

Kolkata official briefs Her Majesty The Queen on UK-India COVID collaboration

Sanjibita Tariang, who works at the British Deputy High Commission in Kolkata, narrated her experience of helping stranded British travellers get home during India's lockdown.

She described how the 'UK in India' team rose to the unprecedented challenges posed by COVID-19, through collaborative working between India and London, and with exceptional cooperation from the Indian authorities.

The UK repatriated nearly 18,000 travellers from India on 66 charter flights, from 11 Indian cities, between April and June.

Sanjibita Tariang, Regional Consular Development Officer at British Deputy High Commission in Kolkata said:

Organising the repatriation flights was a huge and complex operation involving thorough planning and coordination. We also had to obtain movement permissions during a nationwide lockdown – the main challenge was to organise transport from remote places like Meghalaya and Manipur for a journey spanning 32 hours.

I used my local networks and Hindi, Assamese, Bengali, Nepali language skills to organise a safe journey for some of the most vulnerable and elderly British nationals. For example: arranging a bus all the way from Shillong to Kolkata; requesting assistance from police officers to help passengers cross borders; and getting hotels to open their restaurants for dinner and packing breakfast for long journeys – all so passengers could catch their flight in the nick of time.

It was with the support of the Indian authorities and great teamwork across the UKinIndia network that we could successfully organise this operation.

During the engagement, Her Majesty spoke to staff who worked on the repatriation effort and also heard about the work the UK government is doing internationally to develop a vaccine.

Sir Philip Barton, High Commissioner to India said:

The India repatriation effort was the biggest globally for the UK. I am delighted that Her Majesty had the opportunity to hear from Sanjibita, one of our excellent consular officers, about the huge

amount of work and excellent UK-India collaboration that went into making it happen.

Beyond the repatriation effort, the UK and India are working together to combat the effects of COVID-19. A vaccine – developed in the UK and manufactured in India, benefitting the whole world – is the ultimate goal.

The engagement took place during a virtual unveiling of a new portrait of Her Majesty the Queen. The artwork, painted by artist Miriam Escofet, will be proudly on display in the refurbished reception of the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

During the virtual engagement Her Majesty praised Foreign and Commonwealth Office staff members for their work in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Further information

During the pandemic, the UK worked with airlines and other governments to get over 1.3 million British travellers back to the UK on commercial routes.

The UK government brought home more than 38,000 British travellers on special charter flights to the UK.

This was the first time for a portrait of a member of the royal family has been unveiled virtually.

The portrait will hang in the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) department in King Charles Street, London for visitors to see.

The FCDO is the name of the new department to be formed in September following the merger of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development.

For media queries, please contact:

Sally Hedley, Head of Communications
Press and Communications, British High Commission,
Chanakyapuri, New Delhi 110021
Tel: 24192100

Media queries: BHCMediaDelhi@fco.gov.uk

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