

Rotary News

INDIA

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Yadhumanaval

A Project by Rotary Club of Virudhunagar Dist-3212

Goes Global Now



Yadhumanaval
at
Sri Lanka
19.02.2024
to
28.02.2024

She is Everything

We are proud to declare that the main speaker of the program Yadhumanaval Dr Jayanthasri Balakrishnan has touched the lives of 100,000 girls in India and Srilanka. A journey of 25 months.. 79 Sessions.

Dr Jayanthasri Balakrishnan is determined to reach out and inspire many others to become stronger version of themselves.

She helps all young girls to realise their potential and makes them to understand that they can do anything they put their mind to.

Girl students of various institutions are at the heart of the Yadhumanaval program - which aims to empower them across the Universe.

LEKHA a06/Mar 24/Rotary-I

IDHAYAM
PROMISE OF HEALTH AND HAPPINESS



Jayanthasri Balakrishnan
" SHE PAVES A PATH FOR GIRL CHILDREN TO BECOME STRONGER
VERSIONS OF THEMSELVES THROUGH HER MESMERIZING TALK."

Do you wish to organize Yadhumanaval
for the girl students of a school in
your town/city/district ?
We are waiting to partner with you.

Yadhumanaval Project Chairman
Rtn D. Vijayakumari
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Rotary relief for flood victims

The cover photo of the Feb issue is heartening as it depicts the pitiful condition of those affected by floods in South Tamil Nadu. But we can find solace from the fact that Rotarians forming different groups have distributed relief material to them.

RI President Gordon McNally explains well the importance of Rotarians maintaining good mental health, while the Editor's note focused on keeping a regular watch on people who are mentally disturbed and reaching out to them in time whenever required. RI Director Raju Subramanian has urged the clubs to make their proceedings interesting to new members in order to retain them. TRF trustee chair Barry Rassin highlighted the role of



Rotary Peace Centres. All the articles are thought-provoking, making us read them all in detail. The pictures are vivid and colourful. As a whole, the Feb issue is excellent, thanks to the editorial team.

*Philip Mulappone MT
RC Trivandrum
Suburban — D 3211*

education. Here the writer has magnanimously admitted that he is the underachiever in the family but having read most of his articles and knowing some of his activities in the past, I can vouch that none in the family can equal him in writing. Cheers

*APM Gopalakrishnan
RC Kottayam — D 3211*

In the Editor's note, you are spot on in urging Rotarians to keep their eyes open and reach out to help persons suffering from depression. At the same time, our thrust should be on the eradication of social evils that result in mental illness leading to miserable consequences. Since depression rates are higher in females than males, Rotarians should take up projects for the mental health of women. The editorial is penned at a right time when the world is grappling with mental health issues.

*Arun Kumar Dash
RC Baripada — D 3262*

LBW: A delightful read

Whenever I receive *Rotary News* I always turn to the last page first to read the LBW column written by TCA Srinivasa Raghavan. I enjoy his inimitable style of writing, describing ordinary life situations and comparing them to the greater reality of life.

Read in the Jan issue about his childhood prank along with three miscreant school mates. One landed in jail. The other two? Here is the masterstroke from the writer: They probably became politicians. I laughed aloud and now wait for the next issue to turn to the last page first.

*Sasidharan K
RC Mavelikara — D 3211*

I endorse the views of Srinivasa Raghavan in his LBW column on the issue of rough driving (Jan issue).

In my place, Erode, the drivers of vehicles like school vans, commercial trucks and autorickshaws, apart from two-wheelers, are negligent, rash, indifferent, aggressive and treat law-abiding drivers with disdain. Traffic rules are obeyed only in the breach. The other day, a school van driver at a road intersection did not like my crossing his path, though I was doing it as per law. He moved his van so close to my car that the other occupants in my car prayed to god for safety.

The golden rule is that, "drive as you like on the road, but without hitting others. After all, love rules and rules are not loved."

V Pasupathi, RC Erode — D 3203

This has reference to the LBW column. Our country is known for its inequalities in wealth, power and

A unique walkathon

It is heart-touching to see that RC Bharuch and RK hospital have organised a walkathon for a group of 300 people covering elderly and disabled persons in large.

Since mental health is the thrust programme of RI president, club president Rizwana Talkin Zamindar took this initiative for the special people. Hats off to her and her team for bringing out this wonderful opportunity for the disabled and it would have been a memorable event in their life.

*N Jagatheesan
RC Eluru — D 3020*

To project RI President McNally's focus area of mental health, RC Bharuch joined hands with RK Hospital and other service

LETTERS

organisations to hold a walkathon for the differently-abled ones and elderly people. Club president Rizwana's work for the handicapped engages people, creates positive vibes, inclusiveness, empathy and mental wellness. Around 300 persons including Rotarians, volunteers of other partners, companions of elders, and the blind with their aides participated. The happiness of the participants when receiving the medal can be imagined. A project executed with so much care and empathy needs to be emulated.

VRT Dorairaja
RC Tiruchirapalli — D 3000

It is interesting to read the article 'Learn about the good stress' by Bharat and Shalan Savur. It rightly points out that stress is a result of one's mental and emotional state of mind.

A relatively new word 'eustress' introduced by endocrinologist Hans Selye is explained as the type of stress that leads to positive response. Eustress helps us to prepare our mind to tackle new and difficult projects. The last paragraph gives a number of tips to embrace eustress like learning new things, trying to be out of your comfort zone etc. My congratulations to the authors.

M Palaniappan
RC Madurai West — D 3000

Rotary News, my music therapy

I always prefer a hard copy of *Rotary News*. Pictures attract not only me but most of the people who love music before reading the lines on it. Cover photos are unique and display our unity in diversity.

Articles like *Girls empowered through Project Asmita*, *Rotary's*

absence in Gaza explained, *A Rotary Mithai Mission for our soldiers* and *Friendship beyond borders* are all interesting and impressive.

RIPN's views in the article *No fake clubs, no bogus members, no cooking up numbers* is true and need to be followed diligently as he talked about healthy membership.

Soumitra Chakraborty, RC Calcutta
Universe — D 3291

A self-defeating car rally?

The snippet 'Car rally spreads climate change awareness' under *Project Vignettes* is rather intriguing. While details are sparse, it says the rally traversed 5,905km in 14 days. I presume several cars were involved. The emission from these cars would have added to the pollution and global warming, which is the reason for the desperate move towards EV cars around the world. If the cars involved were not EV cars, then isn't there a contradiction in this rally trying to promote climate change awareness?

Though I am not a Rotarian, I was a participant many years ago in your Group Study Exchange programme. I happened to see your wonderful

magazine and read about the good work Rotary does around the country.

C Gopinath

Thank you for referring the reader's response, which makes us happy that questions are being raised on the emission/carbon impact created by our journey. This is a testimony to the awareness we wanted to create. Ours is a solo car rally during which we promoted anti-plastic awareness, reforestation and the need to preserve the ecology.

We believe electric vehicles are not the right replacement to automobiles running on fuel for a few reasons. The batteries require immense mining of precious minerals and there aren't cent per cent recycling systems ready yet for the discarded batteries. Answering the question raised, in order to carbon neutralise our travel, just before starting the journey we set up a nursery to raise 32,320 saplings. We will be planting the saplings this year to meet this goal. Even though we may not achieve 'net zero,' the important objective was to raise awareness and we shall strive to lead by example.

Sivabala Rajendran
RC Chennai Meraki — D 3232

On the cover: RI President Gordan McNally and RI Director Raju Subramanian with RID 3220 DG Jerome K Rajendram, DIR Amir Akram, DRR Sathma Jayasinghe, Rotaractors and Interactors in Sri Lanka.

Picture by Rasheeda Bhagat.

We welcome your feedback. Write to the Editor: rotarynews@rosaonline.org; rushbhagat@gmail.com. Mail your project details, along with hi-res photos, to rotarynewsmagazine@gmail.com.

Messages on your club/district projects, information and links on zoom meetings/webinar should be sent only by e-mail to the Editor at rushbhagat@gmail.com or rotarynewsmagazine@gmail.com.

WHATSAPP MESSAGES WILL NOT BE ENTERTAINED.



Think like a Rotary Peace Fellow

There are many pathways to peace, and in Rotary, we are fortunate to have Rotary Peace Fellows who demonstrate this truth time and again. Each year, Rotary awards up to 130 fellowships for leaders around the world to study peace and development, and what these peace fellows learn prepares them to work in conflict prevention and resolution and promote Positive Peace. Here are a few examples of the creative ways peace fellows advance peace:

Promoting sustainability

Alejandra Rueda-Zarate combined her Rotary Peace Fellowship in peace and conflict resolution with her master's degree in energy and resources to support her dream of protecting the Colombian countryside.

She founded the organisation NES Naturaleza in 2011 to help farmers in Colombia and across rural Latin America gain access to knowledge and training to uphold sustainable farming standards. That support has improved the lives of nearly 4,500 farmers, inspiring many of them to become entrepreneurs. And it's helped promote both natural and social sustainability throughout Latin America.

Ending racism

Peace fellows Geoffrey Diesel and Kathy Doherty have applied their fellowships in peace and development studies toward co-founding the Racial Equity Project, a subcommittee of Rotary Positive Peace Activators in North America committed to studying ways to create a more peaceful society through anti-racism efforts.

The Racial Equity Project takes a deep look into how the eight pillars of Positive Peace could support efforts to address racism, and it works to spread this message to communities across North America. The organisation initially grew from Rotary's strategic partnership with the Institute for Economics and Peace, a global think tank dedicated to promoting Positive Peace.

Managing disasters using data

Through a Rotary Peace Fellowship, Jamie LeSueur earned a master's degree in social science within peace and conflict research. He now leads emergency operations for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, setting a management and operational framework for agency collaboration in emergency response situations.

Jamie has found that research data is a powerful tool to bring calm to the complex world of disaster response. No matter what an organisation's protocols might entail, letting research be the foundation for decision making helps clarify even the most complicated emergencies. These stories — and hundreds like them — show how Rotary is creating a generation of leaders ready and able to build peace worldwide. Nearly 1,800 peace fellows have graduated from Rotary Peace Centers, and they are applying their craft in more than 140 countries. May the continuing work of peace fellows and the Rotary members who support them inspire you to continue to *Create Hope in the World* through service, fundraising and creative thinking.

Gordon McNally

President, Rotary International



Mourning two gentle giants of India...

February 20/21 were tragic days for India as we lost two of our iconic citizens, who we grew up worshipping as heroes. Both were tall figures, one was the brilliant legal luminary Fali Nariman, who never hesitated to speak the truth and was fearless. As mentioned in the tribute written by senior advocate Sriram Panchu, “he was the public intellectual par excellence, who kept standards of probity at a premium. Above all was his attitude to power. He cared a hoot for the power of power, and for those who wielded it wrongly.” Immediately after the Emergency was proclaimed, he resigned as Additional Solicitor General and later, returned the briefs of the Gujarat government after an attack on Christians. “He was the tallest lawyer in the country, but he never became the Attorney General, no prizes for guessing why.”

The other person we lost was the much-loved Ameen Sayani, who kept us enchanted and entertained through his smooth-as-silk voice with adorable diction and use of the simple Hindustani language that could be understood by people across India, through his record radio show *Binaca Geetmala* on Radio Ceylon. Every Wednesday evening, lakhs of Indians crowded around their radios to hear his delightful commentary about the best and most popular Hindi film songs of the week. We simply lapped up his brief comments about the song and were transported to another world as the most melodious music created by the best of our musicians and rendered by Lata, Rafi, Mukesh, Kishore, Asha, Manna Dey, Hemant and others filled our homes and hearts. A generation that has grown up with millions of melodies at their command at a mere

touch on their mobile phones can never even imagine how eagerly we used to wait for Wednesdays in an era sans television, mobiles, and other music systems. Only the wealthy could afford the gramophone in the early 1950s when the show began.

It's worth reflecting why these two gentlemen have left such an indelible mark on those of us who had the privilege of knowing them through their work and their presence in the public domain. Not only were both thorough gentlemen in their dealing with others, there was a gentleness and softness in their manner and speech, as well as an old-world charm in their very personality. They wore their fame and influence over such large number of Indians so lightly. These are indeed rare qualities today, when we see around us so much of boorishness and flaunting of power, loudness and arrogance and a near-total absence of the gumption and the courage to stand up and speak up for what is right... to speak up for the downtrodden, fight against discrimination, and refrain from singing hosannas to those in power... be it in politics, business and industry or various professions.

Just one example is enough; these days inadequate, unjustified, irrelevant and out of context references are being made on a prominent Bollywood actress by one of our mainstream politicians from whom we expected better. Compare this to Ameen Sayani who always opened his *Geetmala* show with ‘*Behno aur bhaiyo*’. It was always the woman first; how many of our politicians do that in their speeches? And mind you, those weren't even days when the gender equity discourse, forget the DEI mantra, was on the horizon!

Rasheeda Bhagat

Customise your convention



The Rotary International Convention in Singapore will offer so many special events and exclusive experiences that you'll want to make a plan to make the most of your time.

Come early or stay after the May 25–29 convention to take a tour curated for Rotary members or meet with potential business partners in this economic powerhouse, home to so many big corporations. And be sure to register for an extra event to mingle with fellow members.

The Host Organisation Committee has tours for you in Singapore and the region. Book at rotarysingapore2024.org. One convenient three-day tour in neighbouring Malaysia includes a Kuala Lumpur heritage walk and a batik fabric dying workshop.

A private tour to learn about the city's immigrants and hawker centre culture includes tastings at the food markets in Chinese, Indian and Malay neighbourhoods.

Rotarians from the area invite you to Host Hospitality Night, with cultural and food events at exquisite venues in the heart of the city. At the Rotary Foundation Donor Summit, a general session-style event, members will hear stories about the impact of their support. Major Donors and members of the Arch Klumph, Legacy, Paul Harris and Bequest societies can register on the convention site.

Rotary Youth Exchange alumni can connect and share ideas at the Youth Exchange Officers Preconvention May 24–25.

And stick around after the convention for the Asia Pacific Regional Rotaract Conference June 1–4. Whichever Rotary-only experiences you choose for your trip, you'll be *Sharing Hope With the World*.

Learn more and register at
convention.rotary.org

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Editor

Rasheeda Bhagat

Deputy Editor

Jaishree Padmanabhan

Administration and Advertisement Manager

Vishwanathan K

Rotary News Trust

3rd Floor, Dugar Towers,
34 Marshalls Road, Egmore
Chennai 600 008, India.

Phone: 044 42145666

rotarynews@rosaonline.org

www.rotarynewsonline.org



Magazine

Director speak



Global effort for a healthier world

and sanitation training in villages ensures that the benefits of improved WASH practices reach every corner, promoting lasting change.

Since 2013, Rotary clubs, in partnership with TRF, have invested over \$130 million in more than 2,000 WASH projects globally. This collective effort underscores the pivotal role of volunteers of action in enhancing access to safe and basic WASH services in communities, schools and healthcare facilities, while also preserving water resources for future generations.

In collaboration with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Rotary actively assists communities and governments in planning, financing, and delivering safe water, sanitation and hygiene services. This holistic approach ensures the sustainable management of water resources, promoting resilience and self-sufficiency in the communities.

As we reflect on the impactful work carried out by Rotary clubs globally, let March be a month of recognition and celebration for our shared commitment to create a world where everyone has access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene. Each local initiative contributes to Rotary's larger journey of service and transformative change on a global scale, marking another milestone in our collective pursuit of a healthier and more sustainable world.

Anirudha Roychowdhury

RI Director, 2023–25

As March unfolds, Rotary takes centre stage in celebrating its steadfast commitment to addressing the critical issues of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Across the globe, Rotary clubs actively engage in impactful initiatives, making great strides in these essential areas.

Collaborating with partners such as World Vision, UNICEF, Red Cross and Clean Water to Schools, Rotary clubs play a critical role in implementing WASH projects in their communities. From the development of gender-specific toilets to the installation of sanitary pad vending machines and training sessions on menstrual hygiene, these local efforts contribute to creating hygienic environments, fostering health, and eliminating barriers to education.

Beyond the Wash in Schools programme, Rotary clubs initiate diverse projects in collaboration with local organisations. Rainwater harvesting, river rejuvenation and pond excavation are examples of initiatives that not only stimulate local economies but also foster sustainable development. Simultaneously, hygiene

More than a basic necessity



Rotary's focus turns to two themes this month. March is Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Month, and we celebrate World Rotaract Week March 11–17. Both WASH and Rotaract are near and dear to me.

Clean water, basic sanitation, and proper hygiene are fundamental human rights, yet a staggering 2.2 billion people still lack access to safe drinking water.

We're taking action. Over the past decade, your Rotary Foundation has invested more than \$180 million in over 2,500 water and sanitation projects worldwide. Rotary is on the ground making a difference through global grant-supported projects funded by your contributions to the Foundation.

But Rotary can't do it alone. We have partnered with organisations like USAID to deliver large-scale solutions. The Rotary-USAID partnership has helped thousands access water and sanitation services in the Dominican Republic, Ghana, the Philippines and Uganda.

Our Foundation is the connector for other water partnerships, too. This was the case when I worked with leaders from Rotary District 7020 to set up the Haiti National Water, Sanitation and Hygiene initiative, known as HANWASH. Foundation grants continue to play a critical role in our strategy of working with nongovernmental organisations, municipalities and government agencies in communities throughout Haiti.

Rotary efforts to connect people with clean water go beyond providing a basic necessity. We are paving the way for healthier communities and brighter futures, and doing so in a sustainable manner. With access to water, communities enhance education levels, improve health, and further development.

When we talk about partnerships, we can't forget our closest ally, right here in the family of Rotary: Rotaract. The engagement, energy and ideas of Rotaract complement the experience of Rotary clubs and increase our collective impact.

Yet many Rotary members still do not know that, as of 2022, Rotaract club activities can be included in district grants, and they are eligible for global grants, expanding avenues for collaboration. I encourage all Rotary and Rotaract clubs to foster closer collaboration and engagement in our Foundation, whether it's rolling up their sleeves on a project or giving. We all know that in Rotary, great opportunities are always around the corner. When you combine water and sanitation projects, Rotaract, and the Foundation, all will become a big part of your life, as they have in mine — and not just this month, but forever.

Barry Rassin
TRF Trustee Chair

An investment for the future

Recently I visited the De Los Santos Medical Center in Manila, Philippines, and saw a congenital heart surgery, a project of RC Makati West. The club has been doing paediatric cardiac surgeries with the help of TRF grants over the last 19 years.



In the pre-operative ward, there were 10 children waiting for their turn. Next to them were their mothers. The mothers' eyes reflected two emotions — anxiety and hope. Anxiety about how the surgery would go, whether the child will become alright; and hope that at long last there is this organisation Rotary which has offered a chance to the children to get operated and live a normal life. Truly, TRF is all about hope. Hope for the sick, needy, illiterate and homeless. Hope of a better world.

One thing is certain. Foundation programmes work only when we support TRF. Too often we underestimate the power of a smile, a kind word, a small act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around. The Rotary Foundation goes beyond that smile, caring touch, kind word. Through global grants and other impactful TRF programmes we touch lives and transform communities.

TRF grants are taking Rotary in a new and meaningful direction. The impact of grants goes far beyond helping the beneficiaries. It helps to engage members, gives a positive public image of Rotary and is a great retention tool too. In short a multiplier effect.

As we celebrate the 119th anniversary of Rotary it is time to build on our past and step forward into the future. A future where Rotary is respected and more relevant than ever before. Thanks to TRF.

It is our responsibility to strengthen TRF by giving what we can every year. Remember the joy of giving lasts longer than the joy of getting. When you receive a gift the joy you get exponentially decreases, a phenomenon known as hedonic adaptation. But study after study shows that participants' happiness did not decline when they gave a gift joyfully and unconditionally.

TRF is our investment for the future — the future of our children and their children; the future of our world. Lead the way in giving to TRF. Enjoy Rotary.

Bharat Pandya
TRF Trustee Vice Chair

Rotarians!

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Rotary at a glance

Rotary clubs : 36,851

Rotaract clubs : 10,732

Interact clubs : 15,291

RCCs : 13,319

Rotary members : 1,172,671

Rotaract members: 161,606

Interact members : 351,785

As on February 20, 2024

Membership Summary

As on February 1, 2024

RI District	Rotary Clubs	No of Rotarians	Women Rotarians (%)	Rotaract Clubs	Rotaract Members	Interact Clubs	RCC
2981	140	6,011	6.08	73	503	34	254
2982	84	3,777	6.15	42	885	95	181
3000	140	5,970	11.92	120	1,782	250	216
3011	135	5,066	29.50	88	2,387	153	37
3012	167	4,168	24.52	77	1,147	100	61
3020	80	4,705	7.53	46	845	121	351
3030	100	5,699	16.58	50	814	521	384
3040	111	2,405	14.28	41	800	79	213
3053	72	2,893	16.60	27	408	42	131
3055	76	3,013	12.39	69	1,076	74	377
3056	87	3,751	24.37	34	461	105	201
3060	103	5,149	15.86	68	2,241	63	144
3070	119	3,260	15.86	49	594	52	63
3080	108	4,266	12.58	63	1,854	172	124
3090	125	2,675	6.13	20	367	194	166
3100	110	2,206	10.83	13	58	36	151
3110	138	3,782	11.30	18	127	48	108
3120	89	3,645	15.64	45	573	28	55
3131	141	5,650	30.94	122	2,886	264	149
3132	91	3,687	13.77	44	638	125	207
3141	115	6,299	27.58	140	5,865	172	226
3142	105	3,792	21.44	64	2,283	116	96
3150	109	4,312	13.49	156	2,018	113	130
3160	79	2,583	8.79	32	257	95	82
3170	151	6,662	15.16	123	1,914	199	180
3181	87	3,660	10.57	44	479	94	121
3182	86	3,687	10.45	47	235	106	103
3191	93	3,500	18.22	90	3,113	148	35
3192	83	3,442	21.38	85	2,376	136	40
3201	175	6,770	9.93	139	2,612	102	93
3203	95	4,866	7.22	83	1,191	189	39
3204	76	2,452	6.97	24	237	17	13
3211	160	5,122	8.42	9	97	20	135
3212	124	4,642	11.36	96	3,715	167	153
3231	95	3,394	6.95	39	515	46	417
3232	188	6,215	19.89	130	5,134	158	100
3240	103	3,524	16.84	47	785	69	230
3250	106	4,076	22.20	71	983	65	191
3261	98	3,313	22.09	25	252	32	45
3262	115	3,773	15.62	78	759	645	286
3291	144	3,817	25.89			73	742
India Total	4,603	171,679		2,631	55,266	5,318	7,030
3220	69	1,961	16.52	97	4,093	80	77
3271	108	1,512	21.05	194	2,075	333	28
0063 (3272)	126	1,300	18.57	97	1,281	26	47
0064 (3281)	332	7,437	17.54	249	1,764	143	213
0065 (3282)	179	3,530	9.58	179	1,352	27	45
3292	154	5,450	18.67	185	5,373	124	135
S Asia Total	5,571	192,869	15.69	3,632	71,204	6,051	7,575

Source: RI South Asia Office

Sri Lankan Rotarians combat cancer

Rasheeda Bhagat

Imagine a world where whispers don't turn into screams. Where tiny abnormalities are caught before they morph into monsters. This is the transformative power of early detection, especially for breast and cervical cancer. A mammogram could re-write your destiny. A test kit could detect the earliest stage of cervical cancer and hold the key to unlock a healthier future," says PRIP K R Ravindran.

Cancer had stolen so many mothers, daughters and friends. This is the reality millions face each year, particularly when battling breast and cervical cancer.

Rotary Club of Colombo, Sri Lanka, RI District 3220, and the Rotary Club of Birmingham, Alabama, US, together with The Rotary Foundation refused to accept this situation as fate. Says Nirmali Samaratunga from RC Colombo, one of the key movers of the project: "Our Rotarians refused to let fear steal another life. That's why we embarked on a mission, to detect these cancers early, when hope blooms brightest."

Past president of the club Derek Wijeyaratne adds: "We set out to build

not just an Early Detection Centre, but a bridge to a future where early intervention saves lives, where fear gives way to empowerment, and hope becomes the guiding star."

A Rotary, government, TRF partnership

They set up a standalone facility with building and equipment completely dedicated for screening for early detection and prevention of cancer, and providing such services at no cost. The centre offers screening for early detection of breast, cervical and oral cancer.

In Sri Lanka breast cancer had the highest incidence amongst all cancers; this Rotary Centre offered a full-fledged breast cancer screening service with first an advanced digital mammography machine and later an ultrasound machine which became critical for detection and confirming diagnosis. Till now this centre has screened over 95,000 women, with over 25,000 detections of abnormalities requiring further investigation. All this free of cost.

This centre was so good that it became integrated into the country's National Breast Cancer Screening

MoU signing: (Seated from L)
Dilmah chairman Dilhan Fernando,
Sri Lanka health secretary Dr P B Mahipala, RC Colombo president Migara Alwis, and RI President Gordon McInally. (Standing, from L) PDG Pubudu De Zoysa, DGN Kumar Sundararaj, PRIP K R Ravindran, RI Director Raju Subramanian and RID 3220 DG Jerome Rajendram.



Programme — a significant recognition of Rotary efforts by the government.

Samaratunga says, “Whenever we spoke about the Rotary Colombo project, we only used two sets of numbers; how many women had been screened, and how many had shown abnormalities requiring further investigation. Those numbers were the measure of our club’s success. The number of women with a positive screen was the number of women to whom we had at least given a better chance at a complete cure. But we soon realised that we needed to go further in our evaluation.”

Past president Tony Alles adds, “The screening process is only the first step in the cancer journey. After all, each positive screen was not really a success, but only the first step on a path, that no one really chooses to walk.”

Cervical cancer can be eliminated

Apart from breast cancer, in Sri Lanka each year, almost 1,500 women are

Cancer steals so many mothers, daughters and friends. This is the reality millions face each year when battling breast and cervical cancer.

PRIP K R Ravindran

diagnosed with cervical cancer; whilst the number of deaths from cervical cancer are over 700 each year.

Dr Edward Partridge, a cancer specialist from the Birmingham club, pointed out that almost all of that suffering could have been prevented, because cervical cancer is nearly always the result of the Human Papilloma Virus, known as HPV, and what’s more, it is the only cancer that has a vaccine. This makes it the only

cancer that can be entirely prevented, thus opening up the possibility of complete elimination.

He explained that HPV vaccination in young girls protects them from the disease and HPV detection at screening identifies those women who may harbour a pre-cancer which can be treated early and prevented from becoming a full-blown cancer.

There was palpable excitement amongst the members of the Colombo Rotary when they learned this. “We realised that we could actually eliminate cervical cancer from our country,” said Alles.

So in theory, all that needed to be done was to vaccinate all girls in the age group 10–14, and screen women between 35 and 45 for the HPV virus. The vaccine gives lifetime immunity and the critical testing side-by-side enables the detection of the virus which might have already infected the women. Around 7 per cent of the women tested were found carrying the virus.





At the handing over of the mammography equipment: PRIP K R Ravindran along with PDG Pubudu de Zoysa and other core members of the cancer combat project.

Full cost of vaccines funded

The government showed its commitment by agreeing to Rotary's request of funding the full cost of vaccines; a huge win for Rotary! With this, the country achieved vaccination levels of over 90 per cent. Ed Partridge confirmed that these types of numbers were almost unheard of anywhere in the world.

Rotary gifted an advanced technology, Cobas 4800 HPV DNA machine, capable of testing for large

numbers and identifying the high-risk virus strains which caused cervical cancer. This test which identified the cervical cancer-causing virus was very viable and doable, compared to the complexity of Pap smear programmes which often faced resistance and involved much longer time to get results.

The club also ran a countrywide comprehensive publicity programme to educate and create greater public awareness on the need for screening

and the necessity for the early detection of cervical cancer.

RC Birmingham brought in their experts from the University of Alabama's famous O'Neal Cancer Center to help build a training of trainer programme for public health personnel with emphasis on midwives. The midwife system in Sri Lanka is extremely effective. Midwives were the key communicators with the target group that needed to be screened.

Meanwhile, the government fulfilled its obligation of providing the vaccines.

Corporate partnership

However, disaster struck in the form of the economic collapse of the government and it did not have the resources to supply the test kits as pledged after the stock provided by Rotary was over.

As Samaratunga points out, "vaccination by itself is not enough. It must go hand-in-hand with the screening and testing process to make a serious impact."

It was a serious setback, but the Colombo Rotarians would not be deterred. They sought out and encouraged a corporate donor to fill



How Dilmah was brought on board

Speaking to *Rotary News* on his family foundation making such a big commitment of SLR 75 million for the first year towards the cause of eliminating cervical cancer from Sri Lanka, Dilma Tea chairman and CEO, the disarming and affable Dilhan Fernando said: “The business philosophy of my late father was that a minimum of 15 per cent of our pre-tax profits should go towards philanthropy.”

While he was walking with PRIP KR Ravindran recently, “he told me about this project and how it comprehensively addresses preventable and curable cervical cancer in Sri Lanka. He told me that while the government has given great support to this excellent project, competing priorities in a difficult economic situation in the

country required help from other sources. When Ravi mentioned this to me, I felt this has to be corrected and I am so very happy that today we are signing the MoU with the government and Rotary.”

While this year his foundation has committed SLR 75 million for this project, “every year we will assess the work that has been done... just as we do in any business we undertake, and after that assessment, we will help accordingly in the next few years.”

He added that the Dilmah Charitable Foundation executes its charitable projects directly; “apart from this, we do 150 projects for children, women, housing, nutrition, etc. We have some 300 people in the field to execute these projects,” he said.

So is he a Rotarian? Dilhan smiles and says, “I was a Rotarian and member of RC Colombo Metropolitan,

but I travel a lot and so got kicked out for lack of attendance! But now they have called to say there is no more insistence on attendance, so I plan to rejoin.”

While the corporate, the government and the Rotarians are committed to ensuring the sustainability and continuity of this project which hopes to eliminate cervical cancer from Sri Lanka by 2030, Ravindran, a close friend of Dilmah founder, the late Merrill J Fernando, says “Merrill’s philosophy was ‘Business is a matter of human service!’ As a trustee of their Foundation, I can tell you firsthand that they spend over \$3 million per annum in their philanthropy efforts each year. Thanks to them, we at RC Colombo are happy that our goal of eliminating cervical cancer by 2030 is back on track!”



From L: RI President Gordon McNally, Dilmah Tea chairman Dilhan Fernando and PRIP K R Ravindran.

the vacuum left by the government. The Dilmah Charitable Foundation stepped in. Together with Rotary and the government they would ensure the sustainability and continuity of the screening operation with a joint vision for Sri Lanka to be cervical cancer free by 2030.

The MoU

An MoU to formalise this partnership was signed on Jan 23 this year between the project partners with MJF (Dilmah) Charitable Foundation which pledged about SLR 75 million, the government committing an additional SLR 35 million and RC Colombo members donating another SLR 26 million to cement this partnership.

The goal of eliminating cervical cancer by 2030 was back on track!

The MoU was signed by Dilhan Fernando, chairman of Dilmah Tea, Migara Alwis, president, RC Colombo, and Dr PG Mahipala, Sri Lanka's health secretary, in the presence of RI President Gordon McNally and RI director Raju Subramanian.

Rotary and their partners Dilmah Foundation and the government of Sri Lanka were writing a new chapter in the fight against breast and cervical cancer. Each mammogram, each child vaccinated, each woman tested meant possibly a life saved. It was a testament to the power of collective action with Rotary acting as the main catalyst.

Summing up the project, PRIP Ravindran says, "Rotary Colombo's Cancer Early Detection Centre isn't just a building; it's a symbol of hope,



RC Birmingham executive director Susan Jackson (top left) along with other members of her club.

a beacon of progress, and a testament to what Rotarians can accomplish. It shows what can be achieved by a club if only it has the sustained dedication of individual members, imaginative initiative of Rotary leaders, the sincere commitment of a club and a magnanimous,

knowledgeable and hands-on partner like Rotary Birmingham. The icing on the cake is Dilmah coming on board; this represents the best of example of corporate leadership."

Pictures by Rasheeda Bhagat

For 27 years now, Rotary Club of Uklana Mandi, RID 3090, has been funding the weddings of young women from disadvantaged families in the district. The Rotarians also shower the newly-weds with gifts such as utensils, mattresses, clothes, furniture and other household articles essential to start a home. The weddings are conducted on January 14 every year, commemorating *Makara Sankranti*, says club secretary Sujan Chand Goyal.

This year the club, along with Rotaract Club of Uklana Mandi, helped solemnise the marriages of five young women with the grooms finalised by their respective families. The club members pitched in with ₹4.5 lakh to conduct the weddings and presented the newly-weds with household articles. DG Ghanshyam Kansal, DRR Vipul Mittal, district secretary Narayan Garg, along with RC Uklana Mandi president Vijay Garg, and the

Rotarians fund marriages

Team Rotary News



DG Ghanshyam Kansal, club president Vijay Garg, zonal secretary Narain Garg, AG Vijender Gar and DRR Vipul Mittal at the wedding ceremony. Chief guest Mohan Lal Singhal and his spouse Sunita are also present.

Rotaract club president Rajat Soni, attended the wedding event.

Club members Bajrang Mohan Soni, Naveen Bansal and Vijender Garg

were the project chairmen. "We have solemnised the marriages of nearly 400 girls so far. Our initiative is very popular in this region," says Goyal. ■

A mega CPR training drive in Surat

Team Rotary News

The best help a person can give someone suffering from a sudden cardiac arrest is administer CPR. Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) can bring back the heartbeat and help save valuable lives. It is important for every individual to be trained in CPR, says Dr Prashant Kariya who leads *Project Sanjivani*, a mass CPR training programme being conducted by RC Surat Riverside, RID 3060.

SCA (sudden cardiac arrest) can happen to anyone. A seemingly fit player can collapse mid-match in a field or a dancer's electrifying performance can come to a screeching halt as she suffers an SCA and crumples on the floor. "Ninety five percent of those who experience SCA die because they do not receive lifesaving support within the 'golden' 4 to 6 minutes," he

says. SCA causes stoppage of circulation of blood to various organs of the body. The cessation of blood supply, and hence oxygen and other nutritional substances to the brain, result in unresponsiveness.

CPR is the only lifesaving technique available to maintain the blood flow to brain and heart till

advance help is available. The earlier CPR is provided, better the chance of survival. Every minute delay in CPR will decrease the victim's chance of survival by 17 percent," says Kariya.

RC Surat Riverside initiated *Project Sanjivani* in 2017 to train people in CPR so that they can be life savers in emergencies. "In the last six years we have done 500 sessions and trained almost two lakh people including students, teachers, professionals, police officers, nurses and even students of schools for the physically disabled," he says.

Kariya and his team of 13 doctors carry out these workshops to teach people to identify an SCA situation, provide chest compressions and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to maintain blood flow to the vital organs. The training sessions also include mastering the use of defibrillators and delivering shock treatment. ■



Project chair Dr Prashant Kariya (L) teaches CPR technique to Gujarat Home Minister Harsh Sanghavi (R).



Dr Kariya (centre) and his team at a workshop for physiotherapists.

Rotary-Rotaract relationship is still evolving: **RI President**

Rasheeda Bhagat

At a hall filled with enthusiastic Rotaractors and Interactors in Colombo, RI District 3220, RI President Gordon McInally and RI director Raju Subramanian interacted with the youngsters, answering their questions, clearing their doubts, recognising the projects they do and encouraging them to grow the organisation.

“What is widely known is that I joined Rotary through RC South Queensferry in 1984, but I was also a Rotaractor and my personal Rotaract

journey began three years earlier in a Rotaract club, and being a Rotaractor gave me the opportunity to join Rotary. And today, I stand before you as the president of RI. Someone once asked me that when I was inducted as a member of my club was it your ambition to become RI president? And I had to confess that I didn’t even know at that time that there was a president of RI!”

But, he added, “there might well be an RI president in this very room and I’d like to think one day one of you will become the leader of our organisation. This is indeed an opportunity

in this amazing Rotary family with 1.4 million people in over 200 countries, all with a similar mindset to do good in the world and make it a better place.”

His own personal goal, the RI president added, was to make the world a better place for his own grandchildren and all the children of the world, through the wonderful opportunity Rotary had given him.

But being Rotaractors also gave them personal opportunities to grow as leaders, develop skills and “recognise that we are very different people and to celebrate that.” A big fan of rugby,

RI President Gordon McInally interacting with DIR Amir Akram as (from L) Rtr Amjad Yoosuf, RI Director Raju Subramanian and RID 3220 DG Jerome K Rajendram look on.



Don't chase awards

At the Colombo meet, District Interact Representative (DIR) Amir Akram asked RI President Gordon McNally on how RI would recognise on the global stage the good work they did, giving example of one of their projects. Recently the Kandy National Hospital in Sri Lanka needed blood and had contacted him for his help. "We collected 185 blood bags through an Interact club at a school and passed them on to the hospital. Later I got a letter from the National Hospital thanking Interactors and saying that but for the blood bags they had given so many people would have lost their lives."

President McNally said, "Rotary recognises and promotes your work and we regularly see Rotaractors involved in district conference, zone institutes and conventions."

RID Raju Subramanian added: "One advice I'd like to give Rotaractors and Interactors is that don't run after awards; let the awards run after you. If you do good work, awards will run after you. I had never got an RI presidential citation. The then RI President John Kenny wanted me to create a new club, but I closed down three because I didn't think they deserved to remain in Rotary. But did that deter me? No. I am sitting here today as the RI director. So what does that piece of paper mean? It means nothing, so let's not run after awards."

He also advised the young assembly: "Please learn to work together; that is one thing that is hampering our organisation today. We need to work together, we need to show a united face to the world. Differences may be there, but they must be settled without involving our egos. And once we present a united picture, focus on what we do, and share our stories, I am sure that the movement will grow and you will automatically get recognised."

Congratulating them "for the fantastic work you do in Sri Lanka in areas such as cervical cancer, schools in Jaffna, etc," he urged them to "sell you stories. Once such stories touch a person's heart he/she will surely join our organisation."

which he used to play as a young man, he always made a comparison between rugby and Rotary. Various players in a strong rugby team brought very different skills to the table — some could run fast, some were strong and had the ability to hold on to the ball, others could kick the ball long distances very accurately. "But only when these different talents in the team were combined, the team could go on to do great things."

The same holds good in Rotary; when Rotarians from different countries brought their unique and individual abilities to any work or goal, "together they can do great things. That is why we need not only senior Rotarians but also young people like Rotaractors and Interactors because you bring so much ability and energy into the organisation." According

to the official website *Rotaract in RID 3220*, the district has over 90 Rotaract clubs with more than 5,000 Rotaractors.

**When I plant something,
I want to make sure that
plant develops strong roots
and becomes established.
And that's what we need to
do with our new members.**

**RI President
Gordon McNally**

McNally said that as he went across the world — he had already travelled to over 30 countries in 18 months — "many people ask me that you fly from country to country, continent to continent, how come you don't get tired? And I simply tell them that when I arrive anywhere and meet members of the Rotary family like yourselves, and see the energy of the audience, I get energy from them."

Touching upon his presidential theme of 'Creating hope in the world,'

the RI president said “I strongly believe this is the year we need hope in the world more than ever before. We are a very disunited world at present but a united organisation like Rotary, which of course includes all of you, can bring so much hope in the world in so many ways.” During his recent travel, he had met so many people who had been given hope by Rotary in different ways.

Recently in Ahmedabad, he had met Satish, who was confined to his wheelchair for most of his adult life; “I met him at a limb-fitting camp organised by Rotary. He came to the camp in his wheelchair, had his limb fitted and could return to his wife and family and provide for them, because of the hope Rotary was able to give him.”

In Pakistan, on World Polio Day he had met Ahmed, a child, and administered to him two drops of polio vaccine. “When I close my eyes, I see those two drops of polio vaccine falling into Ahmed’s mouth, but more important than that, the look of gratitude on his mother’s face. She knew that, thanks to Rotary, Rotaract and Interact, Ahmed would not suffer from a crippling disease such as polio. I know you are also creating hope for the people of your country, and I thank you for that.”

Later, in an interactive session where RID 3220 DRR Sathma Jayasinghe and District Interact Representative Amir Akram quizzed the two senior RI leaders on topics such as the relationship between Rotary, Rotaract

and Interact, the process of sanctioning global grants and Rotary’s adaptation and acceptance of the latest technological tools, President McNally said the “relationship between Rotary and Rotaract, after the CoL decision to make Rotaract a part of Rotary was taken, was still evolving but we can be complementary to each other. We all have different talents and Rotaract in particular has a different set of talent and we have to embrace that talent and ensure it can be utilised well to do service. We continue to evolve our relationship, and it will take a year or two before we know where we stand exactly.”

RID Raju Subramanian added that both Rotarians and Rotaractors could learn from one another. “It’s a mutual learning process. Let’s not assume that either of us knows everything. We need to assess each other and work together to make a huge impact on the world we live in. This synergy

From L: District Interact Committee Chair Manjula S Ratnasekera, RID Subramanian, DIR Akram and DG Rajendram.



will create magic, but there must be acceptability on both sides that ours is a life-long partnership.”

Responding to a question from DRR Sathma on adoption of new technology and accepting new challenges and technological tools, President McNally gave the example of the ice lolly in Scotland called zoom. “That was the only zoom we had known till Covid came and told us about the online platform called zoom. I was amazed at how quickly Rotarians adapted to different digital platforms and were soon holding meetings and implementing projects with active participation in online meetings.”

He gave the example of a recently formed Rotary club in Scotland called the Passport Club; “many of its members are from clubs that did not survive Covid, but others are new members. They may be a little older than the average age in this room (of Rotaractors and Interactors). My wife Heather is a member of this club and is about to become the club president, (by the way she has been president three times, I have been club president only once!) and when some members first said we’ll connect through WhatsApp,

**Don’t run after awards; let
the awards run after you. If
you do good work, awards
will run after you.**

**RI Director
Raju Subramanian**



DIR Akram puts a lapel pin on RI President McNally as DRR Sathma Jayasinghe looks on.

there was protest from many members saying ‘Oh no, we don’t do WhatsApp’. Anyway, the group was started and within a short time it was buzzing and the members are speaking to one another over it... they’ve found it’s a wonderful way of connecting!”

Interjecting RID Subramanian told DRR Sathma: “I think that question should have been put by President Gordon to you and not vice versa. You young people are so technologically savvy and fully aware of the future prospects of so many things. So create impact... not only among the people in your country but across the world, especially among Rotaractors. Rotaract is suffering, even in India, where we lost 40,000 members last year, that’s not a small number. But we are building up the numbers again.”

He added that Rotary as an organisation does so much good in the world, “but so many people don’t even know the major role we have played in bringing polio on the verge of extinction across the world. You are technically so savvy, and should

spread awareness about our work using technological tools.”

In response to another question, McNally said engagement and retention of members were very important. “We have to take care of them and make them comfortable when they join, because far too many people join Rotary and leave within a very short period of time... one in 10 people who joins Rotary today won’t be a member after 12 months from now. That is a cruel statistic which means that we are failing them... we are not engaging them.”

A keen gardener himself, he gave the example of the plants in his garden back home. “When I plant something, I want to make sure that plant develops strong roots and becomes established. And that’s what we need to do with our new members. We need to make sure they develop strong roots and get well established in Rotary. That is what somebody did for me 40 years ago when I joined my club. People took care of me, helped and engaged me.”

Pictures by Rasheeda Bhagat

Rotary check dams in Thane villages transform farmers' lives

Jaishree

Jadav, a farmer in a village in Thane district in Maharashtra, has recently planted almond saplings in his field.

“Watermelons, tomatoes and cucumber grown in the fields here are

now being exported,” says Hemant Jagtap, a member of RC Thane Premium, RID 3142, and a recipient of Rotary’s Service Above Self Award. The check dam constructed in Phugale village in this district has

helped Mathura, a widow with two children, cultivate bottle gourd in a small patch of land, “which has now expanded to 10,000sqft,” he adds.

Barely a few years ago, these farmers were battling for their survival, but Rotary clubs in Thane came to their rescue, and the groundwater table in several villages in this region has improved considerably and farmers are able to cultivate alternate cash crops now.

The project has helped provide water for 2 lakh tribal people, and 4,000 cattle in villages across Murbad, Shahapur, Bhiwandi, Talasari, Jawhar, Palghar, Vikramgad, Vasai, Dahanu and Wada taluks in Maharashtra.



A check dam in Assose village, Murbad, restructured by the club.



PRIP Kalyan Banerjee (centre) with (from L) project leader Hemant Jagtap, PDG Vijay Jalan, Purushottam Agawan and Pradeep Goyal at Adkhadak village, Jawhar taluk, where he inaugurated the check dam.



“The total project value till now is ₹17 crore. *Jal jeevan ka adhaar hai* (water is the basis of life),” says Jagtap.

He is instrumental in the construction of 496 check dams across villages in Thane district since 2005. “Earlier, when villagers experienced water scarcity and had to depend on the monsoon, they could cultivate just one crop. Women had to walk long distance to bring home water. Most families would migrate to nearby towns to take up menial jobs to earn a living. Children’s education invariably suffered. But now all these villages are thriving and the fields are green and prosperous,” he says.

Jagtap, a retired PWD executive engineer, was earlier a member of RC Thane Northend. He was drawn to the club’s discussion to find a solution to the water woes of Nehroli village in Wada taluk, and actively participated in the

construction of a basic check dam there in 2005 at a cost of ₹1.85 lakh. The facility was inaugurated by the then DGE Bharat Pandya. “He appreciated the project and encouraged us to design a ‘rural water management programme’ in 2006–07 when he was DG.” The club, along with other Rotary clubs in the district, focused on providing water solutions such as constructing check dams in villages, providing water filters in schools and piped water for households.

The Nehroli project which was exhibited at the annual meet of the Bombay Chamber of Commerce and Industry won support from corporates such as L&T, Balmer & Laurie, Kansai Nerolac and Deutsche Bank. “L&T, through its CSR wing, supported our project for five years from 2007 to build 200 check dams, and later, with our club matching ₹40 lakh, we added 50 more facilities. Lions

International has been partnering with us for the last three years to construct 12 check dams every year. An MoU is to be signed between Rotary and Lions next year for the construction of 20 check dams every year,” says Jagtap.

Over the years, TRF had approved nine global grants of \$30,000 each. “The construction cost works out to ₹4–7 lakh for each facility and we could do 5–6 check dams with each GG.” A GG with Rotary clubs in Japan as international partners helped construct five check dams worth ₹45 lakh in Jawhar taluk, and another GG worth \$211,000 with WASRAG (Water and Sanitation Rotary Action Group) as a partner provided the facility to nine more villages in the region. Water

purifiers were distributed to households under this project in 2011–12.

The project also includes restructuring rudimentary UCR (uncoursed rubble) masonry check dams built by various government agencies. “We have refurbished 16 such check dams,” he says.

Each concrete check dam, 10–20m long, can store 20–30 lakh litres of water, enough to irrigate 20–30 acres of land. “So far, the facilities in all these villages put together are irrigating around 9,900 acres of land, helping over 5,000 small farmers improve their income by an average ₹20,000 per acre per year.”

Jadav, a farmer in Talasari village, is happy that he can now grow vegetables as an additional crop, apart from paddy. With the availability of copious water,



At Sonavale village in Murbad.



Above: Jagtap and his spouse Rtn Yojana with villagers at a Jawhar village.



the yield is good. “It is a cycle. I am able to make good money, enough to take care of my fields which in turn gives me a bounty. I am able to provide education to my two daughters and also save for their future. If not for Rotary, we people would have been struggling for survival. We would have been forced to migrate to other towns and live a nomadic life,” he says.

Jagtap relates an incident where he had accompanied 30 students of the Singhania School in Thane on an educational tour to Sonavale village a couple of months ago to explain the water conservation concept. “Tired and thirsty after a tour around the check dams we had built in the village, we rested on the doorsteps of a villager and requested him for some water. When I thanked the villager for the water, I was so happy to hear him say: I thank you; because of your efforts we are getting this water.”

“I know the seriousness of water scarcity because I hail from drought-prone Dhule,” says Jagtap. He served



A farmer at his vegetable farm.

as president of the Rotaract Club of Dhule in 1988–89, joined RC Thane Northend in 1999 and is a member of RC Thane Premium since 2015. He, along with a team of trained volunteers, leads the water conservation projects for RIDs 3141 and 3142 as technical service providers. “We identify the site for the check dam, arrange funds and educate the local

communities about the project and the benefits it brings. In most places, we have to convince the villagers that the water stored in the check dams will not overflow into the fields. Once they understand the idea, they extend all help,” he says.

The Rotarians are confident of scaling up the total number of check dams to 500 by this yearend. ■

RID 3291 sets up a blood bank in Kolkata

Team Rotary News

Rotary Club of Calcutta, RID 3291, in association with the Howrah Municipal Corporation (HMC), has set up the district's first blood centre — the HMC Rotary Blood Centre — at Howrah, Kolkata. The facility was inaugurated in February by Arup Roy, state minister-in-charge for urban development.

HMC chairman Sujoy Chakraborty, RI Director Anirudha Roychowdhury, DG Hiralal Yadav, PRIP Shekhar Mehta, club president Kanak Dutt and the club's past president Vikram Somany were present at the event. The land for the facility was provided by HMC and Somany sponsored the equipment for this ₹1.1

crore-project through his company Cera Sanitaryware.

This blood bank, situated close to a blood transfusion centre for thalassaemia-affected children, will benefit not only those children, but also others in the neighbouring Hooghly district. The facility is fully digitised with a storage capacity of 800 bags every month, and the equipment is connected to a computer server which will control the network, collecting data and uploading it to the state health department daily. Arindam Roychowdhury, special projects chair of RID 3291, said the refrigerators for

blood and plasma storage, centrifuge machines, Elisa readers, etc are all state-of-the-art machines.

The blood bank will also have a blood transportation and collection van donated by RC Salt Lake City Calcutta, said its president Oindrilla Guho. This centre will benefit district Rotarians as they will get blood following a request letter from the club president.

Rotary clubs can invite the HMC Rotary Blood Centre for participation in blood donation camps and collection of blood pouches. In return, donor cards will be given to the clubs for helping the community. ■



West Bengal state minister-in-charge for urban development Arup Roy (centre) with PRIP Shekhar Mehta (fourth from L) and RC Calcutta president Kanak Dutt (third from L) at the inauguration of the blood bank. HMC chairman Sujoy Chakraborty is seen second from right.



RI Director Anirudha Roychowdhury (fourth from R) with (from L) Tapan Roy, Jaitra, District Special Projects chair Arindam Roychowdhury, Purnendu Roy Chowdhury, Sonia Dutt, Yogesh Dassani, club president Dutt, Ravindra Khandelwal, Raj Kumar Agrawal and Sarvani Goopto.



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Kerala & Pune

charm a German exchange student

Rasheeda Bhagat



Rotary Youth Exchange student Henry Clemens from Germany at the Taj Mahal, Agra.



I simply loved Kerala and can tell you that no available tourist literature captures the entire beauty of Kerala,” gushes Henry Clemens, 18, a Rotary Youth Exchange (RYE) student from North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, now in India on an RYE programme of RI District 3132. He is living with the family of Abhay Raje Jain from RC Ahmednagar Dignity, “but my host club is RC Ahmednagar Midtown.”

He is one in a group of eight other youth exchange students, seven from Latin America and one from France. “We have been travelling to a few cities such as Mumbai, Goa, and places in Kerala. I have to admit that I found Kerala so beautiful, that in the future when I think about India, Kerala’s unique beauty will pop up in my mind. Honestly, in Kerala, I could not distinguish whether we were in India or the Caribbean. I also thought unlike other

places, pollution wasn’t a problem in Kerala. I like Goa too and Mumbai, but frankly I preferred Pune to Mumbai.”

So Mumbai did not dazzle him as it does other youngsters of his age, I prod Henry. “No, no, I liked Mumbai, specially the Marine Drive, which was such a beautiful sight. But it was too crowded for my taste; I really like Pune because it offered everything that Mumbai offers. I would say there is nothing in Mumbai that you can’t get in Pune. Of course it’s not as big as Mumbai, where I travelled in trains which were rather crowded, but it was really worth an experience to cherish! Pune is quieter and more relaxed, and I really liked it.”

Henry, whose father is the mayor of the town he lives in, finished his school education last year



With RID 3132 DG Swati Herkal (seated, centre).

and learnt about the Rotary exchange programme when “our school principal, who is a member of the local Rotary club in Germany, wrote an email to the students graduating from the school about this opportunity. As he was also my math teacher, I was closer to him, and he guided me how to apply for it, and I did that as my college was starting only in mid-2024.”

He was selected and arrived in India in October 2023 and has travelled with other exchange students quite a bit in India. “I am enjoying my stay in India

and am very fond of Indian food; my favourite dish is chicken *malai tikka*. I am a non-vegetarian but also like *misal pav*, *paav bhaji* and of course tandoori chicken as well as tandoori paneer.” He admits that in Germany he was used to consuming a lot more non-vegetarian food but has got used to the three totally vegetarian food days in a week that his host family in Ahmednagar, Maharashtra, observes.

Describing his daily routine, he says he starts with school (Class 12), returns home to relax for a bit, before “going out with my friends, often

going to the ground to play football. When my host brother Kshitij, son of Abhay Jain, was here, we were roaming around the city, and went to the football ground and the boys there said I played rather well, so now I often join them,” he says.

This will be his routine, till he returns home this April. So what has he learnt about the way of life in India; its positives and negatives, I ask him.

“Well, I am learning about family life which is so different from the one in Germany; I find it very interesting to learn about the very different attitudes



Clemens at the Marine Drive in Mumbai.



Clemens with inbound students from RID 3131 in Kerala.

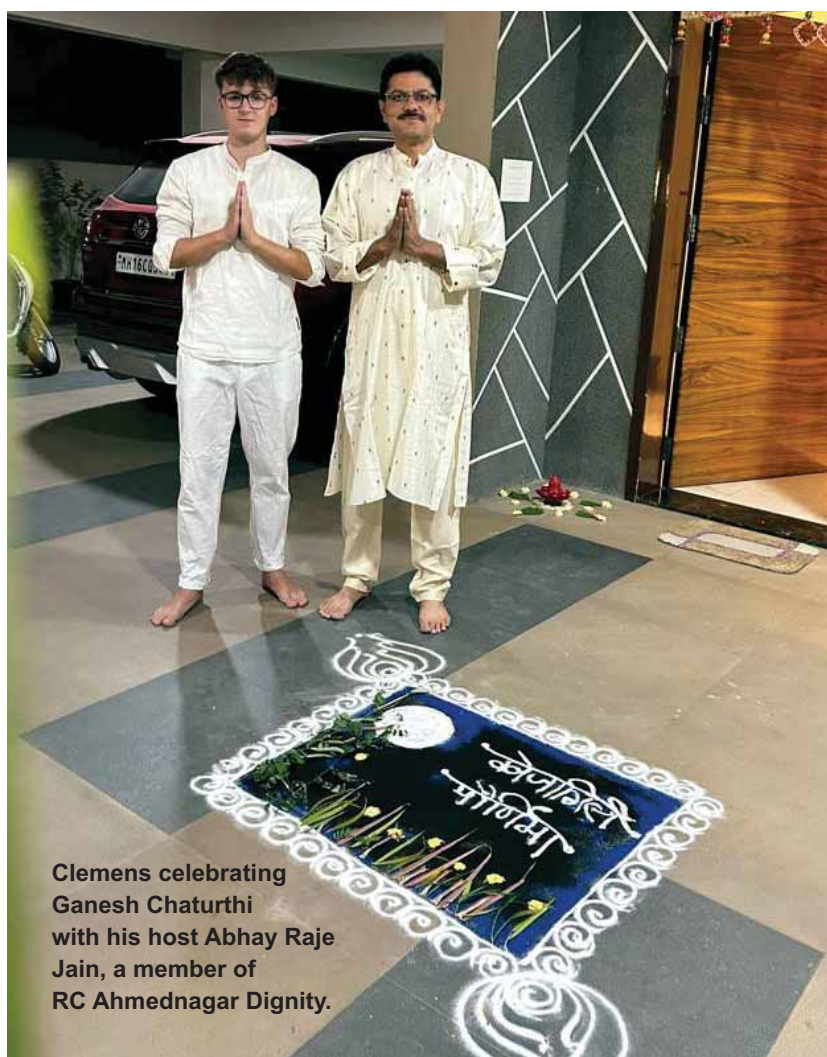


Elephant ride in Kerala.

to so many things here, compared to Germany.” He gives the example of the attitude towards elders; “here people touch the feet of elders or bow down to them. In Germany, we respect all, but whether somebody is 10 or 70, it doesn’t really matter, and doesn’t make a big difference.”

On dust and pollution levels — to which he is getting used to and his “tolerance levels” are increasing — the exchange student says, “Things like burning garbage on the roads is something that is accepted here, but would really disturb people in Germany. I suppose it is the Indian way of thinking; my perception is that everyone takes things less seriously, and more calmly, even when it comes to somebody breaking traffic rules.”

Even when it comes to education... he is attending the commerce course in Class 12 in a school in Ahmednagar, this German youngster feels that “while marks and exams are taken much more seriously in India,



**Clemens celebrating
Ganesh Chaturthi
with his host Abhay Raje
Jain, a member of
RC Ahmednagar Dignity.**

in Germany, it is more about active participation in all activities, including extracurricular activities. Here the emphasis is more on book knowledge but there, classroom lessons account for only half the marks in the final grade. However, topics that are taught and discussed here and in Germany are very similar, such as maths, business studies, etc.”

On the RYE programme itself, RID 3132 DG Swati Herkal says, “This is a transformative gift to the youth worldwide, providing opportunities for cultural immersion, language learning, and personal growth. Through living overseas, participants build bridges of understanding, forge lifelong friendships, and become global citizens, contributing to a more peaceful and interconnected world.”

Giving the last word to Henry, I ask him if he will become a Rotarian after he graduates in business administration, the degree course he will join when he returns home later this year.

“Well, I’d like to join Rotary and become a Rotarian when I settle down and have a stable income of my own.”

Designed by N Krishnamurthy

Bridging education in correctional homes

Kamal Sanghvi

In a groundbreaking move towards reformation and empowerment, Rotary India Literacy Mission (RILM) has collaborated with the Department of Correctional Administration, Government of West Bengal, to create educational opportunities for the inmates of correctional homes across India.

Following a discussion among Imran Zaki, a social activist from Kolkata, Sanjay Singh, the then ADG - Correctional Service at the Department of Correctional Administration and PRIP Shekhar Mehta, a partnership

was proposed to identify non-literate inmates and provide them with an opportunity to transform into literate citizens, thereby fostering a sense of dignity and a chance for a better life.

The collaboration with correctional homes is an extension of the Adult Literacy programme, introducing a new chapter in the lives of those behind bars.

A unique aspect of this initiative is the involvement of literate inmates, who take on the role of 'Akshar Sathi' — individuals responsible for teaching groups of non-literate adults within their correctional homes. This

peer-to-peer learning approach aims to create a supportive environment for the transformation of non-literate individuals into literate citizens.

Animesh Patra, an inmate (name changed), expressed gratitude for the unexpected opportunity, stating, "We never thought that we would get a chance to learn how to read and write. We may be convicted, but we also have the right to live with dignity. Education is crucial in anyone's life, and we now understand its importance. Better late than never; we believe this is the best time to unveil the opportunity to live as literate citizens."

Ajay Kumar Thakur, Special Inspector General at the Department of Correctional Administration, is playing a pivotal role in the expansion of this programme.

The 'Vidya' project, a flagship initiative under this programme, has already enrolled over 160 non-literate inmates in Presidency and Midnapore Correctional Homes in West Bengal. Seven literate inmates are actively serving as *Akshar Sathis* to facilitate the transformation process.

As the initiative gains momentum, plans are underway to expand the *Vidya* programme for correctional homes in Jalpaiguri, Balurghat, Burdwan, Baruipur, Baharampur and Dumdum. With literacy rate in India still below 80 per cent, according to the 2011 census, this collaboration presents a crucial opportunity for individuals to contribute to the mission of making India totally literate.

As the journey unfolds, Rotary clubs across the country are invited to participate in this transformative endeavour, emphasising the belief that education has the power to break barriers and bring positive change in communities even in the most challenging circumstances.

The writer is a past RI director



Inmates at a correctional home learning to read and write.

Vande Bharat architect tells its story

Rasheeda Bhagat

RI Director Raju Subramanian; Sudhanshu Mani, creator of Vande Bharat Express; and PRID C Basker.



Are we able to manufacture to the standards that we import, even after decades? The answer is a resounding no. Because when you say technology transfer... I call it an oxymoron.... Technology is a creation that lives in the mind and the heart of the creator. There is no way to transfer that. We are stuck between mindlessly global and hopelessly local. The truth is stuck somewhere between, I would say near the hopelessly local.”

With these captivating words Sudhanshu Mani, the mastermind

behind the Vande Bharat Express train, captured the attention of the delegates at the Bengaluru zone institute. As GM of the Integral Coach Factory (ICF), it was his passion and belief that made possible an entirely indigenous high-speed train within 18 months.

He told the gathering that if one is confident of “making your own, you can deliver not only 100, but 110 or 115 per cent... more than what you are otherwise capable of. But to achieve anything significant, first of all you have to love what you do. Love the people, your colleagues, love the organisation you work

for. If you don’t, then quit, unless it’s a serious bread and butter issue.”

Saying that human resource is the most important resource, he said, “I love the Indian Railways with all my heart, warts and all, but the image of an Indian Railways train has not changed in decades. It is the same box like thing... the colour has changed, more AC coaches have been added and some new technology has come in. That is all. I’ve always had this angst that we make our trains with such a large network, such a large pool of engineers, but when is India going to have a technically

superior, technologically advanced Indian train, and that was the seed of this (Vande Bharat) story.”

Mani said change is essential but not much of it has happened at the ICF over the decades. “Set up in 1955 as the dream of Jawaharlal Nehru to make train coaches of current technology by railway men like me, it basically kept doing the same with not much variety, so much so that it has a world record of having turned out the maximum number of coaches from a single factory.”

Coming to the Vande Bharat project, he said about 30 months before his retirement he asked for a posting as GM of ICF-Chennai, which was easy to get as it is not a very popular post! Maintaining that the authority of a GM exceeds that of a CEO of a large private company, Mani said: “Look at the large canvas given to you, with a very large palette of colours; you can choose the hues of your liking. I land in this factory, and we are still a very feudal organisation.”

Giving an insight into the working of a government enterprise, and different threads of how he was able to pull off such a challenging project, the railway man said, “As a general rule, about 20 to 25 per cent in government service

are so self-motivated that they carry the organisation on their shoulders. All you need to do is just pat them on the back. Out of the remaining 75 per cent, there will be two to three per cent who will never work. No punishment will work; either reform or sack.”

If there is no spirit of reform, using the power given to one by the GoI, sack those people, he said. And unlike the popular perception, in government “it is easier to sack people than in a private enterprise, but we don’t do it. We were able to sack about 165 people to send the message to the other 70 per cent, that there is a punishment for non-performance. Everybody respects a poisonous snake!”

Ruing that good ideas and good people are always available in the government but are never given a chance, he said: “All you have to do is pick a few of the best and your agenda is done. The problem is that you make somebody a leader but put rules, regulations, audit, vigilance, what not. Time has come to give trust a chance, some people may misuse it, but things

will get done and corruption, believe me, will come down. We trusted only two gentlemen; the chief engineer design (mechanical) and the chief engineer design (electrical). In the short period we had at our command, I said buy whatever you want from whatever source, single, double, and met with success.”

By empowering people to do their jobs, improvements were made in production and “we also became the only carbon negative factory of Indian Railways,” by using solar and wind power, he said.

He also took a firm stance on the issue of sexual harassment; “normally lip service is paid on women’s empowerment, but I took the issue very seriously and said I am not the chief justice of India, I am a simple administrator,” but made it clear that such behaviour would not be tolerated. On complaints, an informal inquiry



39 Chennai women

aged between 23 and 57,

did heavy welding, heavy lifting, heavy fitting entirely on their own and the pride they had in their work, that they could deliver as good as men, if not better, was phenomenal.

was made, in four hours he could find out through an informal inquiry, and “going by the powers given to me by the GoI, I sacked the gentleman the same day. When asked why no inquiry was held, I said I didn’t want the woman officer to relive that horror and hence am sacking this guy.”

The result was that a bunch of determined women, who wanted to prove their mettle, got confidence to deliver their best. “And 39 Chennai women, aged between 23 and 57, did heavy welding, heavy lifting, heavy fitting entirely on their own and the pride they had in their work, that they could deliver as good as men, if not better, was phenomenal.”

Of course, there were problems and challenges in completing the project; such as internecine warfare within the Indian Railways which had to be

overcome and “then there is always the gentleman with the dollars who says we can’t do this ourselves; we have to import.”

But against these negatives, there were so many ideas, so much energy in his team, all that was required was to channelise it. He also described how he got the required permissions from the chairman of the board... and concluded: “If you give your best, success will come... and it did come. We engaged consultants for design input, not transfer of technology. They said in a project of this magnitude, if you work in a systematic manner, from concept to design, to engineering to manufacturing, it will take 36 to 42 months. You are retiring in Dec 2018. But I said we will do something which has never been done... we will do unsystematic work. And we will turn out this train before

I retire in the calendar year 2018 itself... and hence gave the name Train 18.”

Fortune favours the brave; the project was completed and the train was tested at 180km and flagged off by Prime Minister Narendra Modi between Varanasi and Delhi. “Now there are more than 45 such trains, with only one failure which is more than Six Sigma. We were building a train, just a train, it was not Chandrayaan, Mangalyaan, a space rocket. But the kind of appreciation and love we got was phenomenal... from travellers, non-travellers, media, public. Why, because they thought for the first time Indians had built something purely for India by India. The PM puts it beautifully when he says this train is a symbol of a resurgent and aspirational India,” Mani added.

Pictures by Rasheeda Bhagat



Giving a hand to the handicapped

Team Rotary News

Over 500 individuals with a deformity of their upper limb were fitted with LN4 prosthetic hand at a special camp organised by RC Mangalagiri, RID 3150, at Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh.

Prior to the camp, Rotarians of RIDs 3150, 3160 and 3020 — covering the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana — promoted it extensively in their region, and that helped people from across these states, and the border

districts of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka to benefit from the initiative.

Technicians from Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Dharwad and Jaipur, and physiotherapists from Mangalagiri and Guntur helped in fixing the prosthetic arms for the individuals and trained them to use it.

“We were happy to see videos sent by some of the beneficiaries which showed them using their

newly fitted LN4 hands for various activities such as driving a tractor or a two-wheeler, operating an agricultural machine and managing other domestic tasks. They are absolutely delighted with the change that this prosthetic hand has brought into their lives,” said club president Revathi Nagamalleswar. The camp, costing ₹2 crore, was inaugurated by DG Busireddy Shankar Reddy. ■



Cervical cancer screening centres in Gujarat

V Muthukumaran



From L: DG Nihir Dave with his spouse Vaishali, project chair Kalpana Khandheria, RC Bharuch Narmada Nagari president Yuvraj Singh and secretary Amit Tapiawala at the launch of colposcopy centre.

In a major boost to cervical cancer screening, RID 3060 is setting up colposcopy centres at seven clusters, each having 12–14 Rotary clubs, in Gujarat. Each centre housed at the Rotary Bhavan will have a colposcope, the primary device to screen and detect cervical cancer.

DG Nihir Dave inaugurated the first colposcopy unit at RC Bharuch Narmada Nagari in November last year. “Since then, we have conducted four screening camps in rural areas reaching out to 240 beneficiaries — 160 women in the age group of 40–60; and 80 school girls between 16 and 20,” says Yuvraj Singh, club president. He donated ₹3.5 lakh for the colposcope. Before the screening begins, Rotarian doctors hold an awareness session, “where we drive home the message of HPV vaccination for girls (9–15 years), and early detection of cervical cancer,” he says. Each centre is funded either by club donation or a CSR grant.

The colposcopy centre is led by a Rotarian gynaecologist from the sponsoring club, as “the machine should be deftly handled to detect early lesions with vascular markings for signs of either cervical, vaginal or vulvar cancer. After identifying the right cervical spot through the monitor, we take a sampling for biopsy,” explains Dr Kalpana Khandheria, project chair and preventive oncologist. As a portable device, colposcope is taken around easily for screening at cancer detection camps. Early detection of cancer, “ensures the infected are totally cured with timely treatment. Rotarian gynaecologists are trained to handle the screening device.”

Each of the 12–14 clubs in the seven clusters will hold a one-day camp for early diagnosis of cervical, breast and oral cancer in the coming months. “We hope to do

at least 8–10 camps in each cluster till June 30. And in the next Rotary year (2024–25), each cluster will hold at least 24 camps,” says Dr Kalpana, whose hospital — Dr Kalpana Kandheria Hospital, Jamnagar — has set up a Seva Colposcopy Centre under the project.

Recalling her experience, Reina Makwana (19) says, “I felt comfortable during the screening as it was a painless procedure and I got the report within a few minutes.” Sefali Vasava (42) is happy that “everything was done free of cost at the camp, including the transport to the venue.” DG Dave is confident of screening 2,000 women by July at the cluster camps being held in Bharuch, Rajkot, Jamnagar, Vadodara, Anand, Vapi and Dhuliya, North Maharashtra. ■

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Project Create Hope touches 835 beneficiaries

V Muthukumaran

A multipurpose mega service project titled *Create Hope* reached out to over 800 beneficiaries from diverse fields at the Ayana Convention Hall, Vijayawada, on the sidelines of the two-day district conference of RID 3020 named *Sneham* (friendship) in January. RC Vijayawada Midtown hosted the Discon in which 1,200 Rotarians from around 90 clubs took part in the sessions and other events.

Recalling the genesis of the multi-service project, club president Sadhu Prasad says “as we are the single

largest club with 800 members, our DG Subbarao Ravuri motivated us to take up big, impactful projects. Hence we conceived a project which will symbolically depict that each member has reached out to a beneficiary in multiple focus areas of Rotary.”

A 10-member mission team led by project chair Gangisetty Jagadeesh, in consultation with Prasad, went about taking care of minute details of handing over diverse utilities (₹25 lakh) ranging from mattresses, sewing machines to fertiliser sprayers, bicycles, medical support and iron boxes to 835 beneficiaries.

The project team identified the beneficiaries and was well-prepared to handle the “logistic challenges in arranging the items in a neat display and inviting all the beneficiaries at a spot for PDG Suresh Hari, RIPR for the Discon, to distribute them to the people,” says Prasad.

DGs Subbarao, Ritu Grover (RID 3240) and PDG Hari distributed mattresses to 500 girl students from government hostels; sewing machines to 50 women; fertiliser sprayers to 60 farmers; scholarships to 100 school and college students; bicycles to 40 girl students; financial grants to buy medicines and

School girls with their bicycles.





DG Subbarao Ravuri and Jyotirmayi (centre), along with RC Vijayawada Midtown president Sadhu Prasad (2nd from L), PDG Suresh Hari (5th from L) and Anita, DG Ritu Grover and to her left is project chair G Jagadeesh, after distributing sewing machines to women.

for treatment to 15 patients; iron boxes to 20 small merchants; and course-completion certificates to 50 students for a two-month training in DTP and MS Office. “Eight computer trainees have got jobs at the offices of our Rotarians, and the rest of them will also get placement offers soon,” says Prasad.

Sporting a big smile after receiving a bicycle, Y Sathya (17) said, “Walking to and from college took much of my time. Now with this cycle, I can focus on my studies and will have spare time to do other work at home.” A hosteler, Gurram Anusha (20) is happy that she can have a

sound sleep on the cushy mattress compared to earlier when the “rough floor gave me a lot of discomfort.” Narasimha Rao, a farmer, is confident of saving his crops from pests and other rodents with the new fertiliser sprayer donated by Rotary.

Y Ravikumar, a patient at the government hospital, Vijayawada, thanked Rotary for providing him money to buy medicines for treatment. “He blessed all our members for reaching out to beneficiaries and said for him god has come in the form of Rotarians,” says Jagadeesh.

Rotary Foundation Day

On Feb 23, Rotary Foundation Day, the club gave scholarships worth ₹75,000 to 10 students; bicycles to seven girl students; sewing machines to seven women; and iron boxes to three persons to pursue a livelihood. A blood donation camp was held at the Icon Public School, Vijayawada, to mark World Rotary Day. ■



DG Ritu Grover and PDG Hari hand over fertiliser sprayers to farmers. Also seen are club president Sadhu Prasad and DG Ravuri.

Apply for Rotary Peace Fellowship

Applications are invited for Rotary Peace Fellowship Programme 2025–26. The last date for submission is May 15, 2024.

- Each year Rotary awards fully funded fellowships for dedicated leaders from around the world to study at one of our peace centres. Through academic training, practice and global networking opportunities, the Rotary Peace Centers programme develops the capacity of peace and development professionals or practitioners to become experienced and effective catalysts for peace. Since the programme began in 2002, the centres have trained more than 1,600 fellows who now work in more than 140 countries. The Rotary Peace Fellowship is designed for leaders with work experience in peace and development. Each year The Rotary Foundation awards up to **50 fellowships for master's degrees and 40 for certificate studies at premier universities.**
- The fellowships cover tuition fees, room and board, round-trip transportation, and all internship and field-study expenses.

Fellowship details

Master's degree programmes

Accepted candidates study peace and development issues with research-informed teaching and a diverse

student body. The programmes last **15 to 24 months** and include a two- to three-month field study, which participants design themselves.

Professional Development Certificate programme

During the **one-year blended learning programme** as part of the Rotary Peace Fellowship, experienced peace and development professionals with diverse backgrounds gain practical skills to promote peace within their communities and across the globe. Fellows complete field studies and design and carry out a social change initiative. This programme is intended for working professionals. Fellows earn a post-graduate diploma upon completion of the programme.

Eligibility

Candidates must

- Be proficient in English.
- Have a bachelor's degree.
- Have the potential for leadership.
- Have a strong commitment to cross-cultural understanding and peace as shown through professional and academic achievements and personal or community service.
- You are **not** eligible if you are an active Rotary member or an employee of a Rotary club, Rotary International, or another Rotary entity.
- Candidates must have a gap of at least three years between the completion of their most recent academic degree programme (undergraduate or graduate degree) and their intended start date for the fellowship.

Candidates for the Master's degree programmes must have at least three years of full-time **relevant experience** in peace or development work.



Candidates for the certificate programme must

- Have at least five years of full-time **relevant experience** in peace or development work.
- Be able to explain how their plan to promote peace aligns with Rotary's mission.
- Candidates for Makerere University: Either be from Africa, have worked in Africa, or work with African communities or initiatives outside the continent.
- Candidates for the certificate programme at Bahçeşehir University, Istanbul, Turkey, either must be from the Middle East or North Africa, have worked in the region, work elsewhere around the world with communities or initiatives related to the Middle East or North Africa.

- Candidates currently enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate programme are not eligible to apply.
- Rotary Peace Fellows who have completed the master's degree programme or a Global Grant Scholarship, must wait three years between the end date of that programme and their intended start date for the fellowship.
- We encourage people with disabilities and people from other diverse backgrounds to apply. Rotary provides reasonable accommodations as needed to people with disabilities.

Interested and eligible candidates can apply online (<https://my.rotary.org/en/peace-fellowship-application>) until May 15, 2024. Rotary endorsers must submit endorsements to TRF by July 1.

Fellowship components

- **Academic training:** Learn research-based theories and approaches to peace and development.
- **Applied field experience:** Build practical skills through a self-designed, two to three-month field experience.
- **Networking:** Expand your global network of academics, peace workers and Rotary members.
- **Workshop series:** Develop professional skills in peacebuilding and development.
- **Final seminar:** Present your master's research.

For more details, refer <https://www.rotary.org/en/our-programs/peace-fellowships> for the official notification of the Rotary Peace Fellowship Program 2025–26.



Improving infrastructure at a zilla parishad school

Team Rotary News



RC Mumbai Borivali East president Prakash Nirmal inaugurating the new building at the school.

RC Mumbai Borivali East, RID 3141, inaugurated a new building at the Zilla Parishad School at Sarsun village in Jawahar taluk, Palghar.

The initiative aimed to enhance educational facilities at the school, with the construction of 10 spacious classrooms covering 10,000 sqft. The club received support from Momentive Materials Performance who contributed ₹70 lakh. Members from the club and the Rotaract Club of Thakur College of Engineering and Technology were present at the inauguration. ■

RI Prez visits Sri Lanka



(From R) RID Raju Subramanian, PRIP KR Ravindran, RI President Gordon McInally, Heather, Vanathy Ravindran and Vidhya Subramanian.

Below from left: RID Subramanian and Vidhya with RID 3201 PDG Sunil Zacharia and his spouse Asha; President McInally and Heather with PRIP Ravindran, Vanathy and DG Jerome Rajendram (R).





From top: (From L) Vidhya, RID Subramanian, RID 3220 PDG Gowri Rajan, PRIP Ravindran, PRID AS Venkatesh and RID 2982 PDG C Sivagnanaselvam; Heather and President McNally.



Above: (From R) Marlene, PDGs Kamdar, Gowri and Zachariah, and Asha;
Right: Vanathy, Heather and Angeline Rajendram



Above from left: (From L) DRR Sathma Jayasinghe, PDG Pubudu de Zoysa, Marshad Barry (RC Colombo North), DIR Amir Akram, RID Subramanian and RI President McNally; PRIP Ravindran, RID Subramanian, Vidhya, PRID Venkatesh and President McNally; President McNally and Heather with RID Subramanian and Vidhya.

Right: President McNally, Vanathy and Heather.



Below: (From R) DG Rajendram, President McNally, DRCC Sohan Perera, Rtr Amjad Yoosuf, RID Subramanian, DIR Amir Akram, PDG Pubudu de Zoysa, DRR Sathma Jayasinghe and District Interact Committee Chair Manjula S Ratnasekera.



Transgenders who defied norms honoured in Chennai

Rasheeda Bhagat

Holding a pride of place at the transgender award ceremony titled *Matram* (change in Tamil) hosted by the Rotaract Club of Shri Krishnaswamy College for Women in Chennai was the veteran Noori Saleem, a transwoman from Ramanathapuram in Tamil Nadu, who emerged victorious after battling long years of societal pressure, taunting, and all other forms of humiliation and discrimination to create a home for over 300 HIV positive children abandoned by their families because of their infection.

Noori lost her mother when she was just four, and fled home at the age of 13 when her father and other family members couldn't accept the fact that she was a transgender and tortured her. She joined a group of hijras and eked

an erratic livelihood from dancing at weddings, the birth of children, etc. But this wasn't a dependable income and all her attempts to get a decent job failed as she was not considered 'normal'.

Left with no option, she became a sex worker and at the age of 34 found she was HIV positive, becoming one of the first women to be diagnosed with this condition. But despite all her challenges and hardships, Noori took on the task of mentoring HIV positive children and giving them a safe place to live in by setting up the SIP Memorial. "I was diagnosed as HIV positive in 1987, but after 37 years I am still alive, so that is proof that this too is just an infection which can be managed with proper medicines," adds Noori, the recipient of several awards.

The other six recipients were K Meenakshi (fine arts), Sathyasri Sharmila (law), Inba Ignatius (altruism), Priya (cinema), Praghya (aviation) and Kavya Lamba (business administration).

The *Matram* event, where these seven transgenders from Tamil Nadu were honoured, was sponsored by the Rotary Club of Madras Esplanade, RID 3232, "as we felt we have to recognise the remarkable achievements of seven extraordinary transgenders, showcasing their resilience and triumph over adversity," said club president Paresh Jani.

Durgashree, president of the college's Rotaract club, said that against "the backdrop of evolving societal norms, the *Matram* awards symbolise a significant stride towards fostering inclusivity and equity in our



RAC Krishnaswamy College secretary Munipriya (third from R) with award winners (from L) Praghya, Kavya Lamba, Inba Ignatius, Noori, Sathyasri Sharmila and Priya.



RC Madras Esplanade president Paresh Jani with award recipients and members of all participating clubs.

community.” Jani added that since the event was held at the college premises, “it served as a powerful platform to celebrate diversity and highlight the invaluable contributions of transgender individuals to society. We honoured them for their unwavering determination and remarkable accomplishments across various fields.”

One of the other distinguished awardees from the transgender community was Sathyasri Sharmila, who is reportedly India’s first transgender lawyer. Her journey too was filled with discrimination, humiliation, torture and other difficulties in a society

which refuses to accept the ‘other,’ but she overcame all these to get enrolled in the Bar Council of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry way back in 2018.

Another recipient Praghya, 22, is a drone pilot. Speaking to *Rotary News*, she said that as a boy, her awareness about her status began when she was in Class 7. “Parental pressure was always on to change me, but it did not work. At least nowadays, some parents are accepting transgender children but in the earlier years there was so much of resistance and negativity. The result was that I too had to leave home.”

Now she stays along with six other transgenders, “three of them are transwomen and three are transmen. We live as a transgender community in a rented place, which the mother of one of the transgenders helped us find. Even getting a place to live in is so difficult for us in Chennai; nobody wants to give out their place to us,” says Praghya.

She wanted to train as a drone pilot; “it’s a short course of only 10 days and costs ₹75,000 plus GST. A private trust approached the Indian Oil Corporation and they sponsored the training of 15 people, which included four transwomen and five transmen.” Emerging among the top four students from this training course, she is now employed by a private company as a technical assistant.

Jani said that several Rotary clubs in Chennai came together “to champion the cause of inclusivity and diversity in our society.” They were RCs Madras Esplanade, Madras Cosmos, Madras Nungambakkam, Gummidipoondi Industrial City and Madras Fort. RID 3232 DEI chair Barbara Bedi, and several Rotarians from the other collaborating clubs were present.

Durgashree added, “These outstanding individuals have not only navigated through challenging circumstances but have also emerged as beacons of hope and inspiration to others, and their contribution is a testament to the evolving mindset of our society, embracing inclusion and diversity wholeheartedly. As we celebrate the achievements of these remarkable individuals, let us reaffirm our commitment to creating a more equitable and just world.”

The last word to Praghya; extremely happy to be recognised by Rotary, she says, “I am grateful that Rotarians and Rotaractors have given us this recognition. More than for ourselves, we accept this honour on behalf of the transgender community as such events and exposure help to spread awareness in the general community where transgenders continue to face discrimination and other challenges just for the right to live their lives.” ■

Such events and exposure help to spread awareness in the general community where transgenders continue to face discrimination and other challenges just for the right to live their lives.

Praghya, award recipient

Subscribe to Rotary News

1. Subscription is for the Rotary year (July to June).
2. It is mandatory for every Rotarian to subscribe to a Rotary magazine.
3. The annual subscription for print version is ₹480 and e-version is ₹420 per member.
4. Subscription for the full year must be sent in July in the prescribed form.
5. Those joining after July can pay for the remaining Rotary year at ₹40 an issue for print version and ₹35 for e-version.
6. Subscription account of the club with *Rotary News* is a running account and does not cease at the end of June every year.
7. Names of all members with their complete postal address including **PIN CODE, mobile number and email ID** must be sent along with the form and DD/cheque payable at par. Online transfers can be made through GPAY or netbanking. When you make an online payment share with us immediately by WhatsApp (9840078074) or email (rotarynews@rosaonline.org) the UTR number, your club name and amount paid. If this is not done your payment will not be updated

in our records and your club will show dues outstanding.

8. Language preference (**English, Hindi or Tamil**) should be stated alongside member's name.
9. Update the correct mailing address and contact details of your members **directly** to *Rotary News* every year to receive the magazine regularly. **RI does not share member details with us.**
10. Members should ensure their names are included in the subscribers' list their club sends us. If you've paid, but your name is not sent to us by your club, you will not get a copy of the magazine.
11. If you've not received your printed copy to which you had subscribed, check with your club president if your club has opted for e-version.
12. Clubs must **immediately** update us about any modification in membership status to enable us to deliver the magazine to the new members.
13. Clubs are liable to pay for the number of magazines we despatch according to the



list available with the Rotary News Trust.

14. Unpaid dues of the club will be shown as outstanding against the club. Any payment received subsequently will be adjusted against earlier dues.
15. Details of clubs with subscription arrears will be shared with RI and are liable for suspension.
16. We regularly verify our subscribers' list that clubs share with us with that of RI's data to detect missing subscribers.
17. If a member has not received the magazine for a month, inform us **immediately** so we can resolve the issue. Magazines are sent through concessional book post; so postal tracking is not possible. You may not receive your copy if your club has not passed on your subscription to us. So please check with your president or RNT for your enrolment in the subscribers' list.
18. There may be delivery issues in some areas. In such a situation clubs can opt and receive copies in bulk. Additional charges will be applicable.

Non-compliant clubs face termination by RI

Beginning July 1, 2022, the RI Board has included in its *Rotary Code of Policies* the termination of Rotary clubs that do not subscribe to a Rotary magazine. A quarterly report on non-compliant clubs is being sent to RI by our office, after notifying the respective club leaders and the DGs. These clubs are given a **90-day grace period** after which the defaulting club is placed under suspension by RI.

For clubs that stay suspended and are non-compliant for 180 days, RNT, after notifying RI, sends a reminder letter stating "the Board at its discretion can terminate this club."

Club presidents, please urge your members to subscribe to *Rotary News*, and get a full picture of Rotary activities in India. **RI recommends inclusion of information about mandatory subscription in your PETS/GETS curriculums.**



RID 3055 DG Mehul Rathod (centre, back row) with members of RC Ahmedabad Sarvam and award winners.

A buzzing Gujarati exhibition

Team Rotary News

Gujaratis are known for adept money management, and RC Ahmedabad Sarvam, RID 3055, demonstrated this innate skill with their recent initiative, a one-day *Sarvam Bazaar*. Held at Boho Homes, a furniture store owned by Geetika Saluja, charter president of the club, the bazaar was a testament to the members' resourcefulness.

Despite limited resources, the club took a creative approach to maximise outreach. Geetika proudly adds that "leveraging our own venue and engaging Rotarians as volunteers minimised costs."

Featuring over 60 exhibitors, the event attracted around 300 visitors. "The colourful stalls displayed a diverse array of products and services. Stall fees were kept nominal, starting at ₹2,000; some stalls were offered at a subsidised rate of ₹1,000, while few others were given free for deserving participants," she says.

The club urged each exhibitor to invite at least 10 people to broaden the reach of the event. DG Mehul Rathod, who visited the bazaar, complimented the club for its "innovative project to help our community grow and support local businesses."

The event also honoured nine professionals with Vocational Service Awards. Four exhibitors were inspired to join the club soon after the exhibition. ■



Participants at the exhibition venue.

Rotary Jungle Garden in Panvel

V Muthukumaran

Near the market yard of Panvel city in Raigad district of Maharashtra, a two-acre urban forest — Rotary Ghandat (dense in Marathi) Jungle — with a park in the front has sprung up, thanks to RC Panvel Central, RID 3131. This green hub has become a centre of attraction for locals and tourists alike.

Beaming with joy, club president Ratan Kharol recalls, “For long, this place in the heart of Panvel was barren with no trees or vegetation. But after developing a Miyawaki forest with 4,300 wild trees and carving out a small part of it into a beautiful Rotary Garden, we have created a new landmark for the city.” The garden is replete with play equipment for children, joggers’ track and 10 concrete benches for elders to relax and socialise in the evenings.

In the preceding year, the urban forest was designed and completed in eight months; “and we owe it all to PDG Girish Gune who mentored us throughout the project execution.”

The jungle and the Rotary Garden were developed in “record time, thanks to perfect teamwork among the Rotary members and their families donating for both the projects.” Out of the project cost of ₹90 lakh for the Rotary Jungle, members and their families contributed ₹60 lakh, and the balance was given by CSR grants from three companies. Likewise, for the park (₹65 lakh), the Rotarians and their kin pitched in ₹37 lakh, and the balance ₹28 lakh came through CSR grants. What was once a deserted, ‘no-go’ zone is now a happening spot with the Rotary

Garden getting over 1,000 visitors daily, including children who throng to the place for the play equipment.

When the Panvel Municipal Corporation gifted the land to Rotary, it was agreed that the club would maintain the jungle-cum-park for three years before returning the green hub to the civic body. “Now after seeing the response from the locals, and the way the park is being maintained by us, the corporation wants to extend our ownership for seven years,” smiles Kharol. The club is incurring a monthly expense of ₹40,000 to meet the salaries for two security guards, maintenance of the pump set, electricity charges and other maintenance work to keep it clean and green. ■



Former MP Ramsheth Thakur (centre) at the inauguration of Rotary Garden along with PDG Girish Gune (4th from L), to his left, club president Ratan Kharol, secretary Anil Khandekar (5th from R), and Panvel MLA Prashant Thakur (3rd from R).

Helping TB patients in Chandigarh

Team Rotary News

In alignment with the government's fight against tuberculosis, RC Chandigarh Midtown, RID 3080, is striving to eradicate the disease at Hallomajra village through monthly distribution of nutrition bags to TB patients.

The club's community service director Manjushri Sharma led her team's awareness drive about TB and the need to take regular medicines among the patients in this village. "A total of 21 nutrition packs were distributed in the third round of *Project Sakha* (friend). And this month's package was sponsored by Maninder, a friend of our member Dr Anurag Sharma," said Anup Sharma, club secretary. State TB Cell, Chandigarh, officials were also present at the distribution of nutrition packs.

Around 100 blankets and socks were distributed for the less privileged families with the help of Rotaractors for three days under *Project Garmaahat*



Nutrition kits being given to a woman suffering from TB.

(warmth) in different localities of Chandigarh as a shield against wintry nights. Apart from this, the project team distributed 100 edible packets consisting of peanuts, popcorns and *revadi* (sweet balls made with sesame seeds and jaggery) to enjoy the spirit of the Lohri season.

Girls who have passed out of a six-month beauty technician course

at the Rotary Vocational Centre, Haripur, were given certificates. Some of them have got placement as assistant technicians in beauty parlours. FPAI Centre chairperson Anita Batra was the chief guest at the convocation event. Club president Jeeten Bhambri, Vocational Service director Anupam Jain and Rtn Vinod Kapur were also present at the event. ■

Skilling Bengal youngsters

Rotary Club of Chandan Nagar, RID 3291, has entered into a partnership with L&T Construction Skills Training Institute (CSTI), Serampore, Hooghly district, West Bengal, to provide skill development training to



The first batch of seven trainees with members of RC Chandan Nagar.

less privileged youngsters under 30 and school dropouts. Courses include construction-related topics such as bar bending, carpentry, scaffolding and masonry in work-site simulated premises. The classes will be conducted in the CSTI campus for 45 days, after which the institute will induct the students as apprentices for nine months at L&T construction sites across India, providing them accommodation and a monthly stipend of ₹13,146. On successful completion of the apprenticeship, the candidates will be employed in the corporate's sites as regular employees.

Seven youngsters from rural areas such as Namkhana and the Sunderbans of the South 24 Paraganas district were shortlisted in August by the club to undergo the course. "They all are now undergoing apprenticeship," said Tapas Kumar Saha, the district's vocational co-chair. ■

Age had dimmed neither the vigour nor intensity of Fali Nariman

Sriram Panchu

His stentorian voice and forceful delivery, unassailable logic, deep knowledge of the law, assiduous preparation backed by a reputation for unwavering integrity made him an opponent to dread.

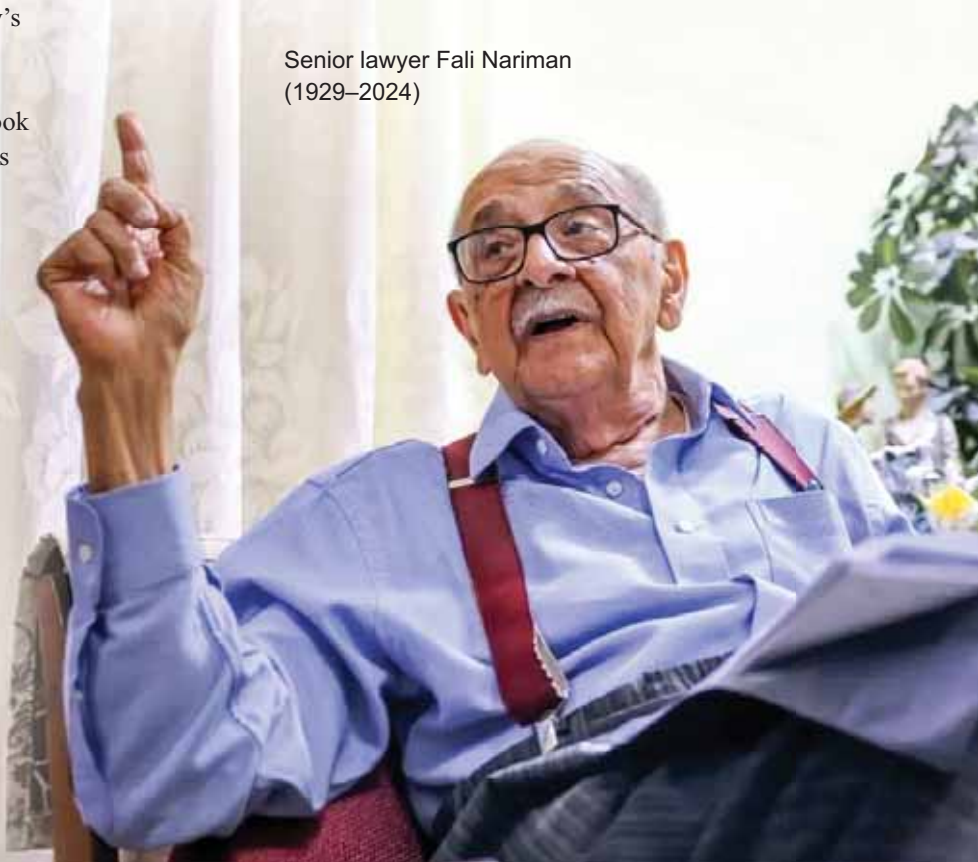
The country and its legal profession suffered an irreparable loss in the early hours of Feb 21 when Fali Sam Nariman crossed the bar to move to the Almighty's court. He was 95, but age had dimmed neither the vigour nor intensity of the man. His last book was published just a few months back, his article in the *Indian Express* on the sidelining of Justice Muralidhar, co-authored with Justice Madan Lokur and this writer, is recent, and his interview with Karan Thapar on the Article 370 case still fresh in memory. "Old lawyers don't fade away, they just lose their appeal" is a humourism in legal circles, but Fali neither faded nor lost his appeal to the many who loved and respected him.

Nariman was many things and so it is not difficult to write about

him. He was many splendoured in what he did, so it is difficult, nay impossible, to paint a complete picture of the man and his work. As an advocate he was head and

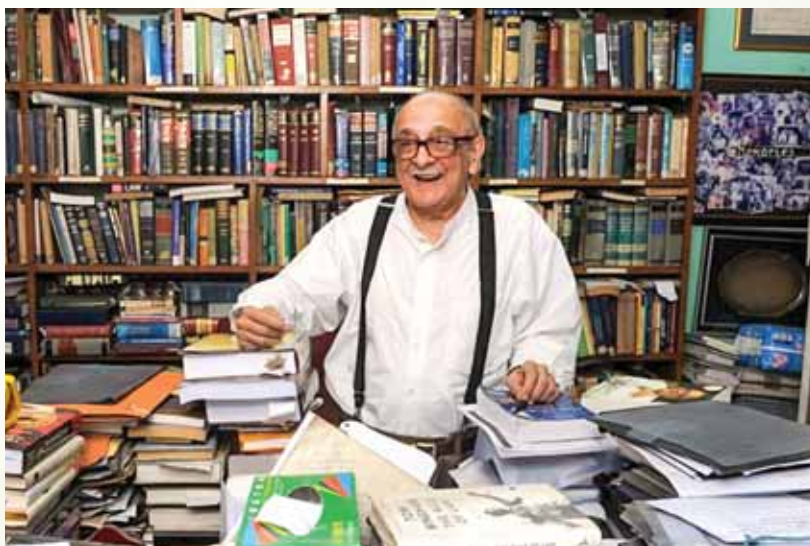
shoulders above his peers. His stentorian voice and forceful delivery, unassailable logic, deep knowledge of the law, assiduous preparation backed by a reputation for unwavering integrity made him an opponent to dread. But he was fairness personified in his duty to court and profession, and while he could bring down senior lawyers with ease he was kind and encouraging to juniors. Decades back, when in the Ram Setu case I opened the environmental arguments against the Sethusamudram Shipping Channel before the Chief Justice's Bench, Nariman was lead counsel for the government. When I finished he said, loudly, "Now that is the way a case should be argued." I prize no encomium more. Since then I have received many kindnesses

Senior lawyer Fali Nariman
(1929–2024)



from this hero of mine, including a sparkling introduction to my book *Mediation: Practice and Law*.

He was far more than the best lawyer. He was a prolific writer, and his books on law and justice carry a lightness of touch with the depth of mastery from years of engagement and reflection. He was one of the best public speakers, lacing his speeches with anecdotes, wit and wisdom. Much sought after for public interviews, he was both accessible and articulate. And he was the public intellectual par excellence, who kept standards of probity at a premium. Above all was his attitude to power. He cared a hoot for the power of power, and for those who wielded it wrongly. He delivered two notable slaps in the face — one on Mrs Gandhi's government immediately after the



Emergency was proclaimed when he resigned as Additional Solicitor General, and another on the Gujarat government after the attack on Christians when he returned its briefs. He was the tallest lawyer in the country, but he never became the Attorney General, no prizes for guessing why.

There is a clarity of mind that comes from exercising the faculty of plainspeak, which is lost to those who fail to speak when they should. Nariman didn't mince words, he didn't spare persons who needed to be called out. He called a spade a spade, not a flawed diamond. And the higher the office holder, the sharper the phrase. But anger was less acute than disappointment. For he wasn't focused on running down a person, his cross-hairs were fixed on issue and action and consequence. Secular India had no better champion than him. Parsi himself, born in Rangoon, early years in Bombay, he knew the intrinsic value of the mosaic that

this country is, and he abhorred the unichrome. In St Stephen's College case he helped to bring in the law to protect minority educational institutions, and he deeply deplored the failure of the court to scotch the controversies around places of worship.

He was one of a very select group of those who stood out boldly and strongly, in conviction, attitude, thought and speech — the League of Extraordinary Legal Gentlemen. With his passing, the candle dims. While our farewells are lacerated with grief, we must remember however that the best tribute we can pay, and the best testament of our love and respect for him, is to hold fast to the traditions he exemplified. If we do that, the Old Warrior will rest in peace.

The writer is a senior advocate and mediator

This article was first published in *The Hindu*.



A pioneer Radio Jockey no more

Rasheeda Bhagat

Waves of sheer nostalgia are bound to engulf a certain generation of Indian music lovers when they close their eyes and recall those much-awaited magic words each

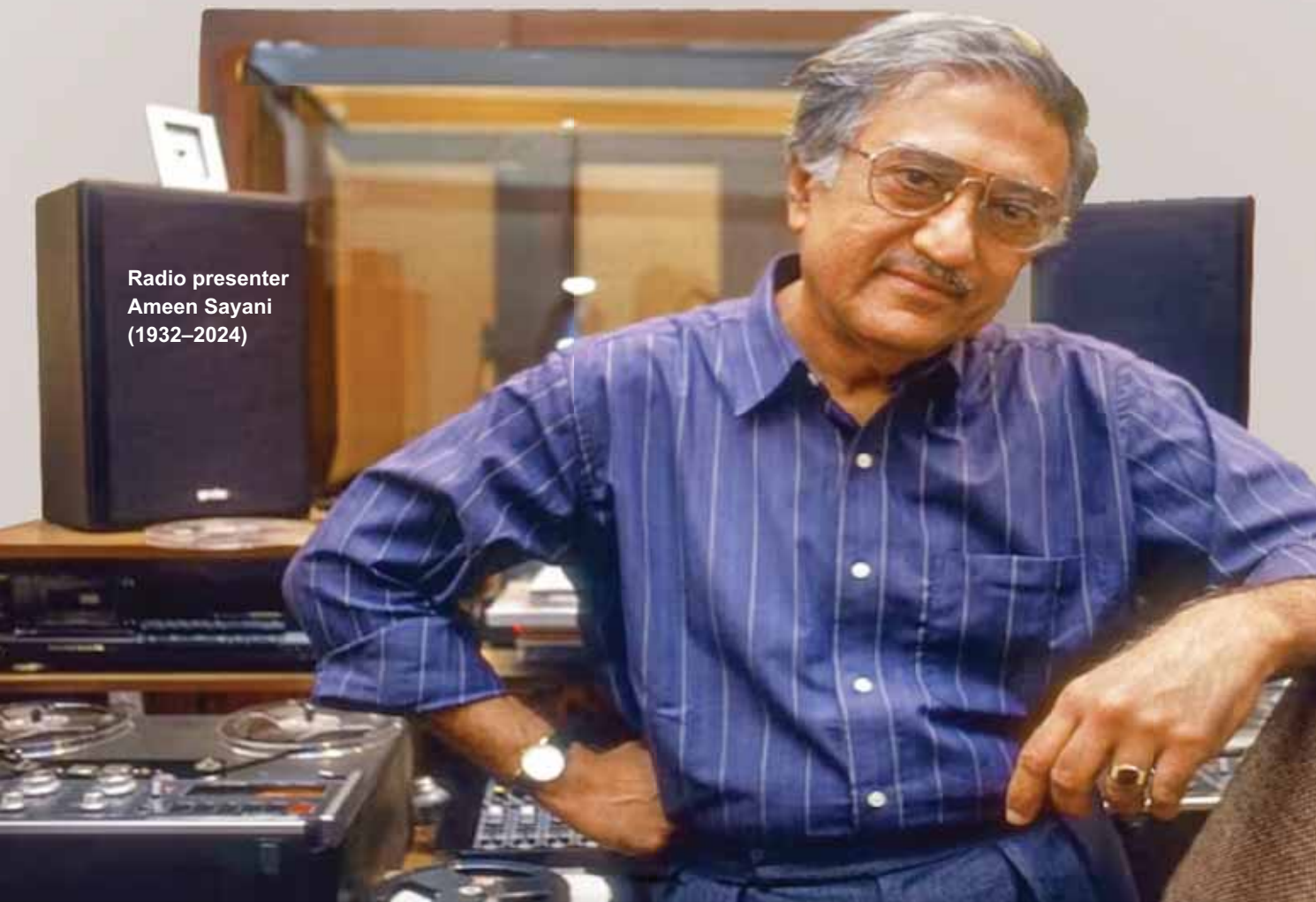
Wednesday evening: *Namaskar behno aur bhaiyon, main aapka dost Ameen Sayani bol raha hoon.*

It was always *behno* and *bhaiyo*, not *bhaiyon* and *behno* that all our politicians use before

beginning their speeches filled with fact and fiction, tall promises and harsh criticism of their political opponents.

Every Wednesday evening, we'd have dinner a tad early so we could settle down before that brown wooden box called the radio and listen to the magical voice of Ameen Sayani, the legendary radio presenter of *Binaca Geetmala* on Radio Ceylon. He would go on to entertain us for a full hour with the most popular Hindi film songs of the week, introducing each of them, with complete information about the singer, song writer and music composer, before playing the song.

Radio presenter
Ameen Sayani
(1932–2024)





With Lata Mangeshkar.

Really useful information in a non-Internet, non-Google era! And oh those lilting melodies... Rafi, Lata, Kishore, Mukesh, Hemant, Asha, Manna Dey... their golden voices filling our homes and hearts.

In his deep and mesmerising voice and diction, with the most delicate nuances of a mix of Hindi and Urdu words that came together to form the delightful Hindustani that anybody and everybody could understand, Sayani would provide us heavenly music for an entire 60 minutes.

The names of those who had made a *farmaish* (request) for the song would be read out and the

Binaca Geetmala was broadcast over Radio Ceylon and not All India Radio because the then I&B Minister felt that Hindi film songs were too vulgar!

more popular the song, the longer the list, which would often irritate us, as we were eager to listen to the song. Do remember that the gramophones and record players were just coming in, television was nowhere on the horizon, and the world had not even dreamt of mobile phones. *Geetmala* time was truly bliss time.

This iconic radio presenter passed away on Feb 20 after a

heart attack. He was 91. *Binaca Geetmala*, began as a 30-minute programme on Radio Ceylon in 1952, and became a rage in the 1950s and '60s. It changed its name to *Hit Parade* and later *Cibaca Geetmala*, but never its essence, running from 1952 to 1994.

Have you ever wondered why *Binaca Geetmala*, which was started in 1952, well after India's Independence, was broadcast over Ceylon Radio and not our very own All India Radio? That was because the then Information and Broadcasting Minister had decided that Hindi film songs were too



With Amitabh Bachchan.

vulgar and they were banned on All India Radio. Wonder what that venerable gentleman's response would have been to the immensely popular Madhuri Dixit number *choli ke peechchey kya hei!*

To get our fill of popular western songs, we would eagerly tune into the Madras station of the All India Radio on the programme called *Listener's Choice*.

The outpouring of people's grief on various social media platforms on Sayani's passing proves that excellence, passion and devotion to your work... and a certain

We will miss him because he came to us as a huge soothing balm at a difficult time... soon after Independence, when we were happy, but also sad because *humne bahut kuch khoya tha, humne apno ko khoya tha aur hum under se zakhmi thhey.*

Radio jockey Sayema

kind of gentlemanly demeanour which can only be felt but never explained... is never forgotten. In an era of the media where raving and ranting, shrill outbursts and slanging matches reign supreme during television debates, it is difficult to think of a programme like the *Geetmala* presented in the smooth and serene voice of Sayani. It is no exaggeration to say those relaxing 60 minutes took away the day's tiredness.

So what made Sayani the mesmerising and loving figure that he was? Born in 1932, Ameen

I wanted each listener to feel
that I was talking to them and it
immediately struck a chord.

Ameen Sayani

Sayani came from a family in which literature and language reigned supreme. He helped his mother in editing a fortnightly journal called *Rahber*, which was initiated by Mahatma Gandhi. It was simultaneously published in Hindi, Urdu and Gujarati. His brother Hamid Sayani was an eminent English broadcaster and Ameen began his stint with Radio Ceylon in 1951.

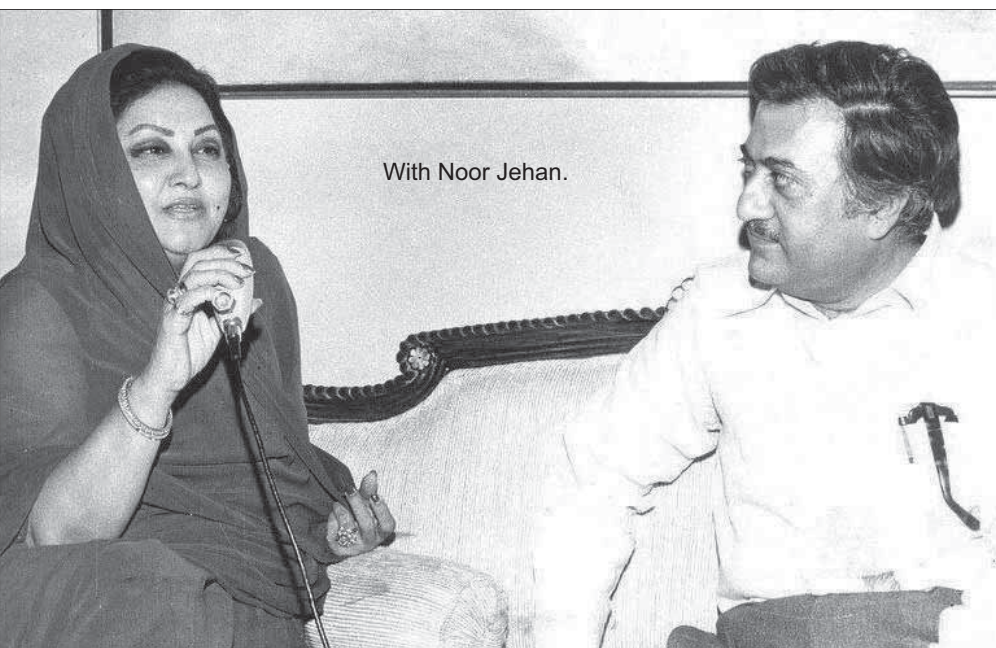
When he started the *Binaca Geetmala* the next year, it became an immediate hit as the All India Radio banned the transmission of Hindi film songs. The programme became a medium for the promotion of simple Hindustani, something that connected with the

people across the country, and was so popular that it ran for decades, till 1994.

Sayani was also a voiceover artist and later a popular interviewer, and thanks to his huge fan following, could ask difficult questions to icons such as Lata Mangeshkar — apparently he had quizzed her on the problem she had with Mohammad Rafi on royalty issues, which was a very controversial subject in those days. He revealed in a programme that once upon a time Amitabh Bachchan had nurtured a dream of becoming a radio presenter — and what a hit he would have been with that deep, magical voice of his — before trying his luck in Bollywood and even visited the Mumbai studio of All India Radio for an audition. But Sayani couldn't meet him as he hadn't taken an appointment!

So how did Ameen Sayani capture the hearts of his listeners? This is what he said in an interview about his runaway success on Radio Ceylon: "I wanted each listener to feel that I was talking to them and it immediately struck a chord. It, surprisingly, even revolutionised radio presentation. I didn't expect it to become a phenomenon in the coming years. They were such fantastic times. It was my romance with Radio Ceylon."

But why we will miss him was best summed up by radio jockey Sayema who posted a short video clip on X. She said that we will miss him not only because of his magical voice and his superb pronunciation, "but because he came to us as a huge soothing balm at a difficult time... soon after Independence, about which we were very happy, but also sad because *humne bahut kuch khoya tha, humne apno ko khoya tha aur hum under se zakhmi thhey, aur hamarey under bahut sarey ghao thhey. Hum chhahte thhey ki koi tau hamey, kuch waqt ke lye hi sahi, hamarey ghum se azad kar de* (We had lost a lot, we had lost our own, and were nurturing many wounds within. We were longing for somebody who would, even though for a short while, release us from our pain). And Ameen Sayani Sahab did just that with his soothing commentary and the songs which we hummed along with the radio. He gave us hope ... that love will rule again and better times will come."■



With Noor Jehan.

Team Rotary News

RI President Gordon McNally inaugurated the Asha Centre for Mental Health set up by RC Bhubaneswar, RID 3262, in the city. The facility is set up in partnership with Manam Foundation, an Odisha-based NGO which has expertise in addressing mental health issues.

A full-time helpline is manned by counsellors recommended by the NGO. They will offer counselling and emotional support to individuals making distress calls, and help them through crisis intervention, suicide prevention and referrals to appropriate mental health services. In the next phase, “we aim to create a one-stop centre with expert professionals such as counsellors, clinical psychologists, psychiatrists and alternate therapists under one roof,” said project chairman Bhumi Mohanty. The district has signed an MoU with the India Psychiatric Society, Odisha chapter, where its members will provide free consultation to patients at the Asha centre. In addition to individuals struggling with mental health issues, support in the form of resources and counselling



RI President Gordon McNally and Heather at the mental health centre with PDG Gajendra Singh Narang, DG Jayashree Mohanty, PDG DN Padhi and RI Director Anirudha Roychowdhury.

will be provided to their families to help them cope and support their loved ones.

The club spent ₹7 lakh to renovate its existing building, constructed as part of a 3H grant project, to house the centre. Mohanty estimates that the project will incur an annual recurring expenditure of ₹10 lakh. Going forward, a global grant proposal for scaling up the project to the second

phase has been submitted to TRF. DG Jayashree Mohanty has promised to support the project through district grant and DDF for global grant. “We are working to organise CSR support to start running the centre,” said the project chairman.

RID Anirudha Roychowdhury and DG Jayashree were present during the inauguration of the centre in January. ■

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**Or does it go to
your junk folder?**



Every month we bring out the online publication **ROTARY NEWS PLUS** to feature your projects. This is sent by mid-month to **every subscribing member** whose email ID we have.

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Please update your email ID at rotarynews@rosaonline.org in this format: Your name, club, district and email ID.

From RI South Asia

Global Grant tips

Plan ahead for submitting your application

There is no application deadline, and you can submit applications throughout the year. However, if you submit it by June, your application may not be reviewed and approved before the end of the Rotary year due to the high volume of submissions at that time. If you want your application approved before the yearend submit it in March or April.

Don't send cash contributions before applications are approved

Wait until you've received the official approval notification from the Regional Grants Officer before sending cash contributions, and include the grant number with all contributions. Contributions won't be refunded if your application is not approved. Send only the pledged amount, not more.

Confirm funding before submitting the application

After a grant application is approved, you can't change project funding sources and amounts. So it's important to make sure everything is accurate ahead of time. Be sure to check all funding sources and amounts, including cash, District Designated Funds, directed and endowed gifts, TRF Donor Advised Funds and the World Fund. You can use the

global grant calculator to help plan your funding.

Plan for contingencies

As you develop your budget, things can change when you start implementing your project, and exchange rates can fluctuate. Add up to 10 per cent of your budget to cover any unforeseen expenses.

Mandatory CSR certification

In view of the recent modifications and changes in the CSR Act, Rotary Foundation (India) strongly encourages all Rotary clubs implementing CSR projects routed through RFI, to apply for Form-CSR1 certification named "Registration of Entities for undertaking CSR Activities". The same can be done by applying on the Ministry of Corporate Affairs website: <https://www.mca.gov.in/MinistryV2/companyformsdownload.html>

The authorities expect applicant organisations to be a registered entity (either Trust, Society, or Section 8 company) before they can be considered for this certification.

Give online on behalf of club or club members

All club officers such as the club president, foundation chair, membership chair, executive secretary/director, secretary and treasurer can make online contribution on behalf of their club members through their *My Rotary* account

through their credit/debit card or net banking eliminating the need to send individual members' cheques.

While the contribution credit is assigned to individual members, the 80G receipt is generated solely in the club leader's name and not in the name of individual members. For more details refer: http://www.highroadsolution.com/file_uploader2/files/give_online_on_behalf_of_club_or_club_members_sao.pdf

Paul Harris Society

The Paul Harris Society recognises individuals who notify us of their intent to contribute \$1,000 or more each Rotary year to the Annual Fund, PolioPlus Fund, or an approved global grant. Paul Harris Society contributions count toward Rotary Foundation Sustaining Member (Annual Fund contributions only), Paul Harris Fellow, Multiple Paul Harris Fellow and Major Donor recognition, and club recognition banners. New society members are presented with a certificate and chevron at a district or club event. Paul Harris Society coordinators visit the club or district to honour new members.

Paul Harris Society members and their eligibility appear in the Paul Harris Society report. For more on the Paul Harris Society, visit <https://www.rotary.org/en/about-rotary/history/paul-harris-society> or read the *Paul Harris Society brochure* ■

A new ending for **Oppenheimer**

Patrick Tyler

A journalist who interviewed A-bomb scientists wonders if the Oscar favourite speaks to younger generations left to deliver the world from a nuclear wilderness.

In the summer movie season, when people seek escape with superhero sequels and action thrillers, I joined millions who flocked to theaters in 2023 for a deeply thoughtful history film that became a rare summer hit to go against the mould.

I watched *Oppenheimer*, the lead nominee for Oscars this month, with

particular interest having interviewed two of the legendary physicists depicted in the movie about the US government's secret creation of the atomic bomb during World War II.

After a journalism career covering defence and foreign policy since the 1970s, I wondered whether younger generations would take away any new understanding of the nuclear

dilemma they have inherited in the post-Cold War world. Do they know we are still living through the early stages of a fate-determining epoch bequeathed to us by Albert Einstein and his successors? Einstein didn't work on building the A-bomb but helped spark its development when he expressed a concern to President Franklin Roosevelt that the Germans might go nuclear after astonishing discoveries from 1934 to 1938 about the massive energy release from splitting the uranium atom.

The movie, which dominated the Golden Globe Awards in January and played in theaters around the world, magnifies the details of the Manhattan Project and the lives of lead scientist J Robert Oppenheimer and the circle of physicists who coalesced around him on a windy mesa at Los Alamos, New Mexico, to build the first atomic explosive, Trinity, which lit up the desert on 16 July 1945. Armed with that success, they fabricated two bombs that could fit in B-29 bombers and dropped them over Japan on 6 and 9 August, killing 110,000 to 210,000 people, most of them civilians.

Many of my generation are familiar with the story of Oppenheimer, known as the father of the atomic bomb, a title he both embraced and abhorred. In truth, he was one of many physicists pulled out of classrooms under war-time pressure to exploit atomic breakthroughs. They believed that whoever converted atom-splitting energy into bomb-making could defeat any army



Illustrations by Chiara Vercesi

and that its catastrophic potential could frighten the world into peace.

After the news came over the radio that Hiroshima had been levelled, he led colleagues in a celebratory rally. Director Christopher Nolan shows Oppenheimer preening before the crowd, shouting that he wished they could have delivered the same surprise to Germany before it surrendered. It is an unsettling scene.

Yet it is also true that for most of the rest of his professional life, Oppenheimer worked assiduously to convince American presidents, Congress, the public, and western allies to put a lid on nuclear power by turning it into an international force for peace and economic development. He argued for strict international controls over the mining and enrichment of uranium and the production of plutonium, and he discouraged the development of the much more powerful hydrogen bomb. His opinions aroused suspicions and many questioned his loyalty to his country.

Still it is hard to judge where Oppenheimer's moral contradictions end and his rank ambition begins. The film portrays him as a brilliant, depressive, chain-smoking set of walking contradictions, and Irish actor Cillian Murphy captures Oppenheimer's flawed genius. We are always guessing about his character. He opposed the Nazi persecution of Jews in pre-World War II Germany and was drawn to the kind of intellectual salons frequented by Communist Party members. And of course, Oppenheimer endured a spectacular fall from prestige, stripped of his security clearance in a 1954 hearing during the McCarthy-era cleansing of purported communist infiltration in America.

Nolan, whose repertoire includes three Batman movies, indulges his love for dark superheroes by opening

the film with an inscription laid across the big screen over a backdrop of nuclear fireball imagery: "Prometheus stole fire from the gods and gave it to man. For this he was chained to a rock and tortured for eternity."

He presents some of the backstories that shaped the nuclear arms race from the mid-20th century to the present, when Mother Earth hosts nine nuclear nations: China, France, India, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

**They believed that whoever
converted atom-splitting
energy into bomb-making
could defeat any army
and that its catastrophic
potential could frighten the
world into peace.**

As I grew up, the subject of nuclear war was never remote. The panorama of ashes from Hiroshima to Nagasaki was familiar even to elementary school students who practised hiding under their desks during my childhood in the 1950s and '60s just in case nuclear war came home. US college students, ambitious for government jobs, took Russian language courses and memorised the minute-by-minute sequence of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis when the two superpowers came closest to nuclear confrontation.

As a young journalist, I arrived in Washington DC in the late 1970s, when President Jimmy Carter was in office. I covered the world of nuclear weapons and documented procurement troubles for the country's nuclear

submarine programme. It was a world where legions of secretive military technicians stood guard over tens of thousands of atomic bombs in the arsenals of the United States and the then Soviet Union. Soon President Ronald Reagan was promising to use "Star Wars" technology to shoot down incoming Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles, or ICBMs, in any nuclear war. Around this time, I interviewed two members of the Manhattan Project, Hans Bethe, head of theoretical physics, and Edward Teller, the brilliant Hungarian-born physicist working under Bethe who pushed a design concept that became the hydrogen bomb.

As the movie depicts, Oppenheimer dismissed Teller's plea to focus resources on the "Super" bomb. After the war, as Oppenheimer advocated against US progression on nuclear weapons, Teller testified against him in the closed hearing that sealed Oppenheimer's fate.

By the time I met Teller during the Reagan administration, he was a frequent White House visitor as a proponent of the "Star Wars" systems that never panned out. In 2022, the Biden administration posthumously restored Oppenheimer's security clearance, proclaiming that the 1954 decision was based on a "flawed process" against a loyal American.

At the end of the movie, I considered whether it speaks to younger people left to face the nuclear dilemma. To me, many people seem unaware that the threat from nuclear weapons still exists, invisibly to most of us, but the weapons are there, fewer of them to be sure, yet thousands spread across the planet and someday, perhaps, in space.

Teen Vogue educates its readers about the symbolic Doomsday Clock, maintained by a board of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, that represents how close we are to a human-made end

of the world. The clock stands at 90 seconds to midnight. Yet today's youth didn't grow up with ingrained worries about possible nuclear disaster, as much as they have with fears of global warming and incessant conflicts.

Over the past decade, the US has allocated hundreds of billions of dollars to upgrade its nuclear arsenal. The worldwide nuclear chain of command is connected by an invisible electronic web of hair triggers. And the only thing restraining the nuclear powers from unleashing a potentially planet-incinerating conflagration is a simple but dreadful theory that is as timeworn as many of the weapons gathering dust in their bunkers: Such a clash would result in the destruction of life as we know it.

I discussed the movie with Dennis Wong, co-founder of the Rotary Action Group for Peace, which advocates for the elimination of nuclear weapons. Wong was impressed with how Nolan parsed the stages of morality that we witness in the film. "Most of those scientists thought that nobody would use these weapons to destroy the world," he says. "The bomb just might be a saviour — a deterrent in neutral hands to be employed to prevent conflict and end wars."

Once the bomb's power had been demonstrated, the physicists returned to their universities and began talking about how to convert this devastating technology into a force for good, like building nuclear-powered generators to produce cheap electricity across the globe.

"If you are looking for security, if your goal is the prevention of conflict with a kind of mutual assured security, they had to design some way to build goodwill and friendships by sharing nuclear power," Wong says. The tragedy, he adds, is that the technology moved quickly in another direction. "Nuclear weapons



are about power — power to stay in office and power to stay relevant," he explains.

Oppenheimer's life, and the scientific establishment he briefly governed, showed how geopolitical realities can pervert a great scientific achievement. One has to wonder what Oppenheimer would say about today's nuclear conundrum: Russia has invaded Ukraine in the centre of Europe and threatened America and the NATO alliance with nuclear fire if they intervene. Israel engaged in a war in Gaza after a terrorising surprise attack by Hamas. Israel has a broad arsenal of nuclear weapons that experts believe it could employ against any state that threatens Israel's existence. Iran, another aspiring nuclear power, stands as Israel's most pernicious antagonist. North Korea is the most recent nuclear power, whose actions are impossible to predict. Meanwhile, China has significantly expanded its

nuclear arsenal in the past few years as Sino-US rivalry intensifies.

Cinema shapes the narrative of history, but even Nolan's important film does not help us through the nuclear wilderness in which we still find ourselves. We are in dire need of a thoughtful closing to the Oppenheimer era about how to construct a safe path forward, for a pandemic or climate change might deliver Earth a terrible blow, but nuclear war is in a league of its own, kind of like the arrival of the asteroid 66 million years ago — only now, we are the dinosaurs.

The writer is an author and former chief correspondent for The New York Times. His books include Running Critical, about the US nuclear submarine programme; A World of Trouble, a history of US Middle East policy; and Fortress Israel, about Israel's leadership since 1948

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Explore SINGAPORE MALAYSIA

MAY 24 - 29
SINGAPORE



5 NIGHTS STAY AT VALUE ADDED THOMPSON
ROOM WITH BUFFET BREAKFAST
ONE-WAY TRANSFER FROM SINGAPORE COACH
STATION TO HOTEL
UNIVERSAL STUDIO TOUR WITH TRANSFERS
HALF DAY SENTOSA (1 WAY CABLE CAR)
HALF DAY CITY TOUR
NIGHT SAFARI
TRANSFER FROM SINGAPORE - KUALA LUMPUR
STANDARD AC COACH (7-8 HOURS DURATION)
ONE-WAY TRANSFER FROM HOTEL TO KUALA LUMPUR BY BUS AT NIGHT
KUALA LUMPUR CITY TOUR
BATU CAVES - MURUGAN TEMPLE

MAY 30 - 31
MALAYSIA



1 NIGHT IN KUALA LUMPUR STAY AT HOTEL
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The importance of adequate sleep

Bharat & Shalan Savur

Create your own virtuous cycle. We had to literally think out-of-the-(meal) box, thanks to our dentist's appointments. We stuck to our two-meal daily intake (lunch and dinner) and ate what we have done for decades — homemade oil-less food that we recommend. We 'upped' our meal times: lunch at noon, supper at 6pm, and decided to turn in at 8pm. Early to bed and early to rise may or may not make us wealthy. But it definitely ticks the healthy and wise boxes. Just waking up before dawn is like gaining an extra day. But before we get to sleep and its benefits, let's get one thing straight.

Covid-19 has changed our lives forever. India's premier health research authority, ICMR, 'sampled' 729 severe Covid cases in a 'multicentric case-control study' of those who prematurely died between October 1, 2021 and

March 2023. In Gujarat alone, 10 died due to heart attacks at garba/dandiya events during Navratri. The youngest — a 17-year old. ICMR dug into a 'possible Covid link with instant unexplained deaths' and cautioned that those who had recovered from severe Covid infections should desist from extra physical labour at work, workouts, etc.

Medical information of its 729 subjects, and their health and behavioural aspects towards tobacco, alcohol and strenuous physical activity was recorded. As were their Covid conditions (were they hospitalised and had they received a Covid vaccine?). The ensuing database was compiled and compared with 2,916 people belonging to the same age group, gender and locality.

The study found that the odds were higher with persons having a family history of sudden death, being in a hospital for Covid, and bingeing on both drinking and intense physical activity

shortly before collapsing. This deadly duo burns life's candle at both ends. To meet death on the double. Hence, ICMR recommended a two-year break from over-exertion for ex-Covid cases.

In addition, how often have we heard or read about middle-aged people apparently, in prime condition, passing away prematurely? A singer gasping for breath onstage and being declared dead soon after. An apparent health freak having a lethal last run on the treadmill.

We lost a friend who said 'good morning' on Whatsapp and departed the same afternoon during his siesta. His death shocked us. Life today can be a grim game and one seldom knows who will draw death's short straw. People in their apparent prime are no exception. Mental/emotional stress, physical strain, air pollution... anything or everything seems to play a part in setting up situations and targets for the silent assassin.



Sleep, your apparent downtime, is actually 'do time' for your body's repair-and-recuperate routine. Like it or not, roughly one-third of your life should be spent sleeping. This works out to around eight hours in a 24-hour day-night cycle. Some might say sleep is simply a waste of time. Do you too? If your answer is 'no', that is a positive going for you. If your reply is negative, it is time to set your alarm clock for a wake-up call. Sunrise and sunset are not just for the birds. They apply to all that is natural, including all of us.

Fortunately, there is now a fast-growing recognition of the rewards of deep sleep. Mattress makers and medicines push and prod us with sleep's 'miracle-like' messages to promote those magical nocturnal eight hours as the seventh wonder. So much so that there are now sleep-specialist doctors and a whole pharma industry in its wake. The sleep economy, including supplements, diagnostics, consumer

devices and apps, will record \$585 billion this year.

Book publishers too have pitched in. 'Mapping the Darkness: The Visionary Scientist who Unlocked the Mysteries of Sleep' by Kenneth Miller is one such body of work. As the title implies, Miller records pillow pioneers, their manner and methods to enable people to 'sleep easy'. Pre-industrial Revolution, humans were body-tuned to the rhythm of dawn and dusk. Artificial lights and working night shifts changed the dynamics of sleep. Digital devices and blue light confuse our body clocks. In the 1930s, Nathaniel Kleitman founded the field of sleep science. His experiments examined how sleep interacts/interferes with the body's other cycles. Disorders like narcolepsy (excessive daytime drowsiness), sleepwalking, etc went under the medical microscope. Eventually, these disorders in turn lead to low productivity and accidents.

Indian tech czar Narayana Murthy might have talked about a 70-hour work week, but we can say that it is at odds with nature. As it is, the third shift is observed to be a long-term deterrent for health if persisted with for a long period of time.

Read in our present context, and confining it to just the third shift, it goes against the natural human grain and negates the emerging trends of flexible working hours and work-from-home. But then again, this is apparently the age of artificial intelligence and robotics. Perhaps, in the fitness of things and themes, robots could be the answer. And the next best thing? Maybe the third shift will get the short shrift! And AI and robots the last shift for starters...

The writers are authors of Fitness for Life and Simply Spiritual – You Are Naturally Divine and teachers of the Fitness for Life programme



Raising awareness on diabetes

Team Rotary News

On World Diabetes Day (Nov 14) last year, RC SPIC Nagar, RID 3212, in collaboration with Dr Arul's Diabetes Centre in Thoothukudi, organised a diabetes awareness camp in the port city. A range of medical examinations including testing blood sugar, blood pressure, cholesterol, HBA1c (test to

diagnose type 2 diabetes), biothesiometry (to detect neuropathy), dental and eye checkup were conducted. Over 500 people availed the services at the camp.

A symposium on managing diabetes was addressed by medical experts from the diabetes centre. The day-long programme concluded with an awareness rally in



A biothesiometry test being conducted at the diabetes screening camp.

which 300 students from two nursing colleges participated along with Rotarians from various Rotary clubs in the city. PDG Dr K Vijayakumar flagged off the rally.

The club has been observing World Diabetes Day with awareness programmes and diabetes screening camps for the past 15 years. ■

Meet your



Muthiah Pillai

*IT consultant and educationist
RC Tirunelveli West, RID 3212*

For quality membership growth

Muthiah Pillai joined Rotary “driven by the prospect of networking and advancing my business.” He vividly remembers meeting a visually-challenged Rotarian from RC Nagarcoil Elite. “He told me that he was a beneficiary of an audio library that my club had set up in his school years ago. I was overwhelmed. This made me realise the profound impact Rotary has, not just on beneficiaries but also on Rotarians.”

Reflecting on membership challenges, he highlights the difficulty in attracting “younger members who seek tangible benefits from Rotary. We have to focus on quality over quantity and prioritise orientation programmes.” He is aiming for a “qualitative net membership growth of five per cent.” For retention, “simple gestures like phone calls and genuine conversations are the key. They foster a sense of belonging and respect within our clubs,” he says. The district has 13 per cent women members, “but there is room for improvement, particularly in creating a more welcoming environment for LGBTQIA individuals.”

He is actively encouraging clubs to apply for GGs. “My goal is to complete 10 global grants during my tenure; three have already been approved.” His district aims to donate \$500,000 to TRF and \$150,000 to the Polio Fund.



Milind Martand Kulkarni

*Builder
RC Kalyan, RID 3142*

Advocating regional language in Rotary

For Milind Kulkarni the heart of Rotary lies in community service. “We join Rotary for the networking and fellowship but Rotary goes beyond. It helps you see the better person in you,” he says, and recalls the day an elderly man touched his feet to express his gratitude after getting cataract surgery at a Rotary camp. “The old man received free surgery but *us din mujhe Rotary ka chashma lag gaya* (from that day on I am seeing through the Rotary lens).”

He believes Rotary provides an “ideal platform for young people and women to showcase their talent and acquire valuable leadership skills.” Kulkarni’s district is working on eight GGs, including a water conservation project worth \$120,000 and a paediatric surgery worth \$32,000.

“We have to understand each member’s purpose and commitment to Rotary, and make them understand that success in Rotary requires dedication and active participation,” he says. He strongly recommends use of regional language for training and communication as that will make Rotary more accessible and relatable to members.

Governors

Kiran Zehra



Ashok Kumar Gupta

Paper industry

RC Saket Meerut, RID 3100

Rotary should push boundaries

Since 1996, Ashok Kumar Gupta has been a part of Rotary, but it wasn't until 2000, during a flood relief effort, that he truly grasped its profound impact while distributing food packets to the flood victims. He sees Rotary "not just as an organisation but as a mindset—a platform for pushing boundaries, challenging oneself, and discovering our capacity for compassion."

He emphasises the importance of selecting members who "embody the spirit of Rotary as a family. A single problematic member can tarnish the goodwill of the entire organisation." So, he advocates a rigorous membership selection process, "ensuring that every member contributes positively to the club and Rotary." Newly inducted members have been asked to demonstrate their commitment by becoming Paul Harris Fellows on the day of their installation. Gupta himself has contributed \$37,000 to TRF.

So far, his district has contributed \$150,000 to TRF this year. The district is carrying out two global grant projects — an eye surgery camp and supplying medical equipment to hospitals.



Ritu Grover

Management & admin

RC Indore Royals, RID 3040

Towards a united Rotary community

Social service has fuelled her journey since 2006 when she joined Rotary. Central to DG Ritu Grover's vision is "the cultivation of a strong, united Rotary community." She advocates consolidation of smaller clubs into larger ones, "fostering greater cohesion and amplifying the organisation's collective impact." Through initiatives aimed at incentivising membership growth, providing leadership opportunities and promoting family involvement, she hopes to reach her membership targets.

Ritu strongly supports DEI principles, striving "to create an environment where every member feels valued and respected." Instead of creating separate clubs for LGBTQIA and transgender individuals, she promotes their inclusion within existing clubs.

On responsible stewardship in using resources, she says, "the judicious use of TRF funds will ensure that Rotary's resources are utilised for maximum benefit." Her district's TRF target for the year is \$300,000. Currently, the district has five global grants and three CSR projects in the pipeline.

She has distributed *Gyankush*, a booklet in Hindi and English, to members to enhance their Rotary knowledge.

Designed by N Krishnamurthy



Make a fresh start while moving home

Preeti Mehra

A new home opens up several environment-friendly possibilities.

Moving home is akin to making a fresh start. It offers you an opportunity to carry out some serious stocktaking of the inventory of household goods you have acquired. But while doing so, wearing a green bifocal will make a world of difference. You will not only be able to give away things you don't need but can recycle and repurpose bits and pieces of furniture and clothes lying unused for years. More importantly, you can invest sensibly in new household goods to ensure that your new home is as minimalist and environment-friendly as possible.

I know this from first-hand experience having gone through the exercise of moving home from distant Delhi to closer-to-my-heart Chennai. The entire process of setting up a new home served as an eye-opener. When I unpacked my kitchenware, I realised I had acquired more than I required. These included gifts from friends and relatives that had

piled up over the years. I know I ought to have given much of it away in Delhi but sometimes emotion and sentiment get the better of us and we rather keep a gift though it will lie unused in some inaccessible top shelf.

Luckily, in Chennai I was more pragmatic. Many of the utensils I had no use for were quickly donated to an organisation which was distributing essentials to people dislocated by the cyclone that had struck Chennai in early December. Out went many clothes and an assortment of household goods and appliances that had seen better days.

But I did not stop there. I decided that my new home should reflect and incorporate the priorities of the times we live in. A fair amount of research went in before the new home was set up and that is the information I would like to share with the readers. But before embarking on this, let me point out that one may not be able to implement all the recommendations of the pundits, but we can at least try.

While buying electrical appliances like air conditioners and fans, invest wisely on brands that are certified as energy efficient, with a Bureau of Energy Efficiency star rating. Do not opt for inexpensive machines which are outdated and run up huge energy bills. If you are buying a washing machine, choose one that consumes less power and water. Ditto for water purifiers. Conserving water is as important as saving energy. Luckily, most manufacturers are producing far more

environment-friendly machines than they did in the past.

One way of saving energy I learnt was by keeping your flat/home well ventilated. The apartment complex we shifted into on the Old Mahabalipuram Road is blessed — as is most of Chennai — with a sea breeze. But most houses in the area we observed have their windows closed for most of the evening and during the night for fear of mosquitoes. Unopened windows may ward off mosquitoes but keep the fresh sea breeze also out.

The young designer we consulted was someone who married aesthetics with pragmatism in her work. She suggested we invest in mosquito meshes that are mounted on sliding metal frames for all windows, large and small in the flat. We took her advice, and are

While buying electrical appliances like air conditioners and fans, invest wisely on brands that are certified as energy efficient, with a Bureau of Energy Efficiency star rating.



happy we did. The house is so airy that we have not felt the need to switch on our ACs so far. We even use our fans sparingly. In peak summer it might get hotter and stickier, but I believe that a well-ventilated house will be far more comfortable than one in which windows are closed in the evenings to keep mosquitoes and insects at bay.

We also chose a place where a metro link will be available soon. This will help us avoid using fossil fuel vehicles in the future and that too only during emergencies.

Along with our designer, we also decided to do most of the interiors in eco-friendly bamboo as it is the most sustainable material available and sits lightly on the conscience.

Ours of course is a high-rise apartment block, but if you are lucky to have your own plot of land, there are several choices that you can make to travel on the road to sustainability. The first rule is to study your plot of land carefully and decide not to do away with any of the greenery that exists on it. Consider a design that can incorporate the trees and bushes that already adorn the landscape instead of cutting down the greenery and starting on a barren new slate.

Understand the water source that is serving your plot. It would be best to plan around that. For instance, make

sure you install a water harvesting system that will help you replenish your groundwater and can be used for watering the garden and vegetable patches. It would be great if you could also make use of the grey water from your kitchen and sinks. A water consultant could tell you how to recycle the same water for your flushing system.

Finally, a word about solar power. The last column delved in detail on how important it is to install solar panels to cut power consumption and finally even be free of drawing energy from the official grid. If you have your own house, setting up

panels would be that much easier than in a flat. However, despair not, judicious use of balconies might help. Or persuading your building society to install solar panels could be an option. Some companies are even offering a mini wind turbine in the balcony that can cut the extensive use of energy from the grid. I saw some installed in Noida, and in a windy area it would be even more efficient.

The idea is to reduce your carbon imprint and do your bit for Mother Earth.

The writer is a senior journalist who writes on environmental issues



Project Vignettes

Team Rotary News

Equipment for a dialysis centre in Pune



Patients being treated at the dialysis centre.

Supported by RC Pune Sports City, RID 3131, the Rotary Dialysis Centre at the Symbiosis University Hospital, Lavale, Pune, provides free dialysis to underprivileged patients. A recent \$85,000 global grant funded 10 new dialysis machines, enabling about 21,000 treatments annually. ■

WASH facilities for Kolkata schools



RID Anirudha Roychowdhary at the inauguration along with Rotarians and members of Prabasi.

Prabasi, an NRI Bengali community, and Rotary clubs from RID 3291, recently inaugurated a WASH project at Bodhodaya Primary School and Asha Bhavan Centre, a school for differently-abled girls in Kolkata. ■

Skilling centre in Delhi



Rotarians at the skill centre.

RC Delhi South West, RID 3011, through its Rotary Delhi South West Foundation and the Arya Samaj, launched a 4,500sqft skill centre in New Delhi. It provides computer, English, and other job-related courses to underprivileged students. Tailoring and beauty care courses are also conducted for women. ■

Wheelchairs for differently-abled children



Disabled children, along with Rotarians, after receiving the wheelchairs

Rotary Clubs Hubli, Dharwad One, Gokak, Mundgod, Hangal, Kundgol and Dandeli, in association with RILM, donated 150 wheelchairs worth ₹13.5 lakh to differently-abled children in Dharwad, to help them attend school with ease. ■

District Wise TRF Contribution as on January 2024

(in US Dollars)

District Number		Annual Fund	PolioPlus Fund	Endowment Fund	Other Funds	Total Contribution
India						
2981		22,051	875	1,000	200	24,126
2982		22,888	694	24,085	8,857	56,524
3000		72,078	290	0	27,797	100,165
3011		134,732	23,916	26,089	249,872	434,609
3012		11,124	50	0	129,370	140,545
3020		111,355	22,227	33,235	49,025	215,842
3030		82,400	27,308	4,275	210,698	324,681
3040		3,772	108	0	25	3,906
3053		22,399	1,000	0	26,053	49,452
3055		82,292	2,516	30	6,228	91,067
3056		27,008	125	0	0	27,133
3060		74,999	9,590	7,700	178,913	271,202
3070		6,449	20	0	0	6,469
3080		83,889	21,006	1,500	11,384	117,779
3090		43,105	1,113	12,000	26,809	83,027
3100		81,611	2,787	25,301	31,118	140,817
3110		11,176	30	0	79,348	90,554
3120		34,079	129	0	101	34,308
3131		389,028	9,817	90,098	552,365	1,041,308
3132		87,806	4,658	10,000	48,391	150,854
3141		299,787	11,405	60,012	613,398	984,602
3142		241,539	33,293	14,500	47,798	337,129
3150		39,252	30,596	160,423	91,975	322,247
3160		10,568	1,051	0	0	11,619
3170		79,718	26,818	12,700	71,334	190,570
3181		82,971	2,073	1,000	75	86,119
3182		35,381	4,606	0	0	39,987
3191		50,405	8,991	60,976	287,466	407,837
3192		71,086	9,767	0	46,198	127,051
3201		121,533	43,971	45,684	1,040,428	1,251,615
3203		16,470	16,317	1,220	15,550	49,557
3204		15,346	2,574	0	18,466	36,386
3211		42,143	4,236	27,325	98,347	172,052
3212		58,621	18,987	2,000	65,152	144,760
3231		4,442	2,649	0	0	7,090
3232		42,329	18,109	15,511	859,326	935,275
3240		87,889	8,705	13,000	92,007	201,602
3250		31,185	3,051	26	11,298	45,560
3261		12,063	1,968	0	28,978	43,009
3262		36,129	4,936	1,000	2,575	44,640
3291		119,232	2,567	41,646	1,050	164,495
3220	Sri Lanka	45,763	3,232	0	973	49,967
3271	Pakistan	44,532	101,435	0	20,402	166,369
*3272	Pakistan	4,342	385	0	25	4,752
*3281	Bangladesh	80,569	2,105	3,000	264,728	350,403
*3282	Bangladesh	91,236	4,982	1,000	9,116	106,334
3292	Nepal	150,403	20,776	13,000	94,094	278,272
63	(former 3272)	1,025	0	0	0	1,025
64	(former 3281)	23,045	200	1,000	0	24,245
65	(former 3282)	3,797	100	0	9,000	12,897

* Undistricted

Annual Fund (AF) includes SHARE, AoF and World Fund.

PolioPlus excludes Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. **Source:** RISAO



Diversity strengthens our clubs


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Wordsworld

Seeing from the Inside Out



Sandhya Rao

A new collection of short stories and a recent book offer historical and social perspectives through fictional accounts.

When the offspring of someone close to you does something special — and we're not talking awards — you feel an indescribable joy and pride. It could be anything: designing clothes, cooking up recipes, taking a break to travel the world, counselling a friend, making a tough decision, writing a book... Recently, I received a slim book published by Black Lawrence

Press, titled *Boomtown Girl*. It's the debut short story collection of Shubha Sunder and you will forgive me for going on a bit about her because she happens to be the daughter of a dear childhood friend who was my absolute reading role model. Many years and much water has flowed since we first met at about ages 6 and 8 or thenabouts. She's in Moscow and I in Chennai, but we remain close friends.

Shubha's book won the 2021 St Lawrence Book Award, and was a finalist for the Hudson Prize, the Flannery O'Connor Award, and the New American Fiction Prize. There's more, but I shall stop with adding that she grew up in Bengaluru when it was still Bangalore, and now lives in Boston, Massachusetts. *Boomtown Girl* contains a set of nine stories, set in Bangalore, and presents a nuanced and detailed array of characters emerging from various crossroads and corners of the city. There's a neglected young girl who is kidnapped, another who goes on an outing with her father, a young man desperate to study overseas, a boy who finds himself 'protecting' a foreigner aunty, a 'quintessential Kaverinagar retiree' who finds a sort of love interest, schoolgirls who get caught up in a horrific turn of events (the title story), and plenty more.

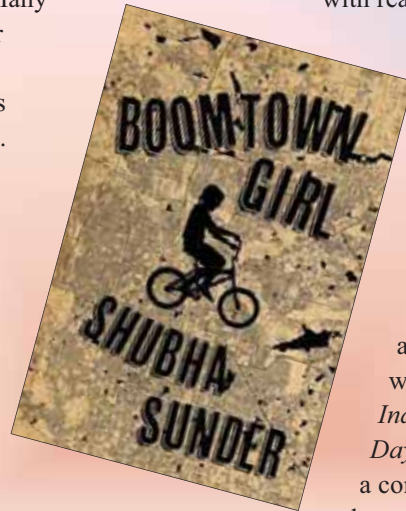
The writing is clear, precise, detailed, contained, even though the plotlines themselves are largely open-ended, giving a slice-of-life sense. Taken together, though,

the stories in the collection create a world of darkness, uncertainties, even menace, at times. Occasionally, the writing may seem self-conscious but it also sparkles with possibilities to make you want more as it pulsates with real life and the

concerns of the 1980s and 1990s. To give one example: In a story called 'Independence Day,' father and daughter are going to watch a film, *Independence Day*. It opens on a conversation between them about the kind of physical

force acting on the car as they drive towards the cinema. After some back and forth on the subject of physics, the father says, 'You got a ninety-one? ... Without understanding Newton's Laws?' My mind goes back to several similar conversations during travel, featuring various children/parents. 'You can memorize and regurgitate ... But until you understand the concepts, you have learned nothing ...' he goes on, while his daughter reflects on how he went to the US to study at age 16 but 'returned to India to pursue his career, how the country needed more people like him in this age of the Brain Drain.'

Further along, there's another conversation, this time with a former employee of the father who asks, after the preliminaries, '... Are you still at Infosys?' No, comes the response: 'He told the businessman he had left



that company because the work pressures had been too much.’ The workaholic father tells the man, ‘At your age, my friend, ... you should be working 16, 18 hours day,’ echoing the ‘70 hours a week’ war cry of another workaholic we all know about!

From Shubha’s Bengaluru we travel to Brinda Charry’s ‘somewhere near Madras’ as her protagonist voyages from India to London to end up in Virginia, USA. Tony, the central character of *The East Indian*, is also the narrator of his amazing saga. To put the novel in perspective, here’s what the author says in her note: ‘While this is a work of fiction, it is inspired by the “East Indian” presence in colonial North America. Many of the very first East Indians (i.e., natives of the Indian subcontinent) in America probably arrived as indentured servants. They came via London, where they were most likely either servants to East India Company officials or sailors of East India Company ships. Most of them were brought over to America by agents scouting for cheap labour. “Tony” is the earliest known mention of such an East Indian worker.’

In the course of her research, Brinda Charry discovered records that indicated that one such person had worked as apprentice to an apothecary in London before being put on board a ship called *God’s Gift* to America. Inspired, she imagined a detailed narrative around the

possible life and times of this ‘Tony,’ entirely fictional but firmly hooked to a historical context. For instance, if you are interested in or familiar with the birth of the city of Madras, you will recognise some names mentioned in the early part of the book, such as Francis Day and Andrew Cogan. They are believed to have been instrumental in the birth of this city on the Coromandel coast. In the Virginia bit, there is mention of a George Menefie for whom Tony works; it is recorded that George Menefie was a rich landowner in Virginia.

Indeed, the nonfiction element is tangible, yet not intrusive. Far from stultifying the telling, it makes the reading experience all the more engrossing in a rather unusual way, be warned, though: the text size is unforgivably tiny. But don’t let that stop you. Many readers are likely to have friends and relatives in Virginia and Maryland, more reason to read this book. The descriptions

are evocative, the plot is engrossing... Brinda Charry does what only the rare book can, she carries you along Tony’s journey. It’s a story of separation, loss of identity, striving, struggling, slaving... but it is also a story about finding, receiving, creating. There is

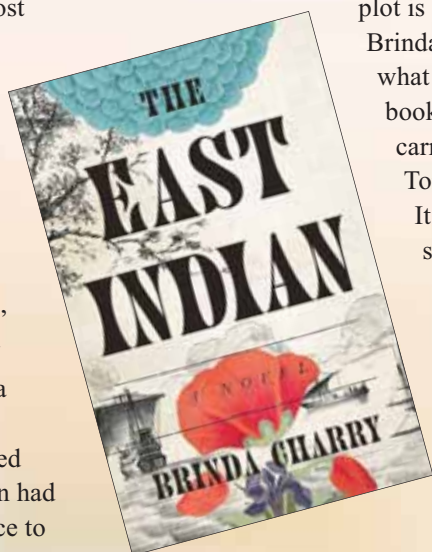
trial and punishment, but there are also insights and rewards. If all this sounds somewhat vague or intriguing, depending upon how

you look at things, be assured the book is far from vague, but intriguing it is.

The writing is rich, lucid, elegant, of the time, yet of our time. Tony is adored by his mother, doesn’t know who his father is, and is scuttled away whenever they have male visitors. When Sir Francis Day visits: ‘“White man here,” my uncle would announce, although he knew our visitor’s name, and although Master Day was less white than exceeding red in the heat, which bothered him terribly. I do not know what my mother felt about her Englishman, but she always welcomed him graciously and smiled as he took her hand in his to kiss, a gesture my grandmother thought was not becoming because it was performed in public.’

Tony sometimes sounds precocious, making observations ‘above his pay grade’. Still, we trust him and empathise with his situation. It’s a challenge: a brown man (not white, not black) navigating his way through a colonised subcontinent, an industrialising city, and trying to let down roots in a swampy, pestilence-ridden environment in which the original inhabitants are gradually being wiped out and ships of slaves are being brought almost daily to work in the tobacco fields. In an atmosphere overridden by the arrogance of ownership and the yearning for freedom, Tony chances upon a huge stroke of luck to become assistant to a doctor. You cheer him on as, through tragic losses and desperate choices, he learns to live and love.

The columnist is a children’s writer and senior journalist



Star Performers (Membership &

Membership Awards	Zone 4	Zone 5
Highest membership growth	Ashok Kantoor (RID 3011)	P Saravanan (RID 2982)
Highest membership growth in %age	Dushyant Chaudhary (RID 3070)	P Saravanan (RID 2982)
Highest expansion	Ashok Kantoor (RID 3011)	S Rajmohan Nair (RID 3201)
Highest women membership growth	Ashok Kantoor (RID 3011)	I Jerald (RID 3000)
Highest existing membership retention	VP Kalta (RID 3080)	VV Pramod Nayanar (RID 3204)
Highest new member retention	Rajesh Kumar Chura (RID 3053)	S Rajmohan Nair (RID 3201)



RI President Gordon McNally presents the award to IPDG VV Pramod Nayanar and his spouse Srividya as RID Raju Subramanian looks on. Also present: PDG Rajesh Subash and his spouse Deeshma, and Rotary Coordinator C Sivagnanselvam.

Public Image Champion Awards — Zones 4, 5, 6 and 7

Zone 4	Zone 5	Zone 6	Zone 7
Kailash Jethani (RID 3142)	P Saravanan (RD 2982)	Anand Jhunjhunuwala (RID 3030)	Bhaskar Ram Viswanatham (RID 3020)
Shrikant Indani (RID 3060)	S Rajmohan Nair (RID 3201)	Shashank Rastogi (RID 3261)	Anil Parmar (RID 3131)
Sandeep Agrawalla (RID 3141)	VV Pramod Nayanar (3204)	DK Sharma (RID 3100)	Rukmesh Jakotia (RID 3132)
Dushyant Chaudhary (RID 3070)	K Babumon (RID 3211)	Pawan Agarwal (RID 3110)	Talla Rajasekar Reddy (RID 3150)
Balwantsinh Chirana (RID 3054)	VR Muthu (RID 3212)	Jitendra Bahadur Rajbhandary (RID 3292)	Vominna Satish Babu (RID 3160)
VP Kalta (RID 3080)	Pubudu de Zoysa (RID 3220)	Anil Agarwal (RID 3120)	Venkatesh Deshpande (RID 3170)
			Jeetendra Aneja (RID 3190)

PI Awards) — Zones 4, 5, 6 and 7

Membership Awards	Zone 6	Zone 7
Highest membership growth	Anand Jhunjhunwala (RID 3030)	N Prakash Karanth (RID 3181)
Highest membership growth in %age	Anand Jhunjhunwala (RID 3030)	N Prakash Karanth (RID 3181)
Highest expansion	Shashank Rastogi (RID 3261)	Bhaskar Ram Viswanatham (RID 3020)
Highest women membership growth	Shashank Rastogi (RID 3261)	N Prakash Karanth (RID 3181)
Highest existing membership retention	Shashank Rastogi (RID 3261) Sanjeev Kumar Thakur (RID 3250)	Dr Jayagowri Hadigal (RID 3182)
Highest new member retention	Jitendra Bahadur Rajbhandary (RID 3292)	Vommina Satish Babu (RID 3160)



IPDG Shashank Rastogi and his spouse Vishakha receive the award from President McInally. DG Manjit Singh Arora (L), PDG Pradeep Mukherjee and RID Subramanian are also in the picture.



President McInally presents the award to IPDG Ashok and Alka Kantoor. RC Gurjeet Singh Sekhon is seen on the left.



President McInally presents the public image award to IPDG Balwant Singh Chirana. From R: RPIC Pinky Patel, RID Subramanian and PDG Ashok Gupta are also seen.



IPDG Venkatesh Deshpande receives an award from President McInally. Also present (from R): PRID AS Venkatesh, RID Subramanian, DGE Sharad Pai and PDG Sangram Patil.

The power of Rotary friendship

Kalpana Khound

The motive power of Rotary is friendship,” said Paul Harris at the Rotary Convention held in Edinburgh in 1921. The friendships that are forged between Rotarians can be the beginning of great things for our community.

The centennial celebration of Rotary in India and mainland Asia was held in a very befitting manner in Kolkata in February 2020. The City of Joy saw the convergence of more than 4,000 Rotarians from over 30 nations, and I was a member of the reception committee. One responsibility

given to me was to receive PDG Nancy Barbee of North Carolina, RID 7730 (USA and Canada), at the Howrah station.

Little did I know when I met her at the station that it would be the beginning of a friendship to be cherished and one that would touch many lives. During those three days I met PDG Nancy several times and we became friends. She had come to RID 3250 as a GSE team leader in 2008 and had developed an emotional bonding with India. The cause of polio eradication is very close to her heart and she had come over during NIDs in India

heading a team of Rotarians from her district.

The euphoria of the successful centennial celebration at Kolkata disappeared soon with the advent of the pandemic. Nations were taken off guard and there was great human suffering. During the second wave of Covid Nancy told me that she would be sending much needed oxygen concentrators, and 40 oxygen concentrators were delivered to my home as a gift from the Rotarians of RID 7730, Zones 28, 32 and 33 (USA and Canada). She had spearheaded the entire effort and had used the service of Sewa India to

get the life-saving equipment over to Dibrugarh, a city in upper Assam where I reside. On receiving the valuable gift, Rotarians of my club reached the machines to the right organisations in Assam and neighbouring states. The first concentrator was given to the Dibrugarh Police Hospital and others to the Marwari Yuva Manch Moran, Deepshika Cancer Foundation, Pratishruti Cancer and Palliative Trust, Dibrugarh University Hospital, etc.

A Rotarian from the E-Club of Connect, RID 3012, Dr Nischal Pandey, with whom I had worked for the Gift Of Life programme, which helps children from economically backward families with congenital heart defects, wanted to send some medical equipment and two oxygen concentrators to Myanmar where they were badly needed. But this was difficult as Myanmar was a country under military regime. The thought that I should do something about it kept nagging me and we decided to send 14 concentrators through train bound for Dimapur, Nagaland, from New Dibrugarh Railway station. The railway staff was very happy that their services were being



Nay Min Oo (fourth from left) with other members of RC Mandalay, Myanmar.

used to give succour to citizens in another country.

Many Rotarians came together for this rather difficult work. Myanmar was struggling with Covid and the military coup of Feb 2021 was hard pressed to face the pandemic. Make-shift medical centres were set up on the streets by a few Rotarians who chose to remain incognito. With hardly any connection with the outside world, no assistance came in from other parts. The seven Rotary clubs of Myanmar were part of RID 3350 but with the country being closed to the outside world and being under a military regime, no help came in from any other country.

Finally, our consignment reached the small town of Tamu which is the entry point for Myanmar from the Indian side. However, it took much longer than expected as it

had to be taken through a heavily wooded hilly terrain. Nay Min Oo, Secretary of RC Mandalay, and other members of the club took up the responsibility of distributing the concentrators. In a touching gesture of brotherhood one concentrator was gifted to Myanmar Meitei Development Association which comprised of persons of Manipuri origin residing in Myanmar by RC Mandalay's president Dr Naing Win in appreciation of their logistics support. The concentrators brought great relief during those difficult times to the Covid-affected not only in Mandalay but also in Yangon.

Many lives were saved. As I reflect on the selfless action of my friend PDG Nancy and the support she received from Rotarians of USA and Canada, I marvel at



PDG Kalpana Khound with PDG Nancy Barbee from N Carolina at the Howrah Railway Station.

the power of friendship in Rotary and the good that follows.

Nay Min Oo recalls that “back in 2021, when Covid ravaged the country of Myanmar, at the peak of the pandemic, lack of oxygen equipment and medical facilities resulted in the deaths of thousands of patients every day. Therefore, in August 2021, an unexpected gift of 10 oxygen concentrators from the US and Canada, with logistic support from RCs Dibrugarh, Kohima and Imphal, RID 3240, and Rotary E-Club of Connect, RID 3012, was almost a godsend.”

He adds: “At this time, I personally witnessed the level of Rotary’s commitment to service, dedicating its members to a seemingly impossible service project across the world amidst a global pandemic. From

this I was also able to build goodwill and lasting friendship with those involved. I will be forever grateful and proud to be a Rotarian.” For this collaboration, numerous zoom meetings were conducted to coordinate the logistics for delivering the oxygen concentrators to Myanmar. The transportation was done by the use of trains, buses and local teams. On behalf of the Rotary clubs in Myanmar, RC Mandalay received these concentrators, and RC Metro Yangon also coordinated.

During their passage through the India-Myanmar border, we lost five oxygen concentrators. However, the concentrators were successfully retrieved with the Rotarians’ endless efforts.

The writer is a past district governor, RID 3240



PDG Kalpana with members of RC Duliajan after giving them an oxygen concentrator.

RC Pattukkottai Kings — RID 2981



Gift hampers and dress material were distributed to underprivileged families during Pongal festival.

RC Ghaziabad Ideal — RID 3012

DG Priyatosh Gupta inaugurated a smart class (₹1.25 lakh) at the Shambhu Dayal College. A rainwater harvesting system (₹1.5 lakh) was also set up.



RC Maa-Nagar Krishnagiri — RID 2982



A plantation drive was held at the Kaveripattinam Boys HS School in with NCC cadets and personnel from the 11 TN Signal Company NCC, Salem.

RC Nagpur Metro — RID 3030

Sixty dinner sets were donated to Matoshree Vrudhashram, an old age home with 64 inmates. Gulmohar Society and Dumbhare Jewellers also sponsored the project.



RC Jayankondam — RID 3000



A cattle deworming medical camp was held jointly with the Animal Husbandry department with district public image chair Leo Felix Lewis as chief guest.

RC Pali — RID 3056

Computers were donated to the government school in Hemawas village, benefitting over 100 students by upgrading their quality of education.



RC Roorkee Midtown — RID 3080



The club is serving tea, samosas and biscuits to labourers at dawn to beat the wintry chill throughout January for the last four years.

RC Kushinagar — RID 3120



Sutatva Riju (12) from Jharkhand who is on a World Peace Message Tour, and three other cyclists were honoured when they arrived from Gangotri.

RC Muzaffarnagar Midtown — RID 3100



TRF vice-chair Bharat Pandya and DG Ashok Gupta inaugurated a toilet block and a freedom fighter's memorial upgraded by the club at the district jail.

RC Pune Kothrud — RID 3131



Thirty-five women were trained in tailoring in a joint project with Glatt Systems. This will enable them to earn a regular income by stitching a variety of clothing.

RC Nainital — RID 3110



Baby kits consisting of blankets and warm clothes were donated to newborns at the BD Pandey Hospital and Sarkari Mahila Chikitsalaya, Haldwani.

RC Mumbai Bhandup — RID 3141



A three-day Rotary Fun Fiesta saw multiple events attended by social celebrities to raise funds for projects to serve the underprivileged.

RC Jammalamadugu — RID 3160



Twenty chairs were donated to the Government Polytechnic College. Club members, principal and staff were present at the handover event.

RC Kallianpura — RID 3182



PDG Nagendra Prasad handed over two additional units (₹17 lakh) to the Rotary Dialysis Centre at the Goratti Hospital.

RC Gajendragad — RID 3170



Out of 400 patients screened for the cataract check-up camp, 103 were selected and sent to MM Joshi Eye Hospital, Hubballi, for surgery.

RC Bengaluru Heritage North — RID 3192



Colourful tables and matching chairs were donated to the Government Primary School, Kamakshipura, for children in Classes 1–3.

RC Kollegal — RID 3181



Club president Nanjundaswamy inaugurated a two-day district-level badminton tournament. Trophies were presented to the winners.

RC Kalamassery – RID 3201



The club provided a house for a homeless man, thanks to philanthropist Kochouseph Chittilappally, a member of RC Cochin Central.

RC Nilambur — RID 3204



DG Sethu Shiv Sankar presented documents to one of the five landless families who got 20 cents of land (₹20 lakh) for constructing their houses.

RC Raipur — RID 3261



At a job fair organised by the club, 157 people were hired by 18 companies in the first phase. Equitas, Tele Brains, Hearing Care Center and Signia were the co-organisers.

RC Virudhunagar — RID 3212



PDGs VR Muthu and K Vijayakumar flagged off a diabetes awareness rally. A diabetes detection camp was also held.

RC Bhubaneswar Meadows — RID 3262



Around 300 students attended a cyber security seminar at the CIME College with DG Jayashree Mohanty as chief guest. A cyber safety van was flagged off.

RC Vellore — RID 3231



Nine-year-old Samuyuktha Sree, a Class 4 student at the Velammal Bodhi Campus, gave a talk on Pongal festival in Tamil Nadu at the club meeting.

RC Jodhpur Gardens Calcutta — RID 3291



Blankets were distributed to families with the support of RCC Sisir Bagan at Joypur Howrah. Saplings were also planted.

Compiled by V Muthukumaran



**TCA Srinivasa
Raghavan**



Loud, louder, loudest

It's often said there is an underlying unity in India's huge diversity. We don't agree on many things. But one of the few things that we do agree upon wholeheartedly is a strong preference for noise, the louder the better. Our diversity converges around extreme loudness. A few weekends ago this was brought home to me once again. Suddenly, quite out of the blue, a massive thumping of electronic music started up from behind our house. It's a massive parking lot owned by a massive builder. It's always full but not on weekends. So the builder has been renting it out to 'events' companies.

One of these organises musical events, which would be fine if there was indeed some music. Instead, only the loud thumping of drums and bass guitars is there. It's apparently called techno music. You are supposed to jump up and down with your girlfriend thinking you are dancing. So on that weekend this assault went on for seven hours, from 3pm to 10pm. It happened again two weeks ago.

One of the neighbours successfully measured the decibel level. It was 90. The legally permissible level is 45. So the next day, the head of our housing society asked the local police station how this was permitted. The police said the district magistrate had given official permission. But it seems the permission made no reference to how loud

the music could be. It is also doubtful if the application said where the event would be held, that is, that it would be adjacent to a cluster of residential buildings. Attention to detail was missing. We are like that only.

So we got the full 90 decibels. The windows in all the houses started rattling. As did our bones. I had to stuff cushions and pillows to stop the glass in the windows from shattering. The flower vases and bottles and other glass things had to be saved from falling. The dogs in the houses, of course, went berserk. As did small babies and the very old people. Only the deaf... lucky people... managed to escape unscathed. This 'music,' as I said, lasted for seven hours. Yes. seven. There was nothing we could do about it but grit our teeth in case they also fell out.

We are loud everywhere.

We speak loudly, we play
music on our phones loudly,
indeed, we speak to our wives
loudly even in public.

Lest you say this was an unusual event, perhaps it was. But let me say we as a people are loud even in everyday life. In buses, in trains, in planes, in theatres, in shopping malls, in restaurants, in offices and even in homes and hospitals, mosques, temples — we are loud everywhere. We speak loudly, we play music on our phones loudly, indeed, we speak to our wives loudly even in public. Once on a plane I heard — not overheard, mind you, because they were sitting across the aisle — a couple discussing their medical issues. The man had prostate issues and the woman had rotting teeth or gums or both. They talked very loudly for the entire duration of the flight from Delhi to Bhopal which takes just 75 minutes. I thanked my stars that it wasn't a Delhi-Trivandrum flight which can take nearly three and a half hours.

But loudness has its funny moments, too. By far, the funniest story I have ever heard was from a retired officer of the foreign service. I don't know if it's apocryphal. It seems one day, long ago, our ambassador in Berne in Switzerland heard someone shouting away. He called his PA and asked what was happening. The PA said "Sir, Mr so-and-so is talking to the consulate in Geneva." The ambassador was totally mystified. "Please tell him to use the phone, then," he ordered the PA! ■



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- 67** 20 FEB, 2024 Central Provincial Council Auditorium, **PALLEKALE**
- 68** 21 FEB, 2024 Grand Pavilion, **NAWALAPITIA**
- 69** 22 FEB, 2024 Prince Hall, **HATTON**, Srilanka
- 70** 23 FEB, 2024 Swamy Vipulanandha Institute of Aesthetics Studies, **BATTICALOA**
- 71** 24 FEB, 2024 University @ **VAVUNIYA**
- 72** 25 FEB, 2024 Event at Jaffna Cultural Center by Consulate
- 73** 26 FEB, 2024 **8 AM - 10 AM** Jaffna Central College, **JAFFNA**
11 AM - 1 PM Union College, **JAFFNA**
- 75** 27 FEB, 2024 **8 AM - 10 AM** Hartley College, **JAFFNA**
11 AM - 1 PM Chavakachcheri Hindu College, **JAFFNA**
2 PM - 4 PM Jaffna University, **JAFFNA**
- 78** 28 FEB, 2024 **8 AM - 10 AM** Palai Central College, **KILLINOCHCHI**
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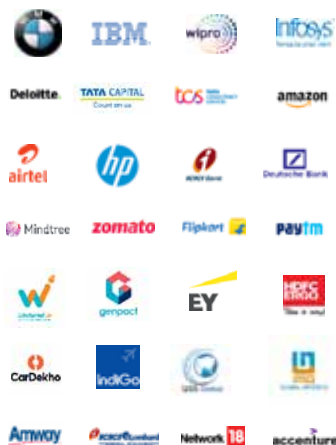
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