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## The Economic Times

# Covid-19 lockdown: Diaspora urged to aid stranded Indians



*The Indian Consulate in New York has reached out to non-profit organisation SEWA International, with 30 chapters across the US, to help Indians who find themselves stranded.*

March 30, 2020

New Delhi: With thousands of Indians stuck in different parts of the world following the travel restrictions imposed by India and lockdown situation in several countries to contain Covid-19, Delhi is reaching out to influential members of the Indian community in different parts of the world to support the stranded lot.

Indian diplomatic missions across continents are reaching out to various influential Indians to support those stranded in respective countries, ET has learnt. It is no secret that the Indian community has emerged as influential in several parts of the globe.

Little India is a street in Harris Park, Sydney, with over 50 businesses run by Indian people. Since last week the community has come together to distribute packed meals and food ration to Indian students who are facing difficulties as college campuses have shut down and part-time job opportunities have dwindled with the Australian government having shut down various services in view of the pandemic and students unable to return to India.

“We have seven restaurants at Little India and they are leading our effort in the free food

distribution. We have to be careful about maintaining social distance during the distribution and follow the lockdown time schedules as well,” said Gurmeet Tuli, who runs a jewellery store and is the president of Little India Australia. The organisation has been co-ordinating with the Indian consul general in Sydney Manish Gupta to send the message across to Indian and other international students across the city who may need help.

The Indian Embassy in USA has been running a round-the-clock helpline since last week for the students in the US, who number over 2,50,000. Most of these hotels offered are in and around universities and colleges, but hotels owners from across the country have come up in large numbers to the call given by community leaders. India's Ambassador to the US, Taranjit Singh Sandhu tweeted, "It is heartening to see that Indian; Indian American and other hotel owners are coming forward to help people with accommodation in these testing times. Together we can overcome the fight against COVID19!"

Over the last week, Indian American hoteliers, who own one in every two hotel properties in the US, are helping Indian students who are stranded around the US with campuses shut down and stringent travel restrictions in place. “We started an initiative among our members early last week after the Indian diplomatic missions approached us to help Indian students across college towns in the US. In an appeal to our fellow hoteliers through the Asian American Hotel Owners Association (AAHOA), we received pledges for over 3000 rooms and the numbers are going up. The students are in trouble and have no place to go and as fellow Indians we are reaching out to help them,” says Kalpesh Joshi, a Chicago based hotelier and regional director of AAHOA.

The hoteliers have decided to provide accommodation to Indian students free of cost. “The Indian students are contacting us through the Indian consul general in Chicago, the other consulate generals and the Indian embassy in Washington DC,” Joshi said. Indian American hotelier couple K K Mehta and Chandra Mehta have offered more than 100 rooms to Indian students at their two prime properties each near the Times Square and Barclays Center in New York City.

The Indian Consulate in New York has also reached out to non-profit organisation SEWA International, with 30 chapters across the US, to help Indians who find themselves stranded. SEWA is partnering with several Indian community organisations to address the problems of food and shelter of Indians stranded in different cities across the US.

In Russia the Indian Ambassador has reached to the leaders of Indian community and students in various universities amid the lockdown situation. In UK, the Indian high commission is working on a countrywide list of Indian hotels, restaurants, organisations and volunteers with

telephone numbers of people who are willing to assist Indian students and travellers who are stranded. Similarly, Indian missions in Europe, Gulf, SE Asia and Central Asia are involving community members to assist stranded Indians.