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COVID-19: Indian-American NGO distributes 30,000 masks, other supplies in Houston

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Houston, Apr 26 () An Indian-American nonprofit organisation has distributed 30,000 masks and other medical supplies to first responders, hospitals and county officials in Houston to combat the spread of the coronavirus pandemic as the city prepares for a 30-day mandate to wear a face cover in public.

Sewa International's Houston chapter on Saturday distributed 30,000 masks, gloves, and 20,000 ounces of hand sanitiser in an "invitation only" drive-through event.

In an executive order signed on Sunday, Harris county Judge Lina Hidalgo has directed all residents to wear some kind of face covering in public for 30 days, starting from Monday. It will apply for any person over the age of 10. There is a USD 1,000 fine for violating of the order.

"The event of distributing PPEs to about 100 agencies on Saturday was very gratifying and we will continue this drive on weekly basis," Gitesh Desai, President of the Sewa Houston chapter said.

"Sewa has set up eight regional non-medical helplines for a coordinated national response, to offer information and resources about travel, health, visas and visa status," he said.

The helplines will also provide information about delivery of masks to first responders and those at the frontlines, delivering food, groceries, and medicines to those who need them, helping seniors in the community with medical advice and assisting stranded students with accommodation needs and food, he said.

The event was attended by Houston Consul General of India Aseem Mahajan, Congresswomen Houston City Council Member Martha Castex-Tatum and Councilman Edward Pollard for Houston City Council District J.

"We are proud of these activities and efforts of the Indo-American organisations and individuals to support their cities and communities to combat this pandemic.

"In addition to PPE distribution event, several volunteers of Indian- American organisations are providing immense support and assistance to needy Indian students and visitors who are stuck

due to the current situation here, by way of lodging, free meals and PPE. Several Indian American doctors are volunteering to provide medical assistance," Indian Counsel General Mahajan said.

US House Representative of 22nd Congressional District Pete Olson also presented a "Certificate of congressional recognition to SEWA" on April 17 for "their heroic efforts in helping Texans in need during COVID-19 pandemic"

Achalesh Amar, Director of Disaster Relief Sewa International said, "volunteers have also been busy organising webinars on a variety of health, wellbeing, travel, business, and other related issues, making and delivering masks, raising funds to buy essential PPE and to help those in distress, networking and collaborating with other community organisations to pool resources and organize delivery of services through a single-point delivery system."

He said that the organisation is also engaged in setting up a national convalescent blood plasma registry to help those seeking blood plasma transfusion and to enable those who have recovered from the infection to register to donate their blood plasma.

"Sewa International has raised over USD 500,000 already and seeks to raise USD 3.5 million to help facilitate this work over the next few months," he said. SHK RS RS