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Outlook

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Indian-Americans set up helpline, volunteer groups to help community members hit by coronavirus crisis

By Lalit K Jha

Washington, Mar 16 (PTI) Several eminent Indian-American groups in the US have set up helplines and deployed volunteers to help community members, including a large number of Indian students, hit by the coronavirus crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic has infected 3,777 people and claimed 69 lives in the country. The country has stepped up efforts to contain the virus by placing travel restrictions, closing schools, restaurants and bars and cancelling entertainment events across the country.

Sewa International, a leading Indian-American non-profit organization, has released USD 10,000 to run its 24X7 helpline and coronavirus awareness campaign through a team of 20 physicians.

It has also established various chapters across the country who are working with the Indian Embassy and consulates to help families obtain visas to travel to India in emergency situations.

“There are over 250,000 students from India studying in US universities. More than 300 US Universities have closed including some who have moved instructions to a virtual mode, and even shut their dorms. Sewa has fielded calls from Indian foreign students from such universities who are finding it difficult to cope up emotionally, health wise and financially,” said Professor Sree Sreenath, president of Sewa International.

“We even had a couple of concerned parents call us from India,” Sreenath said.

“A team of 20 physicians is helping Sewa in providing free advice through Sewa coronavirus helpline. Over 400 volunteers in 20 major cities in the country are working tirelessly to put up a formidable community response at this difficult time,” said Swadesh Katoch, Sewa's vice president for Disaster Relief.

Local businesses and medical professionals are offering their services to the community most times pro bono through Sewa International.

Its volunteers are providing multiple services including delivering free food, assisting the elderly in grocery shopping and visiting a doctor and helping those who are faced with travel and visa issues.

“We are also offering family therapist calls for helping parents deal with anxiety and stress,” he said.

“Sewa is also helping people with COVID-19 like symptoms to meet with doctors. In a few cases our Family Services volunteers are working with friends and family of patients who are in self-quarantine or being tested for COVID-19. Sewa is running a daily Facebook Live campaign to spread awareness about preventing the infection,” Katoch said.

Federation of Indian-American Associations of Georgia is working with all universities across Georgia and Alabama to help students hit by the situation created due to the coronavirus crisis.

“We have daily meetings with the university authorities as well as with various student organisations at their campuses to assess the situation and have offered our help to provide them with food, accommodation and any other help they need,” the association said.

“We are also in constant discussion with our partner organisations who can provide their spaces to the affected students in case we need them. As of now, Gujarati Samaj, Gokuldham and Shakti Mandir have graciously offered their places to host the students impacted by the virus,” it added.

Telugu Association of North America (TANA) has established a COVID-19 helpline for the Indian students affected by the sudden closure of universities and educational institutions as part of the coronavirus preventive measures. PTI LKJ RS RS
