable diplomatic efforts to mobilising a consensus in the regional body, Organisation of American States, for rejection of Maduro's legitimacy, it is unlikely that USA would relent on its tough posture with regard to Guyana.

Guyana is a small country with a population of merely 0.8 million. But what is noteworthy from India's standpoint is that over 40% of that population is of Indian origin having gone from our shores nearly two hundred years ago as indentured labour to work in the sugarcane plantations there. What makes Guyana unique for India is that it is one of the five countries in the world (others being Mauritius, Fiji, Trinidad & Tobago, and Suriname) where the Indian origin people constitute nearly half of the country's population. Despite the geographical distance and the time span, Indian origin people in the Caribbean, who are also known as 'Girmitiyas', have always felt a special emotional and cultural bond with India and people in India fully share this empathy. West Indies cricketers Rohan Kanhai and Alvin Kallicharran, who are household names in India, are incidentally from Guyana.

Indian public opinion is naturally quite incensed at the recent unfortunate developments in Guyana. Antar Rashtriya Sahayog Parishad (ARSP) which has been working for the last five decades for expanding India's interface and outreach with its 30 million-strong diaspora across the world, has historically maintained close connections with Guyana. It has condemned the electoral malpractices committed by the present government and urged early completion of the election processes legally and transparently to preserve the fundamental essence of democracy and also the well-being, safety and rightful claim of the people of Indian origin there.

The Indian Government has also joined other governments, given its own experience as a vibrant and prosperous democracy, in underlining the importance of ensuring that electoral processes in Guyana are credible, fair and transparent in the assessment of the international community. This is a welcome step and we can look forward to increasing assertiveness on the part of our government with India's growing clout on the world stage.

The genesis of the current political crises in Guyana can be traced to the no-confidence motion brought by Bharrat Jagdeo's Peoples' Progressive Party (PPP), comprising mainly of Indian origin people, against the ruling alliance in December 2018. President Granger-led coalition Government lost the no-confidence motion by 33-32 vote, but it refused to resign claiming wrongfully that the requisite majority did not pass the motion.

The ensuing legal battle ultimately landed in the Caribbean Court of Justice, based in Trinidad & Tobago, which ruled in June 2019 that the no-confidence motion was indeed validly passed. The court also instructed that a new neutral chairperson of GECOM be appointed for holding the elections. However, the government kept on delaying the election process on one pretext or the other and eventually held the polls only on March 2, 2020, thus continuing in power for an extraordinarily long period of more than 14 months after losing the no-confidence vote.

After the elections, the process of counting and tabulation of votes began. Guyana has 10 regions. The results of 9 regions were tabulated and finalised, which showed Bharrat Jagdeo led PPP leading by 52000 votes. Trouble started when the Returning Officer of the

region 4, which is largest in the country, proceeded to declare the result of that region without verifying the numbers with the Statement of Polls as mandated by law, placing the ruling party ahead by a large number of votes to give it an overall countrywide lead. The opposition alleged that the vote count was grossly inflated and that in some cases the tabulation totals announced by the Returning Officer reflected more voters than on the list of eligible voters and that tabulation process was interrupted several times under heavy police guard raising serious questions about the fairness and impartiality of the process. It also claimed that based on the duly signed copies of the SOPs, available in its possession, the ruling party had lost the election.

The Commonwealth Observer Group, which was led by former PM of Barbados Owen Arthur and which also included a former Indian Election Commissioner also expressed grave concern at these developments. Asserting that the tabulation processes conducted by the RO for Region 4 were not credible, transparent and inclusive, it lambasted the Guyanese Election Commission for “serious and blatant instances of disregard for the rule of law and electoral ethics.”

There have been disturbing reports that credentials of international observers were sought to be revoked by GECOM and that they were asked to leave the premises where the tabulation of votes was taking place for the most populous region 4.

However, despite strong criticism from the international community and a specific court injunction restraining the Guyana Election Commission from declaring final results pending counting and tabulation in accordance with the law, the Commission proceeded to release the unverified results to the media which gave the ruling coalition one-seat majority in the 65 member Guyanese Parliament.

These developments have evoked universal condemnation from all concerned including the UN, CARICOM, Organization of American States and Carter Centre etc. The Governments of the USA, Canada, Britain and the European Union went so far as to declare that anybody “sworn in based on those results will not be considered legitimate.”

To resolve the impasse, it was agreed to have a total recount of all the 10 regions under the supervision of a high-level team of CARICOM. This was achieved through personal mediatory efforts of current Chairman of Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Prime Minister Mia Mottley of Barbados. It should be noted that the regional bodies in many parts of the world, including in Africa have begun to play an important role in dispute settlements and preservation /promotion of democracy. Earlier, she had called on all parties to work together “to achieve a peaceful and lawful completion of the electoral processes transparently in the presence of political party representatives as well as international observers.”

The CARICOM high-level team however was forced to withdraw because of the court action initiated by the ruling coalition, which was deeply regretted by CARICOM Chair who also warned that “any government sworn in without credible and fully transparent vote count process would lack legitimacy.”

Guyana has so far been an impoverished country marred by high rates of unemployment and poverty, but the recent discovery of huge oil reserves of around 6 billion barrels could catapult this nation to spectacular economic recovery. It is estimated that this



tiny country could well be producing close to 750,000 barrels of crude a day by 2025. This has no doubt, led to increased world attention.

The Democracy in Guyana continues to be on trial. There is so far no indication that the government is in a mood to pay heed to the international community's unequivocal call for fair and transparent vote count in upholding the democratic principles. This is fraught with dangerous consequences since likely isolation and prospects of sanctions could negatively impact on the plans for the economic recovery of the country despite the discovery of large oil reserves.

(The writer is a former IFS officer and Indian Ambassador to several countries. Amongst his various diplomatic assignments, he also served as Indian High Commissioner to Trinidad & Tobago. He is currently President of the Antar Rashtriya Sahyog Parishad. Views are personal)

(Source- Organiser-24 April, 2020)

## **Guyana Election Recount Update-**

Amidst strong international pressure calling for transparency in the counting process and a series of court hearings, President Granger made a request for the Caribbean Community to field an independent high-level team to supervise the re-counting of the ballots. This was agreed to by Bharrat Jagdeo of PPP.

Accordingly the national recount started on 6 May under the supervision of CARICOM team. The recount is progressing at a slow pace and is expected to take about a month's time to complete.

As on 28 May, 1423 out of a total of 2339 boxes had been recounted and tabulated.

The vote count of ruling APNU- AFC alliance was 119,649 as against the count of 145,316 for Bharrat Jagdeo's PPP.

With 39% of boxes still to be recounted, PPP is leading by over 25,600 votes.

The recount of ballots of the contentious Region 4 is being followed with great interest where more than 500 boxes ( out of 879) are yet to be counted. This is the most populous region accounting for about 45% of the total electorates of Guyana.

The Returning Officer of this region, Clairmont Mingo, was accused of tampering with the figures by inflating the vote count of ruling alliance.

The standard procedure of counting involves preparation of Statement of Polls (SOP) at all counting centres which are counter signed by representatives of political parties and a copy of same is provided to the parties.

These SoP's become the basis of tabulation of final results.

Mingo disregarded these SoP's and proceeded to tabulate results on the basis of a spread sheet the figures of which had no veracity.

It is now becoming clear that the vote count claimed by Mingo in his spread sheet had inflated the votes of ruling alliance and reduced the votes of PPP.

If the recount proceeds as per Statement of Polls prepared at counting centers, the Indo Guyanese dominated PPP is expected to be the clear winner in these elections.

## Suriname votes for change- Santokhi set to become President

While Guyana is still waiting for election results after 90 days of going to polls, another South American country Suriname is set to have an Indian origin leader Chandrikapersad 'Chan' Santokhi as President.

Suriname, earlier known as Dutch Guyana, went to polls on 25 May. The two main political parties are NDP led by President Dési Bouterse and the Hindustani origin dominated party VHP led by Chan Santokhi.

NDP has been in power since 2010 with Bouterse as President. He is a controversial leader who was sentenced in absentia for 11 years on charges of drug trafficking by a Netherlands Court in 1999.

Last year a Suriname Military Court sentenced him to 20 years in prison on charges of extra judicial execution of 15 political opponents in 1982 (popularly known as December killings). His appeal is set to be heard in June.

The Suriname National Assembly has 51 seats. Around 90% of votes have been counted. The counting is progressing at a slow pace and there have been some allegations of irregularities.

Though the final tally had not yet been released, Chan Santokhi led VHP is leading in 20 seats followed by ruling NDP which is leading in 16.

Other parties in the contest, and leading, include ABOP (7 seats), NPS (4 seats) and PL (2 seats). They were in opposition till now with VHP.

Another party BEP (2 seats) is the ally of ruling NDP.

The opposition has urged the government to concede defeat while President Desi Bouterse has called for a recount.

While the party or coalition having simple majority controls the National Assembly, the election of President requires two third majority for which upto three rounds of voting are held. If the Presidential candidate fails to win two third majority in Assembly, the vote goes to a larger body of United People's Congress (UPC), comprising of Assembly members and local government representatives.

In UPC a simple majority elects the President.

The call by Bouterse for a recount is being seen as a move to block Santokhi from managing, with allies, the two third majority in the assembly

Suriname has a small population of 558 thousand with about 28% people of Indian origin. It is sparsely populated with an area of 163000 sq km. with a density of just above 3 persons per sq km.

## 14 May, 2020 marks the 141<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of Girmitiyas Arrival to Fiji



141<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the Girmitiyas arrival to Fiji was celebrated on 14 May 2020. On this occasion, the Fiji Gimit Council called on Fijians to learn from the hard work, pains and sufferings of the indentured labourers, and persevere to fight through the current crisis.

On 14<sup>th</sup> May, 1879, Fiji saw the arrival of the Leonidas, a ship that had travelled many thousands of kilometres from British India, a more than three-month journey that endured crashing sea waves, disease and even death, to finally anchor in Levuka - a moment that has been permanently scripted into the psyche of the Fiji-Indian community and generates myriad of emotions. Some 60,500 Indians were transported to Fiji between 1879 and 1916 when the transportation of indentured Indian labourers was finally stopped. Infact, the word 'Girmitiya' (a corruption of the word 'agreement') was coined in Fiji.

Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama has also shared stories of Girmitiyas on this occasion. Bainimarama says that we must never forget the sacrifices that so many ordinary people made. He adds it is in the stories of individual Girmitiyas that we gain the best insight into what life was like for them.

Meanwhile, the Executive Secretary of the Fiji Gimit Council, Selwa Nandan said that the indentured labourers who were brought to Fiji from India faced great difficulties, however, they worked hard to contribute to the country, and in the end many also decided to stay back and make Fiji their home. Nandan announced that the Council had planned to hold major celebrations this year but will not be able to do so because of the COVID-19 restrictions. He said this year also marks 100 years since the abolition of the indenture system



## Sewa International Chapters Continue to Donate Masks, PPE to COVID-19 First Responders



Sewa International's Bay Area chapter volunteers ready with masks and other personal protection items to distribute to COVID-19 first responders May 3 in Milpitas, California.

Sewa International's Bay Area chapter May 3 donated 28,000 surgical, N95, and KN95 masks to first responders such as healthcare workers, police officers, fire fighters, and hospital staff, according to a press release. They also distributed 1500 meals to families in need during an invitation-only drive-through event as part of its COVID-19 relief efforts. "We wholeheartedly pledge to support the courageous healthcare workers, firefighters, police officers, and many others who are working hard to make our community COVID-19 free. As part of our pledge, Sewa International has committed to provide these front-line workers with the personal protection gear they need to stay safe," said Sewa International Bay Area chapter's Indian American president Jayant Somani.

Supplies were distributed to 20 agencies including San Mateo Medical Center, Oakland Children's Hospital, City of Sunnyvale, City of Cupertino, and the Mountain View Police Department. Ten volunteers and key donors were at the event to ensure that the event was a success.

Two Sewa Community chapters, one in New Jersey and the other in Texas, have also launched campaigns for various COVID-19 related relief efforts in their respective communities. In New Jersey, the Edison-based Sewa4Community chapter has raised over \$30,000 in donations, with \$23,000 dedicated to various food pantries and soup kitchens in New Jersey.

Around 150 volunteers from the tri-state area are also working to sew masks, procure N95 masks and other PPE and connect with medical centers in need. So far, 6500 masks and 85000 gloves have been donated to various hospitals including Lantern Medical Center, Holy Name Medical Center, Jersey Shore Medical Center, Central State Hospital, UMDNJ, RWJ, and JFK Medical Center. "We need to support the food pantries and medical centers who serve our communities, enabling them to have the necessary resources to meet the rising demand," Rajesh Sharma, Central Jersey coordinator for Sewa International, stated in a press release.

In Texas, Sewa International's Houston chapter donated 30,000 N95, KN95 and 3ply masks and 20,000 ounces of hand sanitizer on April 25 to first responders such as healthcare

workers, police officers, fire fighters, and hospital staff in an invitation-only drive-through event as part of its COVID-19 relief efforts.

Sewa International also announced recently it has decided to collaborate with South Asian Women Physicians of North America to respond vigorously to the COVID-19 pandemic. In other news, from Los Angeles, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh said that more than 150,000 of its volunteers have been spearheading pandemic relief efforts in 10,000 relief stations across India. The focus is to ensure that the vulnerable and poor sections of humanity are supported throughout the lockdown period, said a press release.

A Twitter campaign called Bharat Spandan was launched asking people in need of help to tweet with hashtag #SOSCorona.

As they did during the 1962 war with China or the multiple wars with Pakistan, RSS Swayamsevaks have risen to combat the deadly COVID-19 pandemic on local and state level, too. Following is a glimpse of its selfless service from across India.

## **Indian-Americans have been extraordinary source of strength during pandemic: Ambassador Sandhu**

**Applauding them for their sense of community service and duty, Mr. Sandhu said they have gone above and beyond in extending a helping hand to those who need.**



*India's new ambassador to the United States Taranjit Singh Sandhu presents his credential to President Donald Trump in his Oval Office of the White House, in Washington.*

The Indian-American community has been an extraordinary source of strength during the coronavirus pandemic, India's Ambassador to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu said on February 5, asserting that they have stepped up and shown leadership in these difficult times. "The Indian community in the United States has been an extraordinary source of strength and support for our Embassy since the time this crisis broke out. You have stepped

forward and shown leadership in difficult circumstances and demonstrated the strength of the Indian diaspora,” Mr. Sandhu said in a virtual interaction with a group of eminent Indian-American community leaders from across the country.

Applauding them for their sense of community service and duty, Mr. Sandhu said they have gone above and beyond in extending a helping hand to those who need. “You are example not just for India but also for the United States. The selfless service that many of you are providing amongst your local communities in the United States has been appreciated by leaders here and makes me very proud, he said. “Needless to say, Indian-Americans are leading this country in the fight against Covid19. Whether as healthcare workers; doctors; scientists, business-owners-you are leading the charge against Covid and your contributions will not go unacknowledged,” he said.

Describing them as important stakeholders in the India-US relationship, he said that the community is the common bond which brings the two countries together. “As global strategic partners, we have close co-operation in all spheres of human activity including scientific and medical research.”

Observing that Indian students in the United States have been facing an unpredictable situation due to the lockdown and classes going online, he said he has succeeded in persuading many Universities in allowing them to continue in their accommodation, some were unable to do so due to closure of dormitories. “When they had no other place to go, Hotel Owners came forward to offer accommodation to stranded students and other short-term visitors. It gives me a great sense of pride that through the pooled resources from all of you, over 5000,-such rooms have been arranged. Special thanks to Indian Hotel owners including AAHOA for this,” he said. “When some students did not have enough resources to take care of the daily needs, you came forward to help with provisions and food packets,” he said.

The Indian Embassy had reached out to many community doctors in anticipation of the worsening health situation in the United States. “Many of our stranded Indians here in the United States are elderly, visiting parents. One of the main problems they are facing is shortage of prescription medicines due to their extended stay. When they approached us, due to your support, we were able to connect them with Indian-American doctors,” he said. In fact, AAPI has set up a dedicated e-mail helpline to assist those in need of medical prescriptions. The AAPI has also tied up with Telemedicine to assist in prescription of medicines. These are only a few among the countless instances where the community has stepped forward, he said.

Sandhu said that many of the community organizations/associations, either individually or jointly as a group, have constituted Task Force/Teams, to provide help. “I have seen the helpline of NCAIA (National Council of Asian American Associations). Sewa International has been helping out students and other stranded Indians on a range of issues and mobilizing volunteers for assistance,” the top Indian diplomat said.

The Indian-American community leaders praised Sandhu for his efforts to connect with the community during this coronavirus pandemic. “Due credit should be given to the Indian mission under the guidance and leadership of Ambassador Taranjit Singh Sandhu who are doing a great job, tirelessly reaching out to the Indian-American community in this Pandemic” said New York-based Al Mason. Indian-American Sikh leader Sukhpal Singh

Dhanoa, said Ambassador Sandhu has been proactively reaching out to the community during this hour of crisis.

Kalpesh Joshi from AAHOA said that it was very nice of the Ambassador to take this initiative. “I have never seen this extraordinary response from government officials that they care about Indian citizens overseas and the diaspora,” he said. “The community is doing its best in this hour of crisis. We hope that things get better here and in India. Some (Indian) students really want to go back and some students are scared as to what will happen. We give them moral support,” said Joshi, who has been leading the AAHOA efforts to provide accommodation to the stranded students.

## Donald Trump names six Indian-Americans to Great American Economic Revival Industry Groups



President Donald Trump has named six Indian-American corporate leaders, including Sundar Pichai from Google and Satya Nadella from Microsoft, to his Great American Economic Revival Industry Groups formed to revive the US economy ravaged by the coronavirus pandemic.

Trump has roped in over 200 top American leaders from various industries and sections to create nearly a dozen and half different groups, who will advise him and offer recommendations on how to revive the American economy, which has hit unprecedented ebb in just a few weeks due to the deadly coronavirus. “They’re the names that are, I think, the best and the smartest, the brightest. And they’re going to give us some ideas,” Trump told reporters at his daily White House news conference on coronavirus on April 13. In addition to Pichai and Nadella, the president has named IBM’s Arvind Krishna and Micron’s Sanjay Mehrotra to the Tech Group. Other members of the group are Apple’s Tim Cook, Oracle’s Larry Ellison and Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg.

Indian-American Ann Mukherjee from Pernod Ricard has been named to the manufacturing Group, which among others include Caterpillar’s Jim Umpleby III, Tesla’s Elon Musk, Fiat Chrysler’s Mike Manley, Ford’s Bill Ford and General’s Mary Barra.

Ajay Banga from Mastercard has been named to the Financial Services Group along with, among others, Al Kelly from Visa, Blackstone’s Stephen Schwarzman; Fidelity Investment’s Abigail Johnson and Intuit’s Sasan Goodarzi. The various groups created by



Trump are: agriculture, banking, construction/labor/workforce; defense, energy, financial services, food and beverages, healthcare, hospitality, manufacturing, real estate, retail, tech, telecommunication, transportation, sports and thought leaders.

These bipartisan groups of American leaders will work together with the White House to chart the path forward towards a future of unparalleled American prosperity, the White House said. “The health and wealth of America is the primary goal, and these groups will produce a more independent, self-sufficient, and resilient nation,” the White House said in a statement. The global economy will this year likely suffer the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, the International Monetary Fund warned on April 13, as government’s worldwide grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic.

With schools and many businesses shut, the measures to slow the spread of the disease have taken a painful toll on the economy. The coronavirus death toll in the United States crossed 25,000 on April 13, with the country witnessing the highest single-day tally of 2,129.

As of April 13, more than 6,05,000 Americans had tested positive for the novel coronavirus more than the other top three countries taken together according to Johns Hopkins University. Globally, 126,722 people have died and nearly two million people have been infected by the novel coronavirus.

## **Indian-origin judicial commissioner Dedar Singh Gill appointed judge of Singapore High Court**



Dedar Singh Gill, an Indian-origin judicial commissioner and intellectual property expert in Singapore, has been appointed as a judge of the High Court by President Halimah Yacob from August 1.

Gill had been appointed JC of the Supreme Court in August 2018, prior to which he was the managing director of the intellectual property department at Drew and Napier LLC.

After taking over his Supreme Court role, Gill was appointed by Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon to manage the intellectual property list of the High Court. He worked on reviewing the intellectual property dispute resolution system in Singapore. In addition to intellectual property cases, Gill also has experience with cases related to contract, tort and negligence matters.



## UK universities reach out to Indian students for COVID-19 support

UK universities, on May 7, have urged distressed Indian students, whether still in Britain or in India, to get in touch with their university support services if they need help or guidance during the coronavirus-related lockdown. We are aware that many Indian students are concerned about money and accommodation, are missing their families and are understandably distressed to be far from home during this global pandemic. My message to those students is: please, please speak to your university,” said Vivienne Stern, Director of Universities UK international, which represents 143 UK university leaders.

Universities UK said that support offered by universities includes delivering food to students, providing hardship funds for students in financial difficulty, waiving accommodation fees or moving international students into accommodation where they can look after them by providing cleaning, security and catering. Universities are also providing pastoral and mental health support.

The University of Bath has moved all students in university owned accommodation around the city into campus accommodation and is providing three free meals a day to all students who remain on campus. It has also enhanced the availability of financial assistance to students who find themselves in hardship. Glasgow Caledonian University in Scotland has implemented a dedicated helpline for students, which operates seven days a week, and has introduced a fund to support students through the COVID-19 crisis as well as waived rent for April and May. Solent University and the University of Bangor have been supporting students stuck in the UK to access hardship funding.

## Mint Covid Tracker

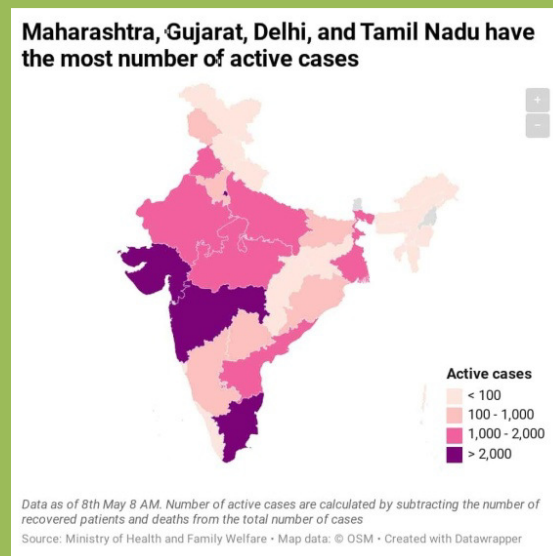


**An Indian Air Force helicopter showers flower petals on the staff of INS Asvini hospital in Mumbai (AP)**

The number of reported coronavirus cases in India rose 14 percent over May 7 and 8 to 56,342, data from the morning update of the ministry of health and family welfare (MoHFW) showed. So far the week ending May 8, the number of cases has gone up by 32 percent (between May 4 morning and May 8 morning). This is a faster rate of increase compared to the previous four days, when confirmed cases had risen by 28 percent. The rise of infections in India is now faster than in neighbours Bangladesh and Pakistan. Compared to Western nations where the virus has claimed more lives, the trajectories of most Asian

countries, including India, have been flatter. Yet, with new infections declining, the worst may be over for several European countries. In many Asian countries, new infections are still rising.

India's case count is roughly double on May 8 what it was eleven days ago. This is much slower compared to early-April, when cases were doubling every four days. Deaths have also seen slower rise compared to the trend in early-April but have picked up pace over the past week. India's death toll from covid-19 as of May 8 morning was 1,886, roughly double what it was ten days ago. If this trajectory continues beyond that period, it could overwhelm [India's hospital capacity](#) and strain an already overburdened [health system](#).



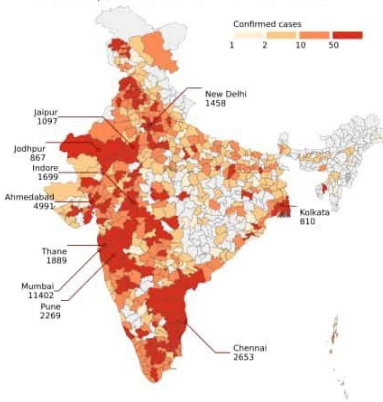
**Source: MoHFW**

Over the period from May 2 to May 8, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra have seen the highest spike in cases among the top ten states with most cases. These three states account for 75 percent of all the new active cases in this period. Over the same period, fatalities have surged the most in West Bengal, Gujarat, and Rajasthan. These three states account for 50 percent of all covid-related deaths over the past seven days.

Over May 7 and 8, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Thane, and Ariyalur (Tamil Nadu) districts have seen the biggest spike in confirmed cases nationally. These five districts account for 58 percent of new cases over this period. Other districts that have seen a sharp spike over May 7 and 8, include Viluppuram and Thiruvallur in Tamil Nadu, and Nashik in Maharashtra.

### 512 districts have confirmed covid-19 cases so far

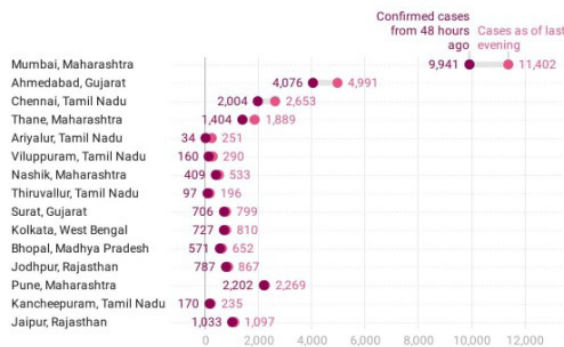
The top 10 districts in terms of cases (named below) account for 53.4% of confirmed cases in India. And the top 50 districts account for 77.0% of confirmed cases.



Note: Data is as of 7.30 pm, May 7, and has been compiled by howindialives.com from a number of data sources. Case counts don't always match updates from the union health ministry. Source: Data sourced from National Disaster Management Authority, state health ministries, and national/regional publications.

### Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Chennai, and Thane saw the highest jump in cases over the past two days

Change in confirmed cases between Tuesday and Thursday evening



The chart shows the top 15 districts which have witnessed the highest rise in confirmed cases. Latest data as of 7th May 830 PM. Confirmed cases from 48 hours ago as of 5th May 830 PM.

Source: Data compiled by howindialives.com from NDMA, state health ministries, and national/regional publications.

Created with Datawrapper

### Source : NDMA

As on May 8, so far, 512 districts have confirmed cases in the country. Mumbai (11,402 cases) has reported the most number of cases nationally among all districts, followed by Ahmedabad (4,991) in Gujarat. Chennai (2,653) in Tamil Nadu, Pune (2,269) in Maharashtra, and Thane (1,889) in Maharashtra are the other leading districts. These top five districts now account for 42 percent of confirmed cases in the country.

Indore (1,699) in Madhya Pradesh, New Delhi (1,458), Jaipur (1,097) in Rajasthan, Jodhpur (867) in Rajasthan, and Kolkata (810) in West Bengal are the other high-burden districts which figure in the list of top ten districts. The top ten districts account for 53 percent of the confirmed cases nationally.

Most of India's hotspots so far have been [urban affluent districts](#), with richer states hit harder than the rest.

The coronavirus case count has crossed 3.8 million globally even as several parts of the country and the world remain under lockdown to contain the pandemic.

## Trump admn urges US court not to block work permits to spouses of H1B visa-holders

In a major relief to thousands of Indians living in the US, the Trump administration has urged a federal district court not to block Save Jobs USA, an Obama-era rule, allowing certain categories of spouses of H-1B visa-holders to work in the country. In a submission before the US District Court, District Washington on May 5, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) argued that the American technology workers, who had challenged the 2015 ruling on giving work permits to H-4 visa-holders, have not been irreparably harmed by such work authorisation, and that the rule "only speculates about potential economic harm to its members, based on five-year-old affidavits". The DHS's court submission was in response to the one by Save Jobs USA, which sought a preliminary injunction to stop the H-4 rule from providing qualifying H-4 visa-holders with temporary employment authorisation.

An H-4 visa is issued by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to the immediate family members (spouse and children under 21 years of age) of the H-1B visa-holders, most of whom are Indian IT professionals. They had obtained work permits under a special order issued by the previous Obama administration in 2015. It is normally issued to those who have already started the process of seeking employment-based lawful permanent resident status in the country.

As of December 2017, the USCIS had approved 1,26,853 applications for employment authorisation for H-4 visa-holders. According to a 2018 report by the Congressional Research Service (CRS), 93 per cent of approved applications for H-4 employment authorisation were issued to individuals born in India and five per cent to individuals born in China.

**April Bhutan News**

## Nation Celebrates Royal Birth



The second Royal Child of Their Majesties The King and Queen, a Prince, was born on the 19th of March 2020, corresponding with the 25th day of the 1st month of the Male Iron Rat year, in Lingkana Palace, Thimphu.

Her Majesty and the royal baby are in good health, and His Royal Highness The Gyalsey was delighted to meet his younger brother. Their Majesties expressed their gratitude to the medical team, the Zhung Dratshang and to everyone for their well-wishes



and prayers. While this remains a very happy occasion for the Royal family and the nation and people of Bhutan, Their Majesties wish to remind all Bhutanese to be mindful, responsible and supportive to each other in the wake of the COVID-19. Their Majesties have everyone whose lives have been affected by this global pandemic in their thoughts and prayers.

## **His Majesty visits Phuentsholing to inspect uninterrupted supply of Essential Goods**



His Majesty The King visited Phuentsholing to inspect the plans put in place to ensure uninterrupted supply of essential goods from India, in light of the closure of our borders, and the 21-day lockdown in India.

While in Phuentsholing, His Majesty also inspected the Amochu Land Development and Township Project area (near YDF), the site chosen for the construction of temporary shelters for Bhutanese living in Jaigoan. Upon Royal Command, the Royal Bhutan Army has deployed about 1,300 soldiers and officers for the construction. Over 5,000 Bhutanese have been evacuated from Jaigoan, and are currently sheltered in schools. Schools nationwide are closed since 18th March until further notice to prevent COVID-19.

His Majesty is on a tour of Samtse and Phuentsholing.

## **His Majesty addresses the nation on Covid-19**

Starting today, our land borders will be sealed.

We are compelled to take this drastic measure in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. As you have been made aware through various government bulletins, the virus is spreading, causing immense disruption worldwide, and drawing closer to us each day.

At such a time, the health and safety of the people of Bhutan is of the greatest priority, and as such, we are putting in place every measure necessary to safeguard the people of Bhutan.

Should those of you who are abroad at this time wish to return home, the government will help you. I ask those of you who are studying or working abroad, not to worry.

Covid-19 will cause great disruptions to the global economy, and Bhutan will not be an exception. The economic repercussions will not just impact a select few sectors, but each and every one of us. At such a time, we must exhibit the strength that comes out of our



smallness, remain united and support one another. During such exceptional circumstances, the government will take the responsibility of alleviating any suffering to the people due to the virus.

As you know, all schools have been closed as a preventive measure, and children are at home instead of in their classes. We do not know when the situation will improve and schools can be reopened. Parents must guide their children, and children must take it upon themselves to use this opportunity to continue studying- at your age, education should be your most important concern. Do not waste time.

On the part of the government, there are already plans to make learning materials as widely available to students as possible. Internet providers, television, and even newspapers, have been tasked to bring learning materials to you. Therefore, it is your responsibility to take advantage of the avenues that will be made available to you.

According to experts, the elderly population is at the greatest risk from Covid-19. We must take care of our elderly, protect them, and ensure that their environment is safe and clean.

As a small country with a small population, we can overcome any challenge we are faced with, if the people and the government work together.

It is important, however, to not lose sight of our national objectives, and aim to bring normalcy as soon as possible so that when this pandemic is behind us, we can continue to work on making our future better and stronger.

In the meantime, we will continue to work ceaselessly through this challenging situation.

## **Bhutan makes Contribution to the SAARC COVID-19 Emergency Fund**



Lyonchhen Dr. Lotay Tshering participated in the SAARC Leaders' Video Conference on combating COVID-19 held on 15 March 2020. The video conference initiated by His Excellency Shri Narendra Modi created a platform for the Leaders to share experiences on combating the pandemic in respective countries and chart out collective strategy to combat the threat of COVID-19. One of the strategies discussed during the video conference was India's proposal to establish a COVID-19 Emergency Fund through voluntary contribution from the SAARC Member States. India has made an initial offer of USD 10 million as a contribution to the proposed fund.

The Royal Government of Bhutan has welcomed the establishment of the Emergency Fund and has decided to make an initial contribution of USD 100,000 (US Dollar One Hundred Thousand only).

Recognizing the urgent need for collective efforts to combat such a crisis, the Royal Government of Bhutan would like to reassure its full support and cooperation to do everything possible in close collaboration with all Member States to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic.

**May Bhutan News**

## **His Majesty toured Southern, Central and Eastern parts of Bhutan to inspect national preparedness against COVID-19**



His Majesty The King toured the southern, central and eastern parts of the country to inspect national preparedness against COVID-19. His Majesty visited Tsirang and Gelephu on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, and has visited Zhemgang, Trongsa, Bumthang, Mongar, and Tashiyangtse since then.

During the visit, His Majesty met with the COVID-19 task-force members of each dzongkhag, who has the responsibility of, among other things, collecting data of the at-risk population and demographics of their respective dzongkhags.

His Majesty visited hospitals to inspect medical facilities, and the Food Corporation of Bhutan (FCB) branches to inspect essential food stock held in reserve. His Majesty also visited shops, to learn how businesses have been affected due to COVID-19.

In Mongar, His Majesty visited the Royal Guest House, which has now been converted into a COVID-19 hospital. His Majesty Commanded that after the pandemic is over, it would become a mother and child hospital for the east. Throughout the tour, His Majesty emphasised to all those working in various capacities across the country that our greatest objective at the moment is to prevent the outbreak of the virus in Bhutan.



His Majesty also visited DeSuung training sites in Dewathang and Samtse. Upon Royal Command, there will be an accelerated DeSuung training programme to train about 2,500 teachers, in-service graduates, unemployed youth, and other volunteers simultaneously in 7 different locations. The training commenced on 6th of April, with special focus on public health and security, to prepare the trainees to support health workers in our efforts against COVID-19 if necessary. All the volunteers and trainers were tested for COVID-19 at the start of the 3-week program to rule out any possibility of a community spread.

## **Prime Minister launches the Druk Gyalpo's Relief Kidu program**



For an ordinary Bhutanese, in the COVID-19 situation, we can only worry and care about our own family members and the immediate circles. Likely so, it is important one takes care of the family in this challenging time.

But thinking beyond a household, exuding immense compassion and concern for the entire nation, is His Majesty The King who offers respite to the suffering of every Bhutanese in all parts of the world.

To think properly, every word and action of His Majesty translates as a kidu for the people of Bhutan at all times. However, today, the launch of Druk Gyalpo's Relief Kidu is an antidote to those who have been affected by coronavirus.

It is for those who have lost their jobs and livelihoods. There are those who have been directly hit and others who don't have means to feed their families the moment their work stops. It covers both formal and informal sectors.

Besides the cash grant from His Majesty, it is important to mention that His Majesty's kidu during COVID-19 is not just limited to that, as you are aware.

Given the fact that coronavirus is harsher on those with underlying conditions and old age, His Majesty initiated several kidu packages to protect the vulnerable section of the society from COVID-19 at all cost.

Making sure all Bhutanese have enough food and essential supplies during the emergencies, His Majesty commanded the government to go beyond basics and procure vital commodities for the nation to sustain for at least six months.

For the welfare of Bhutanese living and studying abroad, who are in want of financial support for logistics while battling the disease, His Majesty has ensured accommodation. For students in foreign land who are seeking to return but unable to afford, His Majesty has granted kidu.

These are a few to mention. To encompass the vastness of endeavours His Majesty undertake for each one of us is incomprehensible and beyond our human conception. It is also for the same reason that Bhutan will see through this turmoil and restore the country to a new realm.

## **Lyonchhen speaks with Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi**



Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, called Lyonchhen Dr Lotay Tshering this evening, extending concern and support for Bhutan as countries deal with COVID-19 situation.

Acknowledging the gesture, Lyonchhen thanked Prime Minister Modi for the unconditional support India offered to Bhutan at all times, and more so now, when the country itself was dealing with numerous issues.

Lyonchhen conveyed appreciation for Prime Minister Modi's leadership and bold decisions that steered India out of circumstances that could have been worse otherwise.

“It is because of the overriding humane and compassionate qualities in you, which makes you keep the neighbouring countries in your heart despite immense challenge of managing one of the largest countries in the world,” Lyonchhen said.

Initiating video conference among SAARC leaders, instituting COVID-19 Emergency Fund, and other supports for neighbouring countries all aligned with Prime Minister Modi’s Neighbourhood First Policy.

Reiterating Prime Minister Modi’s words, Lyonchhen said His Majesty is very concerned for the people and has been personally guiding in all preparatory and response efforts. “In fact, as we speak, my King is in the districts, ensuring everything is in place,” Lyonchhen said.

Prime Minister Modi also agreed to the reprioritisation of activities and projects supported by the Government of India. Lyonchhen said such adjustments will make it convenient for the government to align with the COVID-19 situation.

He thanked the close cooperation Indian Embassy in Thimphu India in Bhutan (Embassy of India, Thimphu) extended, as Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj worked closely with Bhutan round the clock. Lyonchhen said it would have been difficult without the support.

Among others, Lyonchhen expressed gratitude for ensuring supply of goods and essentials, despite lock down in India, as well as for medical donations.

## Picture Story:



21 April 2020: His Majesty The King granted an Audience to 399 volunteers being trained for the 38th Batch (accelerated) DeSuung Programme at Paro Drukgyal Central School. The accelerated programme was held upon Royal Command to impart health and security training to DeSuups so that they can supplement the work of existing personnel working across the country in various capacities to combat COVID-19.

His Royal Highness Prince Ugyen Jigme Wangchuck is among the DeSuups undergoing training in Paro. The 3-week training held in 7 locations simultaneously across Bhutan for 2,468 volunteers in total, concluded on April 25<sup>th</sup>.



## कोविड-19 : आर्थिक त्रासदी से निपटने हेतु सार्वभौम बुनियादी आय की जरूरत

विश्वव्यापी महामारी कोविड-19 महज एक स्वास्थ्य संकट भर नहीं है बल्कि यह दुनिया भर में बड़ी संख्या में लोगों के लिए एक आर्थिक त्रासदी भी साबित हुआ है। संयुक्त राष्ट्र विकास कार्यक्रम (UNDP) एशिया-प्रशांत ब्यूरो की प्रमुख कननी विग्नाराजा ने यूएन न्यूज के साथ बातचीत में देशों से अपने नागरिकों को सार्वभौम बुनियादी आय (Universal Basic Income) देने का आग्रह किया है ताकि उन लाखों-करोड़ों लोगों की मदद हो सके जिनके रोजगार और आमदनी महामारी पर काबू पाने के लिए उठाए गए कदमों की भेंट चढ़ गए हैं। अगर ऐसे संकट के माहौल में किसी निश्चित आय का स्तर नहीं है तो लोगों के पास अपनी गुजर-बसर के लिए कुछ साधन ना होने पर उनके भुखमरी या बीमारी का शिकार होने की आशंका बढ़ गई है।

एशिया-प्रशांत के अधिकांश देश या तो ऊँचे घरेलू कर्ज में हैं या फिर बाहरी ऋण में दबे हैं। और हम कर्ज के भार को और बढ़ता नहीं देखना चाहते क्योंकि इससे आने वाली पीढ़ियों के लिए और ज्यादा मुसीबतें खड़ी होंगी। लेकिन इस क्षेत्र के अधिकांश देशों में टैक्स और जीडीपी का अनुपात बेहद कम है, और अधिकतर सार्वजनिक धन पुरातन, अप्रत्यक्ष करों से आता है। दूसरे शब्दों में, असल में गरीब को ही टैक्स की मार झेलनी पड़ती है और इसे बदला जाना होगा। हमें वित्तीय संसाधनों को व्यर्थ में बहने से रोकना होगा।

कोरोना वायरसों के संक्रमण का एक प्रमुख कारण उनका पशुओं से मनुष्यों में इतनी तेजी से प्रवेश करना है और ऐसा इसलिए हो रहा है क्योंकि हमने अपने प्राकृतिक पर्यावास इस हद तक तबाह कर दिए हैं कि जानवरों से लोगों तक बीमारी का फैलाव टालना मुश्किल प्रतीत होता है। साथ ही, कोरिया गणराज्य में विश्वव्यापी महामारी के दौरान सफलतापूर्वक चुनाव संपन्न होते देखना उत्साहजनक था। जीतने वाली पार्टी ने कम-कार्बन पर आधारित अर्थव्यवस्था और वर्ष 2050 तक नैट शून्य उत्सर्जन के वादे पर चुनाव लड़ा था। इन वादों के लिए भरपूर समर्थन दर्शाता है कि मतदाता अब सिर्फ आर्थिक और स्वास्थ्य संकट नहीं देख रहे हैं बल्कि समझ रहे हैं कि यह एक जलवायु व पर्यावरण से जुड़ा संकट भी है। जब महामारी शुरू हुई थी तो चीन में विनिर्माण ठप हो गया था, सप्लाई चेन टूट गई और जरूरी पुर्जे जैसे बटन और जिपर भी नहीं भेजे जा सके थे। इससे बांग्लादेश की फैक्ट्रियों में ताला लग गया। जिन कामगारों के रोजगार गए, उन्हें एक हफ्ते का वेतन मिला लेकिन सामाजिक सुरक्षा हासिल नहीं है। एक दूसरा उदाहरण उन देशों का है जो खासतौर पर पर्यटन पर निर्भर हैं, जैसे मालदीव, थाईलैंड, श्रीलंका और भूटान। अंतरराष्ट्रीय पर्यटकों की यात्राएँ रुकने से इन देशों की अर्थव्यवस्थाएँ बुरी तरह प्रभावित हुई हैं। इस संकट से अर्थव्यवस्थाओं की सहनक्षमता पर अनेक सवाल उठे हैं। एशिया के अनेक देशों पर स्वचालन (Automation) जैसी नई टेक्नॉलॉजी का असर पड़ने की संभावना है और महामारी के कारण लाखों रोजगार छिन जाने की आशंका भी है। सार्वभौमिक बुनियादी आय इस क्षेत्र की आर्थिक मुश्किलों का समाधान नहीं है, लेकिन यह लोगों को खाई में गिरने से बचा सकती है।

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