

29<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Dear fellow Rotarians,

### **Progress Report - Rotary COVID-19 Response Task Force of District 3220**

The world is now facing a global crisis. Perhaps the biggest crisis of our generation. As at date approx. 750,000 positive cases and 34,000 deaths. The decisions people and governments make in the next few weeks will probably shape the world for years to come.

The steps taken by our government are necessary and needed. Sure, they are painful, but it's essential.

Rotary, Sri Lanka has not remained idle. You formed a committee and entrusted them with the task of embarking on a project of worth to the country. You gave the committee a free hand. The committee believes that we should give you an update of the progress made this far.

As we informed you earlier, after negotiations with the Ministry of Health (MOH) and examining the various proposals made to us, we agreed to fund the upgrading of the testing equipment of our principal research Institute – the MRI and help bring it up to international standards in testing techniques. We have been guided by WHO with whom we are working closely.

### **The Project**

The project envisages the upgrade of the surveillance and testing mechanisms at the Medical Research Institute (MRI) by re-equipping and modernizing the virus detection equipment that will be at the forefront of COVID-19 diagnosis.

The key equipment here is a **fully automated Nucleic Acid Extraction and PCR System**.

With this equipment MRI will be able to reduce test time from approximately eight hours to two hours, providing very accurate testing results. The speed will enable MRI to undertake more tests in the same time period. Essentially increasing capacity. It will also enable MRI to test safely as manual testing carries with it a high-risk exposure. This system does not exist in Sri Lanka, not even in the private sector.

The equipment can also be used beyond the COVID-19 crisis for other tests like CMV, BKV hepatitis B and C (16 other virus PCR) in transplant patients, pregnant women and new born children.

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The rest of the project consists of supporting apparatus:

- **20 KITS (96 tests per KIT) PCR Reagent** crucial PCR test to accurately identify suspected patients.
- **2 Nos Autoclave** which will guarantee both human and environmental safety in disposing of waste.
- **2 Nos Safety Cabinets** which guarantees a safe and hygienic environment in the handling of samples without exposing staff to unnecessary risks.
- **2 Nos Point of Care fully automated Biochemistry Analyzer** enables Patients undergoing COVID 19 tests need to undergo several other - Biochemistry Tests (liver function, kidney function etc., etc.,) in a safe manner without risk to the staff with reports being generated automatically.
- **4 Nos Centrifuge** which separates Serum in the Blood without contamination to the serum. Also produces accurate results.
- **2 Nos 3 Part Hematological Analyzer with CRP:** Similar to above, these COVID 19 patients require to undergo several Hematological tests such as Full blood count, ESR, Blood Picture. This Analyzer will help to carry out these tests without confirmation, and also without risk of manual handling

We have split the project into two segments mainly for purpose of facilitating our application for the Global Grants from the Rotary Foundation and with the thought that sourcing the PCR machine will take a longer period than the rest.

The first part is the main equipment which totaled USD 167,072 and the second part is the extension – all the ancillary equipment, totaling USD 151,486 and required to support the main piece and essential in order to deliver a complete and wholesome project.

The first part is the for the fully automated Rapid PCR Close System. Its funded by District Designated Funds (DDF) from ten districts in Australia and one district in Japan to the total value of USD 42,500, together with our own contribution in cash and DDF makes up a total value of USD 52,500.

**NOTE** - The DDF available to districts are primarily based on a percentage of the amount the said districts members have contributed to the Rotary Foundation over the previous three years.

The second part is for the ancillary and supporting equipment.

The funding for this is supported by the DDF of a USA district, two Districts from UK and three Districts from Taiwan totaling USD 48,000. The balance will be in cash from us.

The total project cost is USD 318,558. That's just under Rs 60 m.

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## Supporting project

Another stage in the project is to equip the MRI with a Nanopore Sequencing machine. Nanopore sequencing has the potential to offer relatively low-cost genotyping, high mobility for testing, and rapid processing of samples with the ability to display results in real-time. Publications on the method outline its use in rapid identification of viral pathogens, monitoring Ebola, environmental monitoring, food safety monitoring, human genome sequencing, plant genome sequencing, monitoring of antibiotic resistance, haplotyping and other applications.

Currently we spend nearly Rs 1m (USD 5250) a month on courier charges alone in sending samples to Hong Kong and India. The machine requested by the MRI had a list price of Rs 60 m (USD 315,000) and we are doing a feasibility on its appropriateness or whether a lower model would suffice for us.

But it must be stated that this very expensive machine is being completely funded independently, by the MJF Foundation sponsored by the Dilmah Tea company founder Merrill J Fernando. Depending on the final cost of the machine the same Foundation has also indicated its desire to fund purchases of test kits to do COVID 19 testing. As you know there is a severe world shortage of test kits.

## Sourcing equipment

We have had some initial difficulty sourcing equipment and the ratio of positive response to our inquiry was almost 1:10!!

As you would imagine there is at present, a worldwide shortage of capacity for these testing equipment and considering the demand, it is not surprising that prices are up, further compounded by prohibition by some countries to export any of these products, understandably because they may require it for themselves. Thus, we have gone with the first reliable supplier of international repute from Germany and for two smaller items from another in Hong Kong who were less expensive.

## MOU

A Memorandum of Understanding is being signed with the Ministry of Health protecting all Rotary interests, ensuring service and maintenance and ensuring that adequate publicity is given for our efforts.

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## Funding

As at 28<sup>th</sup> March we have received pledges of cash from Clubs and other local entities totaling Rs 28 m.

Special mention must be made of a Rs 15 m (USD 78,000) pledge received from Rtn Mano Selvanathan and the Carson's Group of companies and Rs 5 m (USD 27,000) from LBR Foundation Sri Lanka.

We have been offered DDF from overseas totaling USD 99,500 to date which together with the TRF match and our own cash so generously contributed, will work out to about Rs 75 m.

Its with immense gratitude that we record the help we received to secure these DDF from Past RI Director Fredrick Lin of Taiwan, Rotary Australia's Mark Anderson, PRID Andy Smallwood of Texas, Director Floyd Lancia from Indiana and Trustee Mike Webb from UK.

All of them have their issues in their own countries and yet they were willing to reach out to us.

Ernst & Young are our auditors and we must record our gratitude to them for doing this work on a pro bono basis.

## Pending requests

However, we are now receiving more and more requests for help as stated below while several more are in the pipe line:

- Ventilators for regional hospitals
- PPE (Surgical masks, gowns, foot cover, boots, goggles) for several entities – hospitals and ambulance services
- Infra-Red contactless digital thermometers
- Test Kits
- Robots for work in the hospitals

## Renewed call for funds

With the increased plea for help we have to renew our call for funds. We note that whilst some clubs have been extra ordinarily generous others have remained silent. Equally whilst some members within the generous clubs have been amazingly generous, others have stood by. I believe every citizen of this country has an obligation to give whatever we can or secure; the amount is not important but our readiness to do is. What we cannot do individually our membership in Rotary enables us to do. We also must state how pleased we are to see club s also active in their own way doing projects localized to their communities.

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This is an emergency as never seen before. Hopefully those who are not supporting our project are doing so because they are doing their bit in some other way. That is understandable. We have given below our bank details to facilitate easy transfer of contributions.

### Finally

The benefits of this project will extend far beyond the current crisis. We would have helped set up a state-of-the-art testing facility in our principal research institute (the MRI). It is sustainable and it is long term and will serve the people of this country in the best sense. Rotary would have played a significant role. The governments faith in us was not misplaced and we truly would have lived up to our reputation.

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