

## Item 3.2

### Solidarity with the People of India

File No: S051491

#### Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

India is in the midst of a humanitarian crisis due to the global pandemic. Covid-19 infections have surged past 21 million across the country, with a total death toll of 230,168, according to health ministry data.

Most recently India recorded 412,262 new Covid-19 cases and a record 3,980 daily deaths, as a second wave of infections overwhelms the health system and spreads from cities into the countryside.

The situation is said to be particularly bad in vast rural areas with little or no healthcare. One charity reports that in some areas, "there are deaths in almost every second house".

The City is a multicultural, harmonious city and we share strong ties with our Indian community. We have residents from nearly every nationality—half were born overseas and one third speak a language other than English. The eclectic mix of languages, customs and cultures that make up our city is one of our biggest strengths.

Our Indian population ranks ninth of our largest migrant ancestries, and together we celebrate rich and colourful events like Deepavali, that is a significant religious Festival.

That is why I propose that Council stand in solidarity with India and our Indian community during this difficult time, who have family and friends at home. I would like to offer my sincere condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives as a result of Covid-19 and those who continue to be directly affected by the pandemic in India.

The Indian community needs our support more than ever right now, and I would like to offer my sympathies to everyone affected, including the Australian citizens who have been unable to travel home.

The Federal Government's temporary suspension of flights from India has left some 9,000 Australian citizens stranded in India, which has been distressing for many. The media reports that around 900 of those people have registered as financially or medically vulnerable and they are trapped in a country where hospitals are running out of oxygen.

Our own citizens have also been threatened with jail terms up to five years and fines of up to \$66,000, if they attempted to travel back from India to Australia.

I have found the treatment of Australians in India unacceptable, who have rightly said this policy has made them feel "angry, scared and worried".

Which is why I am pleased that Prime Minister Scott Morrison decided to lift a ban on travel from India on 15 May 2021. The Prime Minister has signed off on a plan to repatriate Australians stranded in India to the Northern Territory, bringing home the most vulnerable people first.

New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria have also pledged to take repatriation flights to help our citizens home.

The Federal government also announced in its budget for 2021/22, that it will provide \$119.9 million over four years to increase consular capacity to support vulnerable Australians overseas, and \$37.1 million over two years to support the Indian response to Covid-19.

The consular assistance will include 120 facilitated flights by June 2022 to bring Australians home. There are currently 34,500 Australians registered as wishing to return from overseas.

The City remains vigilant and continues to act on the advice of State and Federal Government to inform our response to the pandemic. However, we must also be vigilant in supporting all of our communities around the world and stand up to policies that can result in distress and discrimination.

### **Recommendation**

It is resolved that:

- (A) all persons present stand for one minute's silence to mark the lives lost in India; and
- (B) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to the Prime Minister of India expressing Sydney's support for the people of India.

### **COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE**

Lord Mayor