

Helping virus-hit Indians breathe again

V.K. SANTOSH KUMAR

Three recent incidents made Singapore permanent residents Prantik Mazumdar and Dipti Kamath get out of their comfort zone and help struggling people in India survive a catastrophic Covid-19 surge that has caused the healthcare system to collapse.

"A very close colleague's father had to be hospitalised after he contracted Covid-19 in Mumbai, but he couldn't get a bed in the intensive care unit or medical oxygen. Luckily he survived," said Mr Mazumdar, who is managing director (CXM Group) at Dentsu International Singapore.

"Then a vendor-partner, only 31 and newly married, died in Delhi because of Covid-19. We couldn't do much to save him because oxygen was not available in the city.

"Before that, my aunts, aged 64 and 57, died in Patna and Gaya because they could not get oxygen in time. They were in decent health before Covid-19 hit them."

Rattled by the dire situation in India's cities, towns and rural areas which are facing a shortage of medical supplies, especially medical oxygen, Mr Mazumdar and his wife Dipti, a doctor at the National University Hospital's Accident and Emergency Department, started a dollar-to-dollar matching fund-raiser for India's fight against Covid-19 leveraging crowdfunding platform Milaap on April 25.

Within 48 hours they received more than \$100,000 in donations, which crossed the \$200,000 mark in seven days. The figure stood at \$204,960 on Thursday.

"With the money we have collected, we are procuring oxygen concentrators from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and United Kingdom as that is much needed in India right now," said Mr Mazumdar. "Being in Singapore, we cannot physically do much to help our friends and relatives in India. Helping them out with medical equipment is the least we can do."

Oxygen concentrators are devices that help concentrate oxygen from the ambient air by removing nitrogen and delivering pure oxygen to individuals, whose blood oxygen saturation (SpO2) levels drop below 93 per cent.

The couple are working with the Swasth Hindustan Mission in Bengaluru and Mission Oxygen in Mumbai to distribute the concentrators.

"We are inspired because 1,043 people from 10 nations have supported our project," said Mr Mazumdar. "About 55 per cent of the contributions are from Singapore, with both locals and permanent residents chipping in. This shows that people are really concerned about what is happening in India and willing to help."

A group of Nanyang Technological University, National University of Singapore and Singapore Management University alumni have also taken to Milaap to raise funds and help India overcome the oxygen shortage.

About a dozen of them, banded under Singapore Universities' Mission Oxygen (SUMO) and spread across Singapore, the Philippines and India, are using their varied expertise to



A Covid-19 patient being provided with emergency oxygen at a gurdwara in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, on Tuesday. (Below, left) Mr Prantik Mazumdar and Dr Dipti Kamath. (Below, right) Some members of the SUMO team – (from left) Vishal Ladha, Ishita Dhamani, Rahul Singh, Anisha Baghudana, Vikram Vummidi and Ekta Gandhi.

PHOTOS: AFP, RAHUL SINGH, PRANTIK MAZUMDAR



manage the end-to-end process – from procurement to logistics and deployment in towns and villages.

"With the worsening situation in India, we decided to do our part in helping India fight one of the worst crises in recent times," said bank employee and NTU 2010 graduate Rahul Singh, who initiated the project. "The campaign went live on April 29."

"About 600 people from all over the world have contributed and we have raised about US\$100,000 (\$134,000). We are now buying oxygen concentrators."

The first batch of concentrators, procured from the Netherlands, will be delivered to India this week.

"The concentrators will be given to two organisations, Community Empowerment Lab and Mercy Mission, which will distribute them at the ground level in Uttar Pradesh and Bengaluru," said Mr Singh.

"This is a global crisis which has united humanity and it is our moral responsibility to help India revive. As Singaporean universities' graduates, we are doing our small part in this."

Indian expats Rohit Dwivedi, Gaurav Mishra and Seema Devgan are also using Milaap to raise funds and working with NGO Delhi Youth Welfare Association to distribute essential medical equipment in India.

"We started our campaign on April 26 and have received around \$100,000 from people in Singapore, the Nether-

lands, Germany, United States, Australia and Hong Kong," said Mr Dwivedi, partner at St James's Place for Wealth Management – Asia. "Our first phase target is to collect \$200,000 and provide medical oxygen devices and supplies and home care services."

"In the second phase, we aim to arrange ambulances, food for families and support people who have lost their jobs. We are also exploring the option of setting up a mobile oxygen power plant in Delhi."

The trio believe that the pandemic has created a huge gap in Indian society and the poor are suffering because they do not have the resources to access medical facilities. "We are trying to bridge this gap by providing oxygen cylinders, concentrators and flow meters and arranging plasma donors in Delhi," said Mr Dwivedi.

Singapore Gujarati Society president Biren Desai's family trust, Yamuna Pulin, has ordered 50 oxygen machines from China which will be sent to India over the next two weeks.

"We (three families based in Singapore and one in India) plan to loan them out for free to middle-class and lower-income families in Ahmedabad and later in other places in Gujarat," said Mr Desai, who owns a consumer goods business in Singapore.

"Many friends and relatives have been affected by Covid-19 in India and some have even died. The realisation has come that much more should have

been done before. We are doing whatever we can now to help the people."

Many other individuals, organisations and international companies in Singapore have also stepped forward to help India's Covid-19 patients.

Caritas Humanitarian Aid and Relief Initiatives Singapore (CHARIS), the fund-raising arm for overseas humanitarian aid of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Singapore, rallied local Catholics to support the cause.

"Our campaign was scheduled from April 26 to May 2 but within three days we surpassed our target by more than three times," said Mr Linus Ng, executive director, CHARIS. "We are now focused on working with our partner organisations to judiciously and effectively deploy the funds."

It aims to identify the most severely affected and poorest locations and set up first-level treatment facilities and provide food and basic medicines.

Adani Global, the Singapore-based regional headquarters of India's Adani Group, has partnered with the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Singapore Red Cross to raise financial and logistics support to help India alleviate the immense pressure on its health services.

On Tuesday, Adani Global donated 300 oxygen cylinders to the Indian Red Cross which will be carried over by Indian naval ship Airavat, which left Singapore on Wednesday.

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