

## IN BRIEF



World Vegan Vision, an NGO based in NYC promoting health vegan way of life donated 900 lbs of grocery to Hands of Hope Community, Edison, NJ and Foods Bank Network of Somerset NJ. Seen in picture World Vegan Vision PR director Nitin Vyas, committee and volunteer Uma Swaminathan, Niren Chaudhary and Shailesh Mehta with Somerset director Marie Scannell.

### Letter to the Editor: Real lessons from the 2020 Presidential Election Countering Mr Vibhuti Jha's parochial view

I am surprised at the biased and parochial view expressed by Mr. Vibhuti Jha regarding the U.S. Presidential Election in an op-ed published in The South Asian Times (issue dated November 14, 2020). We, the Indian diaspora here, are Americans first, Indians second, and Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian or Parsi, etc., third. We vote for what is good for the USA - our country - first. Mr. Jha, in his "learning lessons from 2020 elections", starts by saying, "If Indians need to be counted, then let's not repeat the mistakes again". In the very next sentence, he states "Hindus have no institutional backing or support." Why does Mr. Jha collect all Indians into one group of Hindus? What about other Indian Americans who are NOT Hindus? Many Indian American have multi-religious, even multi-racial families. We Indians here don't bring religion into politics, and our politics is more issue-based. There are, in fact, Political Action Committees that Indian Americans have created and support that advocate for various causes important to all of us living and working here. Also, just to note, the Hindu American Foundation and Council for American Islamic Relations are both 501(c)(3) organizations and cannot and have not endorsed political candidates.

Second, Mr. Jha points out that about 70% of the Indian American community voted for the Democratic ticket of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, because of their stance on immigration and that this is usually the only issue that Indians care about. Nothing could be further from the truth. While exact numbers are not known since Indian Americans are counted in the larger "Asian" category, it appears that about 60-65% of Asian-Americans voted for Biden-Harris ticket with the issues of the economy, healthcare, and racism taking top priority. Is immigration reform important to Indian Americans? Of course, just as it is to so many other Americans. This year, however, everyday Americans (including we the Indian Americans) care about the fact that millions of our fellow Americans have lost

their jobs, are going hungry, know someone who has suffered from COVID-19 (not the Hunan Virus, as Mr. Jha would derogatively like to call), are concerned about how divided our country has become, and want a President that would unite us rather than one that would further fan the flames of ignorance and hate. As a community that strives for educational excellence, we looked for a President that would tout the benefits of science and not have public health experts fearing for their lives from threats by conspiracy theorists. We Indian Americans did not want to support a President that touts his friendship with India, while tacitly encouraging white supremacist attacks against Indian Americans (and other minority groups) in the United States.

Third, Mr. Jha says that Hindus should follow the lead of Muslims in ensuring they have a "seat at the table" after the election is over. Again, for Indian Americans, this election was about more than religious influence and/or foreign policy. For some, it may even have been about having the first ever Indian American Vice President. In a nation that is proud of its commitment of freedom of religion, it is possible that we Hindus, and all Indian Americans, care more about other tangible issues like those mentioned above than the political influence of their religion. And we do have the seats at the Table. Hasn't Mr. Jha heard of Dr. Vivek Murthy, Dr. Atul Gawande & Dr. Celine Gounder. There are Indian Americans in the Federal Judiciary, are Federal Prosecutors, helm several American companies, etc. Similarly, I am sure many more talented Indian Americans will be inducted into the Biden Administration, the same way many Indian Americans helmed several prominent posts in past administrations and will continue to do the same for future administrations. They all do it because of what they know, not because of who they know.

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## BJANA celebrates Chhath Puja in NJ

The Bihar Jharkhand Association of North America (BJANA) celebrated Chhath puja at Thompson Park, Monroe, New Jersey amid Covid restrictions.

Usually around 25-30 vratis perform puja together at the BJANA event but due to COVID-19 and safety concerns this year only 5 vratis performed together and others performed puja at their home. This year Neetu Prasad, Minal Govil, Sanchita Tiwari, Pratika Prakash and Sushma Singh performed puja at the Ghat.

BJANA started organizing community wide Chhath Puja 4 years back and now it has become a signature event.

After initial apprehensions, the community came together to celebrate the festival with utmost safety measures and social distancing.

The BJANA executive committee members devoted days and nights for a couple of weeks to plan Chhath Puja and executed it successfully. There was a drive through an Araghy arrangement and prasad distribution. The entire event was telecast via Zoom and Facebook live with the help of media telecast expert Pranit Singh and Sudhakar Raj.

Many members of the community observed a three-day fast and puja which brought about 500 members of the community together and hundreds watched the entire puja live.

The event was attended by Consul General of India, New York Randhir Jaiswal and



Vratis performing puja at the Ghat



BJANA members preparing prasad.

Deputy Consul General Shatrughna Sinha with their families.

"It is great to see the love and affection for mother land. This is one of the auspicious festivals," said Mr. Jaiswal. FIA past president Alok Kumar said that this event brings the community close. BJANA president Dr. Avinash Gupta acknowledged the team work of the executive committee and the Chhath volunteers with special thanks to Prabish Chaurasia, who devoted all his time for making Prasad for all the attendees.

## NYC Test & Trace Corps launch 'Validate my tracer'

The tool will enable New Yorkers to verify identity of their contact tracer

**New York, NY:** The NYC Test & Trace Corps announced the launch of "Validate My Tracer," a new tool designed to allow New Yorkers to easily verify that the person reaching out to them is a contact tracer with the NYC Test & Trace Corps, in recognition of International Fraud Awareness Week. The tool is now available on the program website, [testandtrace.nyc](https://testandtrace.nyc).

"As more people test positive for COVID-19, our contact tracers are reaching more New Yorkers than ever," said NYC Test & Trace Corps Executive Director Dr. Ted Long. "Our program has been able to reach 90% of all New Yorkers diagnosed with COVID-19 since our program launched in June, and we are confident that this tool will help us reach even more New Yorkers by earning their trust from the start."

Individuals who receive a phone call or a home visit from a contact tracer can now ask them to share a one-time validation code. New Yorkers can then visit [testandtrace.nyc](https://testandtrace.nyc), select "Click Here to Validate My Tracer" and enter the code. The tool will confirm the contact tracer's name if the

code is valid. Once a valid code has been used, it expires and cannot be re-used, thus preventing the possibility of fraud or misuse.

"The Test & Trace Corps always has been committed to protecting the privacy and security of New Yorkers' personal and health information," said Dr. Neil Vora, Director of Tracing, NYC Test & Trace Corps. "With Validate My Tracer, contact tracers have another tool to build trust with New Yorkers, and New Yorkers can feel even safer engaging with a contact tracer."

"We are proactively launching this tool to keep New Yorkers as safe as possible," said Lisa Hendricks, Chief Technology Officer of the NYC Test & Trace Corps. "Contact tracing is a tried and true public health measure, and this new technology improves upon that practice. We are taking every step to ensure the safety of our community members."

The Test & Trace Corps reminds New Yorkers to answer the phone if they get a call from NYC Test & Trace or a phone number beginning with 212-540-XXXX or 212-242-XXXX.