

Trinidad to host centennial of abolition of Indian indentureship

By Paras Ramoutar (Special to the Indian Diaspora) Nov 09, 2016

Trinidad and Tobago will host a commemorative conference “Global Indian Diaspora Charting New Frontiers” from March 17-20, 2017 in the capital city of Port-of-Spain to mark the centennial of the abolition of Indian indentureship, a milestone in the evolution of the Indian diaspora around the world.

The conference is being hosted by the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha (SDMS) National Council of Indian Culture (NCIC) the Indian High Commission, and the Indian Diaspora Council (IDC) of Trinidad and Tobago, in collaboration with the Indian Diaspora Council Int'l (based in New York) coordinated by Ashook Ramsaran.

According to Dr Primath Gooptar, chairman of the Academic Council, the theme, “Global Indian Diaspora: Charting New Frontiers,” has been chosen to encourage enquiry by diasporic scholars, researchers and others into the challenges and practical possibilities for diaspora peoples in the social, economic, technological, scientific, medical and entrepreneurial fields.

This country will form part of 23 countries stretching across the globe where the Indian diaspora is located as it is proposed to be “a major historical, cultural and sociological project aimed at enhancing the cultural and social and economic stock and innate capacities of those who came from Indian between 1845 and 1917,” Dr Gooptar said. Deadline for papers are Dec. 15, 2016 Contact at: pgoopta@hotmail.com or contact (868)-470-0133.

Dr. Gooptar pointed out that while the Defence of India Act 1917 was an official declaration to abolish Indian migration that did not bring about immediate end to the indentureship system; instead, it was gradually phased out until finally ended in 1920.

The commemorative events - in Trinidad and around the world - will be overseen by the New York-based Indian Diaspora Council (IDC). According to Ashook Ramsaran, IDC president, the British Parliament on March 21, 1917 abolished the whole concept of Indentureship and the commemoration is “not about celebration, but rather about how Indian immigrants and their descendants went beyond broken dreams, hardships and challenges to arrive at fortitude and resilience that paved the way for the exploration of new frontiers.”

“We reiterate an important principle that in times of hardships and distress, it is generally believed that people need, at least, two pillars to lean upon, namely religion and history. We cannot separate ourselves from our history, no more than can we separate ourselves from our shadow,” Ramsaran noted.

“Although many Indian immigrants had the right to return to India, only one in three decided to return. The rest remained in the respective countries and many were allocated plots of land in lieu of the payment of return passages. That measure allowed for the sustenance of the sugar industry as well give rise to the development of the rice industry, and other agricultural crops,” according to a release from the IDC.

“This event is not only timely by also a much-needed boost to further enhance the image and the national and international contributions which the Indian diaspora has made to all aspects of development and human existence in every corner of the globe. And it more than likely that when the history of the world is written much would have to mentioned of the Indian diaspora for posterity and for inspiration to all mankind,” the release added.

Several similar activities will be undertaken in India (Chennai, Lucknow, Patna, Bihar, Kolkata), USA, Canada, the Netherlands, Singapore, New Zealand, Singapore, Hong Kong, Guyana, Suriname, Jamaica, St. Vincent, Grenada, St. Lucia, Guadeloupe and Martinique, among other countries.

Senior executive members of the IDC have been visiting several countries to map out a programme of activities, “and we have been having positive, encouraging and inspirational responses which augur well for the Indian diaspora everywhere,” Ramsaran said.

Paras Ramoutar HBM,JP,BA,APR,ABC, is an international journalist for over 45 years who writes for several media houses in Trinidad and Tobago, India,(IANS, theindiandiaspora, India Empire) Canada, USA, the Caribbean, among other countries. Mr Ramoutar is a respected commentator on issues of public affairs, social, cultural and religious issues with special focus on the Indian Diaspora. He is a Justice of the Peace for Trinidad and Tobago, and has received several national, community and international awards, including the Humming Bird Medal from the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the Peace Award from the Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago, the Rotary International Paul Harris Fellow. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Journalism from Ryerson University, Canada; and Accreditation from the Public Relations Society of America and the International Association of Business Communicators. Contact: paras_ramoutar@yahoo.com.

