

THE DIASPORA BI-WEEKLY



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MASK UP

India is in the middle of a Covid tsunami. There's a lesson for all. It is not just for governments to look out for us. Each of us is responsible for our and others' safety. Follow Covid protocol diligently.

It's beyond what we called a surge or spike. Covid-19 has evolved into a full-blown tsunami that is threatening to wash away everything—a catastrophe that's probably worse than anything the human species has ever known.

The entire world is in the grip of the coronavirus. But, the situation is exceptionally alarming for India. On Sunday, the country recorded 3.55 lakh cases and 2,807 deaths in just 24 hours. This is a global record high. In the preceding week, the country reported 22.49 lakh new cases, higher than any country in the world in the same time span at any point during the pandemic.

One may put it on the relaxations allowed by the government when cases dropped significantly some time in February. All of this might not find any justification. The government of the day would be hard-pressed to answer questions that people are raising. Was the pandemic over when it decided to give permissions for public events? Did it have a backup plan in case the crisis bounced back? Every time we look back at a spike in cases, we shall find a lot that might want us to comment that the spike was expected. But this is not the time to

look back. Clearly, there is no immediate solution to this situation. The least that everyone can do is follow the basic Covid protocol. MASK UP and KEEP DISTANCE! It's not rocket science.

Covid-19 has proved that this indeed is a small world. Just look at how rapidly the newly surfacing variants of coronavirus spread across the globe. So, to assume that one is safe outside a Covid hotspot is akin to living in a fool's paradise. Be it the UK, South African or Brazilian variant, the virus



has travelled thousands of miles to wreak havoc. Going by that understanding, the double mutant variant that is seen at the forefront of the Indian Covid crisis will sooner or later move beyond the country's borders if not reined in immediately.

As for India, it is getting support and promises of help from the international community. At a lower level, NGOs and crowdfunding groups have been trying to put together funds for Covid treatment essentials for India. These are tough times and we can tide over them only by being there for each other.

Here's hoping that we emerge stronger, wiser and more empathetic from this situation!

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Write to us!

Got feedback for us? We would love to hear about it. Have an event you want others to know about? Tell us. Clicked a pic worth sharing? Send it across. Your inputs are invaluable. You can mail your comments to editor@fianyjnct.org

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India, we are with you

The chorus from across the world is testimony to the goodwill that India has garnered. In its exhausting fight against the deadly coronavirus and efforts to curb rapidly increasing daily cases and deaths due to Covid-19, when the country reached out to others for help, almost all of them responded immediately

On Monday, India recorded 3.2 lakh new cases of Covid-19 and 2,766 deaths of patients infected by the virus. Grappling with an unexpected and rattling surge of Covid-19 cases across its territory, the Indian government has reached out to the global community for help. Many have been prompt in announcing support.

Among the swiftest to respond was UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Britain said Sunday it was sending life-saving medical equipment to India, including ventilators and oxygen concentrators, as the country reels from record numbers of daily Covid-19 infections and deaths.

"Vital medical equipment, including hundreds of oxygen concentrators and ventilators, is now on its way from the UK to India to support efforts to prevent the tragic loss of life from this terrible virus," Prime Minister Boris Johnson said in a statement. The first consignment of aid from the UK too arrived in India.

France has offered India "significant" extra oxygen capacity in the coming days to

help the country cope with a record surge in Covid-19 infections, the French presidency said on Sunday.

Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission tweeted, "Alarmed by the epidemiological situation in India. We are ready to support. The EU is pooling resources to respond rapidly to India's request for assistance via the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. We stand in full solidarity with the Indian people! Amid tense relations, neighbouring China and Pakistan have offered assistance to India.

India's vaccine diplomacy helping?

Earlier, the country had swiftly responded to the Covid-19 crisis in other countries. It has donated Made-In-India vaccines to several nations across the world. Seychelles became the first African nation to be donated vaccines from India. Also on the list of countries that received India's help in their respective fights against the virus are Afghanistan, Mauritius, Mongolia, Maldives, Serbia, Ghana, Sri Lanka, Nepal and others.



Burj Khalifa lit up with tricolour as show of UAE's support to India

Message from Mongolian Airlines for India

India also donated Covid-19 vaccines for UN peace-keeping forces.

On the request of the US, India had lifted the ban on hydroxychloroquine (HQC). It had supplied HQC tablets and paracetamol to 133 countries. While the efficacy of HQC for treatment of Covid is still being debated, the promptness with which India supplied the drug and other medicines earned it wide appreciation from other countries and groups.

US lifts ban on vax material, rushes oxygen to India

After initial reluctance citing 'special responsibility to Americans', President Biden pledges 'full support' for India who "was there" for it.

#Washington/New Delhi

Acknowledging that India was "there for us", US President Joe Biden has pledged full support to the country amid the ongoing Covid-19 crisis in the country. The US had come in for sharp criticism both from within and outside after Biden initially rejected India's request for supply of raw material for manufacture of vaccines.

Biden had justified his refusal earlier citing that his government had a special

responsibility to its own people. The decision invited strong responses with many criticizing Biden for failing to rise up to the occasion and helping India, its strategic partner, in the latter's crisis.

Late on Sunday, Biden agreed to lift the ban on export of raw material.

The US has millions of unused doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, which has not yet been approved for use there. Top infectious diseases expert Dr Anthony Fauci said the option of sending them to India was being considered.

On Monday, after a talk with Indian PM Narendra Modi, Biden tweeted, "Today, I spoke with Prime Minister @narendramodi and pledged America's full support to provide emergency assistance and resources in the fight against COVID-19. India was there for us,



and we will be there for them."

An Air India flight brought 328 oxygen concentrators from New York to New Delhi on Monday, Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Puri announced.

Antagonistic, destructive, derogatory...

Hinduphobia defined at Rutgers

The university's Student Assembly RUSA passed a historic resolution to adopt the working definition of Hinduphobia which was developed at a conference held by Rutgers Hindu Student Council last week

#New Jersey

In a historic feat last week, the Rutgers University Student Assembly (RUSA) passed a resolution to adopt a scholarly definition of Hinduphobia. This is the first time that a US university has institutionally recognised Hinduphobia through its student assembly.

The Rutgers Hindu Student Council (HSC) had organized a conference 'Understanding Hinduphobia' on April 23. The scholarly definition of Hinduphobia was developed at this conference. As per the definition, Hinduphobia is "a set of antagonistic, destructive, and derogatory attitudes and behaviours towards Sanatana Dharma (Hinduism) and Hindus that may manifest as fear or hatred."

In a tweet, Rutgers HSC stated, "Rutgers University's Student Assembly (RUSA) becomes the first American University student government to recognize Hinduphobia, including a scholarly definition



Dr. Audrey Truschke

of #Hinduphobia institutionally.

According to Rutgers HSC, RUSA has not only recognised the working definition of Hinduphobia but also the changes made to the definition within 14 days of the conclusion of the conference. It is being seen as a major victory for the Hindu students on the Rutgers University campus, who have been fighting the faculty and administration to recognise the perils of Hinduphobia.

The Diaspora Bi-weekly had reported earlier about controversy at Rutgers over reportedly prejudiced commentary on



Hinduism by associate professor Dr Audrey Truschke. A group of Hindu students had called for terminating her teaching assignments on Hinduism. However, the university has come out in support of Truschke. According to a statement by the Hindu Students Council at the university, administrators assured them following a meeting that they would be working with the Hindu students to create a safer space for them on the campus.

The university's decision to support Truschke had shocked current as well as prospective students at Rutgers

US Senate passes Anti-Hate Crime Bill

#Washington

Last week, the US Senate passed the Covid-19 Hate Crimes Bill by an overwhelming majority of 94-1, with Missouri Senator Josh Hawley the only 'no' vote.

In a statement, President Joe Biden said, "I applaud the United States Senate and the leadership of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) for passing the Covid-19 Hate Crimes Act by an overwhelming margin. This critical legislation will bring our nation one step closer to achieving justice and equality for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities."

The Bill must pass the House of Representatives, where Democrats hold a clear majority. President Joe Biden has called for passage.

"When given the opportunity to work, the Senate can work. Members from both sides of the aisle have worked together... to consider and perfect and enact legislation responding to a pressing issue," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on the Senate floor earlier in the week.

Reports of violence against Asian Americans have spiked since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. Activists and police said anti-Asian sentiment was fed by comments from former President Donald Trump blaming the pandemic on China using terms such as "kung flu."

The Bill requires the departments of Justice and Health and Human Services to raise awareness and expedite the review of hate crimes reported to the police during the pandemic, and work with law enforcement agencies to ensure online reporting. It provides guidance for local law enforcement agencies to report hate crimes, expand public education campaigns and combat discriminatory language in describing the pandemic.

"This legislation will improve the Justice Department's response to the appalling rise in hate incidents targeting the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community," said the Senate's No. 2 Democrat, Dick Durbin.

"For more than a year, far too many Asian Americans have woken up each morning increasingly fearful for their safety and the

Bill passed with 94-1 majority. US witnessed nearly 150% spike in anti-Asian hate crime in 2020, as per a report



safety of their loved ones. They have been scapegoated, harassed, and assaulted; some have even been killed. It has been over a year of living in fear for their lives, as acts of anti-Asian bias and violence have accelerated..." Biden added in his statement.

Anti-Asian hate crime in 16 of America's largest cities increased 149% in 2020 according to an analysis of official preliminary by police data by the Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino, with the first spike occurring in March and April amid a rise in Covid cases and negative stereotyping of Asians relating to the pandemic.



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Ready for some cricket?

The Cricket Clubs of Westchester have scheduled their cricket tournaments starting May. The Super 8 League will begin on May 15, with 24 teams. Those interested can apply latest by April 30. The group is introducing more cricket events, for example Children's / Women's / Senior's Cricket tournaments in July. The last date for application for these events will be June 15.

Ladies Of The Ring

Indian women win 7 golds in boxing

Seven of eight finalists from India at AIBA Youth World Boxing Championships were women; all of them clinched gold medals

#Kielce, Poland

It was a proud moment for India when seven of its women boxers clinched gold medals at the youth world championships in Kielce, Poland last week. All the women finalists—Gitika (48kg), Babyrojisana Chanu (51kg), Poonam (57kg), Vinka (60kg), Arundhati Choudhary (69kg), Thokchom Sanamachu Chanu (75kg) and Alfiya Pathan (+81kg)— won gold medals in their respective categories.



Previously, Indian women had won five gold medals during the 2017 edition of the Youth World Championships held in Guwahati.

An unprecedented eight Indians made it to the finals this year. The lone male finalist, Sachin (56kg), will fight on Friday. The Indian women's team also finished as the number one.

"This has been an amazing effort from our youth boxers especially when the players had to be confined at home for the most part of the last year and only make do with online training sessions," Boxing Federation of Indian President Ajay Singh was quoted by Scroll.

"Our coaches and support staff did a stellar job despite the limitations and challenges. This achievement is a testament of the talent we have in the upcoming generation of Indian boxing," he added.

Agencies

Now, forest fire in Mizoram

#Lunglei, Mizoram

Forest fire started on Saturday on the outskirts of Lunglei town, the headquarters of Lunglei district in Mizoram, 170 km from the state capital Aizawl, and spread to non-settled areas in 10 village councils.

Forest fires were also reported from Lawngtlai and Serchip districts.

On Monday, two M-17 helicopters of the Indian Air Force were pressed into action to contain the blaze.

The Assam Rifles deployed personnel and firefighting equipment.

According to officials, while the situation has been brought under control in some places, the dry and windy conditions could trigger fresh flames.

Just like in Uttarakhand, where deficient rain and dry air had been blamed for raging forest fires, in Mizoram too, the dry season is believed to have fanned the flames.



Oscars 2021 makes history

Beijing-born Chloe Zhao becomes first woman of colour to win the best director award for 'Nomadland'

Winners of the Oscars 2021 were announced on Sunday.

Chloe Zhao won the award for the best director for the film Nomadland. She became the second woman and the only woman of colour to win in this category. Kathryn Bigelow was the first woman director ever to win the Oscar in 2010 for The Hurt Locker.

Due to the Covid situation, attendance was limited at the gala held in Los Angeles.

"I have always found goodness in the people I met, everywhere I went in the world,"

Zhao said. "So, this is for anyone who has the faith and the courage to hold on to the goodness in themselves, and to hold on to the goodness in each other -- no matter how difficult it is to do that."

Anthony Hopkins won the award for 'Actor in a leading role' for his performance in the film 'The Father'. The other favourite was late Chadwick Boseman, who had been nominated for his role in 'Ma Rainey's Black Bottom'.

Frances McDormand was named the best actress for 'Nomadland'. The film also

won the Oscar for Best Picture. This is the third Oscar for McDormand

Daniel Kaluuya walked away with the trophy for the best actor in supporting role for 'Judas and the Black Messiah'. Yuh-Jung Youn won the best actress in supporting role for 'Minari'. 'Soul' was named the best animated feature film.

In other firsts, Mia Neal and Jamika Wilson became the first Black women to win the makeup and hairstyling Oscar, a prize they shared with Sergio Lopez-Rivera for their work on 'Ma Rainey's Black Bottom'.

Mank, which led the nominees slate with 10 nods, won two Oscars - Best Cinematography and Best Production Design. 'Sound Of Metal', starring Pakistani-origin actor Riz Ahmed, also won two of its six nominations - Best Sound and Best Film Editing.



The Winners

- Best Picture: **Nomadland**
- Best Director: **Chloe Zhao, Nomadland**
- Best Actress: **Frances McDormand, Nomadland**
- Best Actor: **Anthony Hopkins, The Father**
- Best Supporting Actress: **Youn Yuh-jung, Minari**
- Best Supporting Actor: **Daniel Kaluuya, Judas And The Black Messiah**
- Best Original Screenplay: **Promising Young Woman**
- Best Adapted Screenplay: **The Father**
- Best Animated Feature Film: **Soul**
- Best International Feature Film: **Another Round**
- Best Original Music Score: **Soul**

Bollywood loses two more gems

Music composer Shraavan of Nadeem-Shraavan fame succumbs to Covid; Hindi-Gujarati actor Amit Mistry suffers cardiac arrest

Be it for Covid or non-Covid reasons, Bollywood's losses in the past several months have kept on mounting. Last week, music composer Shraavan Rathod of the Nadeem-Shraavan fame lost the battle to Covid at Mumbai's SL Raheja hospital. He was 66.

Shraavan's son Sanjeev re-affirmed that his parents visited the Kumbh Mela before they were tested positive.

Shraavan had a musical background—

his father was Hindustani classical singer Pt Chaturbhuj Rathod. His brother is popular playback singer Roop Kumar Rathod.

Popular Gujarati and Hindi film actor Amit Mistry (47), known for starring in films like Shor In The City, Bey Yaar and Amazon Prime Video series 'Bandish Bandits', died on Friday following cardiac arrest, his manager said. "He woke up, had his breakfast and even exercised before he suffered a cardiac arrest. He was absolutely fit and fine. Amit had no underlying

medical condition. It's absolutely shocking news," the actor's manager Maharshi Desai told a news agency.

Agencies.



Shraavan Rathod

Amit Mistry

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