



Hindu Forum Britain

Hindu Forum of Britain
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Press Release: Launch of the Hindu Environmental Task Force (HETF) on 18th September 2021

Further to the Hindu Forum of Britain's training on the Environmental Assessment & Management (EAM) Toolkit for Temples and Samaj buildings delivered by LEAP on 4th September 2021, the next key event in the timeline to COP26 and beyond has been the official Launch of the Hindu Environmental Task Force (HETF) on 18th September, right at the start of UK's Big Green Week. The launch was initiated with the blessings of Swami Surya Prabha Didi from the Brahmarshi Ashram, London, who had blessed the earlier EAM training, and whose opening prayers and spiritual thoughts asked attendees to reflect on the ancient Vedic wisdom of Sanatana Dharma (or Hinduism as known today) not just as a religion but a way of understanding and respecting the universe and every creation within it, as our philosophy is that of one-ness. She spoke of sustainability as the essential balance between the generation, operation and destruction of life forces, which must always be upheld through all our actions.

In highlighting the need for HETF, Smt Trupti Patel, President, Hindu Forum of Britain and Trustee of Faith for the Climate observed that, "We need to improve our cities and neighbourhoods not just through improving the aesthetics but also by creating a truly sustainable environment. Human factors play a vital role in enhancing our environment and everything we do should be linked to sustainability and using our environment wisely, in order, to preserve it for future generations."

The keynote at the HETF Launch was delivered by Sri Bob Blackman, MP, Padma Shri and Chair of APPG on British Hindus. Sri Blackman portrayed the bigger picture of the climate crisis, of deserts advancing all over the world, mass deforestation in the equatorial belt, and food and water is becoming scarcer, leading to many parts of the world becoming uninhabitable, and future migration, stressing on how it was imperative that the world work together to take strong steps to counter this. Sri Blackman underlined also, the importance of individual small action such as properly insulating one's home. Sri Blackman referred to the six thousand year old Hindu scriptures stating the knowledge they propound - in consuming only enough to sustain life and not more; to leave the planet in the same state as we found it. He stated further as individuals we should review what we do and think of how to protect the environment better such as walking instead of taking the car where possible. Sri Blackman went on to suggest that all participants at the HETF Launch undertake personal responsibility such as a personal audit to see if they could make their lifestyle more environmentally friendly in some way, rather than just asking of others to do so, which would lead to an unbearable planet for our children.

Esteemed heads of collaborating and HFB member organisations contributed their thoughts and experiences at the Launch, sharing numerous perspectives on environmental protection and the highlights of environmental initiatives taken forward by their organisations. The sharing of so many environmental best practices, activities and projects by the Hindu Forum of Britain's members brought





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together under the Hindu Environmental Task Force was highlighted by Dr Harriet Crabtree, Executive Director at Inter Faith Network for the UK. This was expanded on by Dr. Maureen Sier, Director, Interfaith Scotland, who underscored the importance of multifaith working together towards COP26. Shri Dhiraj Shah, Head of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh UK noted the importance of involving grassroots environmental action, welcomed the HETF initiative and said that he was looking forward to grassroots organisations taking part in action to counter climate change. Sri Velji Vekaria, President of the Shree Kutch Leva Patel Community (SKLPC) outlined measures that the SKLPC temples had taken to uphold protection of the planet. He said that while the role of the government was salient, as a member of the community, as people running the organisation and the community as a whole needed to work together with and as part of the government, to bring about positive change to the environment, particularly where the effect of climate change and the damage caused was so visible. Sri Vekaria cited the example of clearer air and cleaner rivers as a result of people staying indoors during the pandemic, demonstrating how lifestyle changes now could quickly bring about positive change for future generations.

Sister Maureen, Programme Coordinator for Brahmakumaris in London explained that the Brahmakumaris had become very active in climate change conferences since 2009 and many environmental practices were being adopted by their centres in UK and within their wider network across 120 countries worldwide. Smt Sheila Chauhan, a prominent member of the Green Team or Eco-Bhakti Sangh of Iskcon UK, shared the concept of Eco-Bhakti and the sustainable excellence that Iskcon devotees are instilling in their practices in temples, their buildings and schools all over the UK, such as their eco-farm in Scotland which promotes biodiversity and where organic vegetables are grown, as well as in further expansion of micro-dairy farms all across the UK. Dr Sujata Sriram and Sri Shailen Mittal, introduced the Art of Living (AOL) as an organisation spanning 156 countries operating through a dedicated network of thousands of volunteers operating through 10,000 centres worldwide.

Dr Narayan Srestha is on the Board of Directors for Aberdeen Hindu Temple, and earlier was the Climate Change Fund Project Manager at Aberdeen Multicultural Centre, and an invited speaker at the 2nd Global Conference on Climate Change. He made the valid point that it is important to see how the community perceives climate change. Dr Srihari Vallabhajousula, volunteer Priest at the Hindu Temple of Scotland, Vedic scholar and Board Member at Interfaith Scotland congratulated the Hindu Environmental Task Force on its inception. Srihari ji quoted from the Atharvaveda, highlighting the relationship between the Earth and us, referring to Earth as the Mother and us as her child, and speaking of the reason for the HETF coming together to pledge action to look after the Earth. Srihari ji said that Interfaith Scotland was at the forefront of this relationship nurturing and had been planning and implementing initiatives for a long time to spread awareness around the philosophy of COP26. Sri Bhanu Vashisht from Healing Himalayas Foundation thanked the Hindu Forum of Britain for having a futuristic vision and yet creating a platform like HETF to meet the need of the hour. He pointed out that





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it was not possible to sustain planet Earth as long as high ideologies were not translatable into day to day environmental action.

Dr Shorna Pal, Founder-Director, LEAP, shared its objectives in serving as an Environmental Partner for Communities, and lauded the Hindu Forum of Britain as proactively working with LEAP in taking forward the agenda of grassroots action for environmental protection, starting with a roll out of the Environmental Assessment & Management (EAM) toolkit, which would not only help temples celebrate their achievements in the area of climate action, but would provide a tool for ongoing assessment of areas with scope for improvement in environmental protection, as well as in leading to a formulation of an environmental policy for the temple organisation which would impact not just its devotional community, but also those within its wider network of interaction such as suppliers.

Smt Manjulika Singh from the Glasgow Hindu Mandir mentioned that the temple had planned several key activities during COP26 and shared how the temple had trialled the Environmental Assessment & Management (EAM) Toolkit offered by the Hindu Forum of Britain, supported by LEAP and had found it very useful to recognise the good practices the temple had in place whilst helping to identify those areas of temple activity which could be made more environmentally friendly.

The Launch was concluded by Dr. Ramesh Pattni, Vice-President (London & South), Hindu Forum of Britain, who summarised the launch to reflect on how there was a lack of alignment between the spiritual world view of Hindus and the material world view, leading to the main factors resulting in the disbalance in the environment and the resultant climate crisis. He urged participants to go through a self reflective practice to understand where they were deviating from their spiritual world view and to bring their way of life back into alignment. Dr Pattni endorsed also the idea of a self audit to map the lifestyle choices we were making everyday and to try to see how these could be realigned to prevent an overuse of resources beyond that of the individual need. Similarly he endorsed the collective audit of externalities such as the Environmental Assessment and Management Toolkit, to bring wider Hindu practices as a community within community spaces into alignment with the Hindu way of life. Following Dr Pattni's insightful summary of the Launch, Smt Trupti Patel recited the closing prayer, the Shantipath, invoking peace within all beings of nature.

Retracing the Hindu Forum of Britain's journey into environmental awareness & action...

The Hindu Forum of Britain is the largest umbrella organisation representing British Hindus and with a membership of over 320 member organisations across England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. The Hindu ethos embedded within the practice of its member organisations is reflected positively within its ecological footprint which gains salience particularly in context of the climate crisis we face today. With





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a view to upholding and sharing these best practices as well as making every effort to improve upon and add to the efforts of all member organisations and their communities, and in the light of its role in contributing to the COP26 UN summit, the Hindu Forum of Britain formalised a Hindu Environmental Task Force (HETF).

The Hindu Forum of Britain rolled out earlier, a pioneering Environmental Assessment & Management (EAM) toolkit supported by Lancaster Environment Action & Protection (LEAP), for use by community organisations such as Hindu temples and samaj buildings. Earlier discussions with Mrs Patel around the need for building a specific environmental management plan that suited the needs of Hindu temples, had made Dr Shorna Pal realise how necessary it was at this climate crisis juncture, to have an Environmental Partner for Community organisations, and she had gone on to establish LEAP. She was soon joined in her efforts by Dr Richa Soni, an Environmental Engineer with particular interests in Waste-water treatment, and soon after by Dr Gargi Das, a veteran anaesthetist with a lifetime interest in environmentalism, Mrs Binoti Tanna with a background in Environmental Science, and community leaders Mrs Harsha Shukla MBE & Mrs Kailash Parekh MBE. As the newest member of the Hindu Forum of Britain, LEAP was excited to support HFB on its journey to COP26 and beyond, in celebrating and promoting sustainability within British Hindu communities.

Dr Ramesh Pattni OBE, Vice President (London & South) for Hindu Forum of Britain, observed, "It is about refreshing and rebuilding the Hindu environmental sustainability narrative through pragmatic principles and action. The EAM toolkit will ensure that for and beyond COP26, Hindu temples continue to acknowledge the excellent contribution they make towards protecting Mother Earth. This will assist in expression of the great Hindu truths about the co-dependability of human beings and the environment. The EAM Toolkit is the first step in a chain of events and action that Hindu Forum of Britain has planned to undertake under its environmental wing, the Hindu Environmental Task Force (HETF) which draws in Hindu organisations from all across the UK."

Training on the EAM toolkit was organised by the Hindu Forum of Britain and delivered on 4th September to 38 Hindu temple & organisational representatives by LEAP Directors Dr Richa Soni and Dr Shorna Pal. The EAM toolkit includes a versatile Environmental Assessment & Management Plan which comes with detailed guidelines, including in understanding and formulating an Environmental Policy from the EAM plan. The session was initiated by Swami Surya Prabha Didi, Brahmarishi Ashram, London.

Prior to rollout of the toolkit, consultations were held with Environmental representatives from Brahmakumaris and ISKON, two large Hindu temple organisations, who reviewed the toolkit. It was then piloted by the Hindu Mandir Glasgow. After the training on the EAM Toolkit and formulating an Environmental Policy was delivered, Sister Maureen from Brahmakumaris UK enhanced the training by





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sharing the spiritual underpinnings of the environmental policy followed by their group, with the core principles of Living with Simplicity, Buying Compassionately, Using Economically, Learning Continuously and Sharing Generously.

Mr Puneet Dwivedi, Vice President (Scotland) for Hindu Forum of Britain, detailed the essential action of having a unified Hindu Environmental Charter, to be agreed and signed by all temples following on from their Environmental Assessment and formulation of an Environmental Policy. The closing prayer was recited by Mrs Harsha Shukla, Vice President (North) for Hindu Forum of Britain.

The training was received with great positivity and commitment. Dr Srihari Vallabhajousula, who represents the community on Interfaith Scotland, commented during the session on social media, "A very informative and productive webinar working on an Environmental Assessment & Management Toolkit for Hindu places of worship – the first in the series of events in the lead up to COP26. Attended by around 40 representatives from various Hindu groups across UK." Dr Srihari Vallabhajousula's viewpoint was echoed in the remarks of Dr Harsha Jani from the Param Shakti Peeth of UK group, who said, "I attended the training session. Much work has gone into preparing the guidelines. Must be shared widely."

Post event feedback has been extensive and has encouraged further nation-wide uptake, as with Mr. Avnish Thakrar from Hindu Climate Action who stated, "Excellent and very informative presentation. Thank you. I will try and get my local Mandir (temple) to do the assessment." A repeat of the first session will be organised as there have been multiple requests such as from Krishna Pradyumna Dasa, ISKON (Leicester), who asked, "For those who missed the training will there be a repeat or will guidelines be shared?"

Mrs Harsha Shukla, Vice President (North) highlights the enormous impact of having in place an Environmental Assessment & Management Plan for Hindu Temples & Samaj Buildings across the UK. She explains, "This means that temples all over the UK will start to use our Environmental Assessment & Management toolkit to surface all the points at which they can start or improve on existing environmentally friendly practices such as asking temple users all across UK to bring all fruits and sweets offerings in biodegradable packaging and using steel or biodegradable food trays at events and activities like elderly luncheon clubs, as well as sourcing groceries locally. This grassroots impact will be effected through many thousands of people across UK."

