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The Kolkata Memorial, a tribute to the memory of Indian indentured labourers, at Kidderpore, Kolkata, on the banks of the Hooghly River

SATURDAY, MAY 6TH, 2017

4345-14TH AVENUE, MARKHAM, ONTARIO

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Indian Diaspora celebrates centenary of the end of indentureship

Indo Caribbean World - April 5, 2017

Port of Spain, Trinidad – The Indian Diaspora World Convention 2017 held in Trinidad & Tobago from March 17–20, 2017 successfully commemorated the 100th anniversary of the official abolition of Indian indentureship. The historic series of events drew capacity audiences with delegates and high ranking officials from several countries including India, in attendance.

This global event was conceptualized and initiated by the Indian Diaspora Council's (IDC) president Ashook Ramsaran and hosted by partners and affiliates: IDC Trinidad & Tobago headed by Dr. Rampersad Parasram; National Council of Indian Culture (NCIC) headed by Dr. Deokinanan Sharma; Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha (SDMS) headed by Shri Sat Maharaj and Vijay Maharaj; and several other supporting organizations. Mr. Deo Gosine coordinated on behalf of IDC and Ena Maraj chaired the Monument Centennial Committee.

Chief guest at the opening ceremonies on 17th March was Prime Minister of Trinidad & Tobago, Dr Keith Rowley who spoke of the contributions of Indian indentured labourers in the development of the twin island and other countries.

The event, held at the NCIC (Diwali Nagar), included commemorative cultural presentations and centennial tributes by the Trinidadian Prime Minister; Prime Minister of Guyana, Moses Nagamootoo; Shri Dnyaneshwar Mulay, Secretary of Overseas Indian Affairs, India's Ministry of External Affairs; Sir Anand Satyanand, former Governor General of New Zealand; Shri Harish Dwivedi, Indian MP representing Uttar Pradesh; Smt. Rama Devi, Indian MP representing Bihar; Grenada's Minister of Culture, Brenda Hood; and India's High Commissioner to Trinidad & Tobago, Bishwadip Dey. Lighting of the symbolic lamp was done by Ashook Ramsaran, Dr. Rampersad Parasram and Dr. Deokinanan Sharma, who all remarked on the significance of the centennial and its global impact.

A keepsake commemorative magazine with an attractive cover design was released at the opening ceremonies containing messages of congratulations and good wishes from 22 prominent officials, organizations and institutions, including Smt Sushma Swaraj, India's Minister of External Affairs; PM Rowley, PM Nagamootoo, PM Ralph Gonsalves (St Vincent),

Commemorative Monument at Saith Park in Chaguanas, Trinidad unveiled on 20th March 2017 to memorialize the 100th anniversary of the official abolition of Indian Indentureship. In picture are, from left: Ashook Ramsaran, Beverly Reid-Samuel, PS, Ministry of Community Development, Culture & Art, Deo Gosine, Ambassador Bishwadip Dey and Mayor of Chaguanas, Gopaul Boodhan (partly hidden) and Ena Maraj.

PM Andrew Holness (Jamaica), Goodwill Zwelithini kaBhekuzulu, King of Zululand, former Guyanese presidents Bharrat Jagdeo and Donald Ramotar, Ela Gandhi, granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi, and others.

The academic conference, with the theme: "The Global Indian Diaspora – Challenges, Progress and Charting New Frontiers"– was chaired by Dr. Primnath Gooptar on March 18-19 at the spacious NCIC facilities. Prominent international experts, historians and researchers discussed and deliberated on issues related to: Commemoration of the Centennial of Abolition of Indian Indentureship; History of Indian Indenturedship; Perspectives on the end of an era – Indian Indenturedship; Hardships, endurance, religious sustenance and cultural survival; Opportunities with Challenges for Unparalleled Progress and Achievement; Descendants of Indian Indentureship and the PIO experience; Second Journey; and Motivation, Assimilation & Adaptation.

The academic conference inaugural session featured Shri Dnyaneshwar Mulay as keynote speaker. He spoke on India's engagement of the diaspora and the bonds connecting many generations around the world. Other speakers included PM Nagamootoo, Smt. Rama Devi, Dr. Rampersad Parasram, Sir Anand Satyanand, Ashook Ramsaran and Dr Deokinanan Sharma.

The conference concluded with a summary wrap-up by IDC president Ashook Ramsaran along with IDC T&T country coordinator Deo Gosine and Resolutions co-chairperson Dennis Ramadhin. A series of resolutions were proposed and adopted by the convention. These included: Convening the Indian Diaspora World Convention annually in different countries of the Indian Diaspora on a rotating basis; following up on the resolutions and action items adopted at each convention beginning with Indian Diaspora World Convention 2018 to be convened in Durban, South Africa in March 2018. Additionally, the convention adopted a resolution to: Develop a practical, progressive and visionary

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road map for more engagement and progress in all segments of society globally: Science & technology, education, medical and professional, agriculture, economics, politics, human rights advocacy, gender equality, infants and youth, environmental sustainability, health and well-being, inter-ethnic relationships, peaceful resolutions of conflicts, and other social improvements.

Lighting the symbolic lamp: From left: Surujdeo Mangaroo, Dr. Deokinanan Sharma, Ashook Ramsaran and Dr. Rampersad Parasram.

On the evening of March 18, Indian High Commissioner Bishwadip Dey hosted a reception at his residence which featured a memorable cultural presentation. Shri Dnyaneshwar Mulay and Smt. Rama Devi spoke there about India's connection to the Indian diaspora and the strong and enduring bonds with India.

The Girls College of Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha hosted a gala banquet with chief guest former Prime Minister of Trinidad & Tobago, Hon. Kamla Persad Bissessar. Ms Bissessar spoke on the history and impact of Indian indentureship. The students made a series of colorful presentations highlighting indentureship. Sir Anand Satyanand spoke of his roots from India to Fiji and New Zealand.

A Commemorative Monument was unveiled at Saith Park in Chaguanas, on 20th March 2017 to memorialize this historic milestone – the 100th anniversary of the official abolition of Indian Indentureship – as a tribute to, and recognition of, those who made the journey, endured untold hardships and made significant achievements. It's a historic marker in the journey of people who left India generations ago to seek a destiny in lands and cultures far beyond their imagination or expectation.

The inscription on the Monument reads: In Commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of Abolition of Indian Indentureship (1834-1917) and in recognition and honoured tribute to those who made the treacherous journeys from India to far away lands and endured severe hardships while seeking better livelihoods following emancipation of slavery in 1834, and with profound gratitude for the pioneering spirit and invaluable contributions by Indian indentured labourers and their descendants to the social, cultural and economic development of their new homelands.

The unveiling was done by the Mayor of Chaguanas, Gopaul Boodhan; Beverly Reid-Samuel, Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Community Development, Culture & Art; Ambassador Bishwadip Dey; Deo Gosine, chairman of Deo Gosine Foundation; Ena Maraj and Ashook Ramsaran. Other participating in the ceremony included Sir Anand Satyanand, MP Suruj Rambachan; Jamaica's Ambassador Pendergast; Rampersad Parasram and Dr. Deokinanan Sharma.