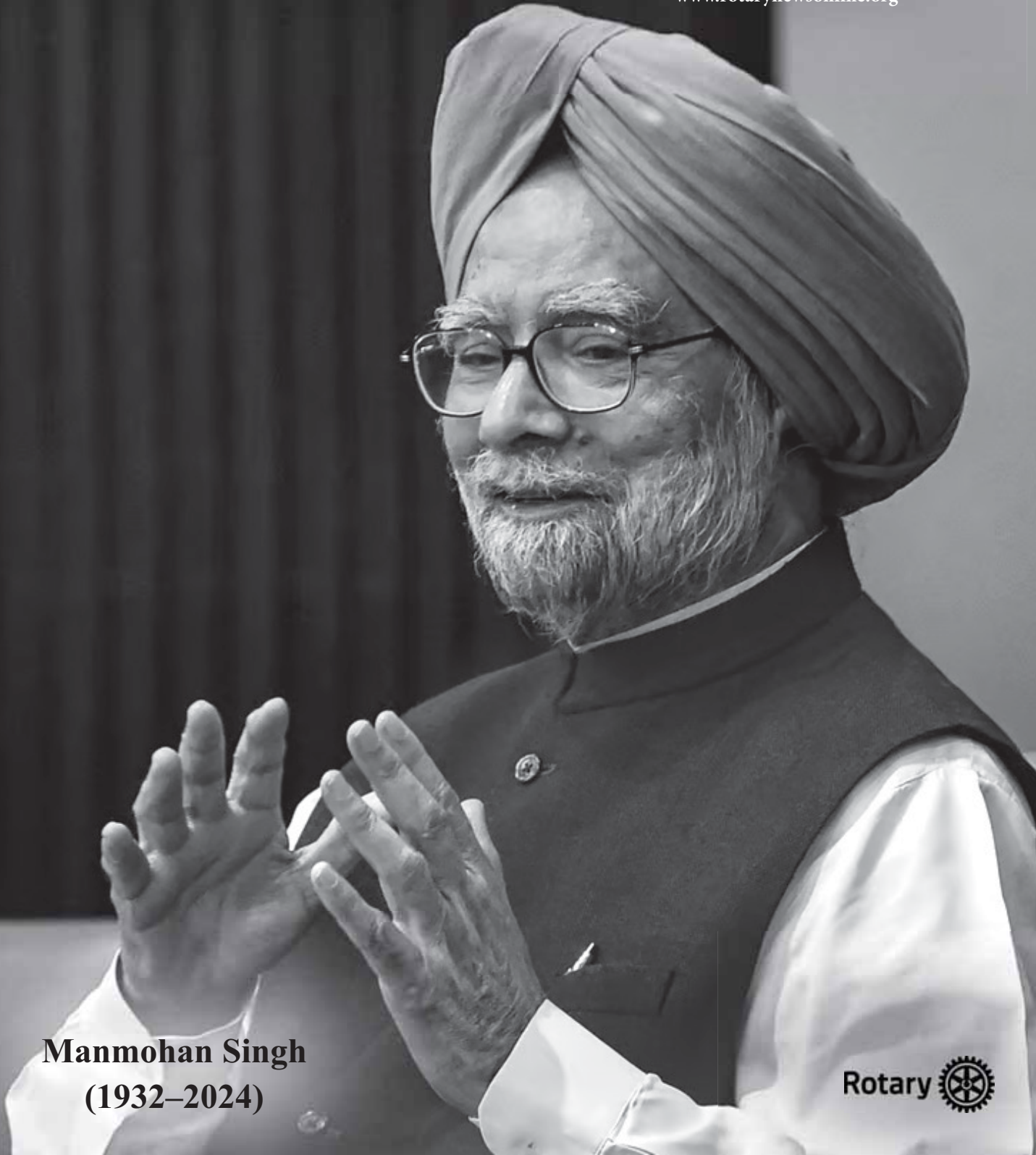


Rotary News

India

www.rotarynewsonline.org



Manmohan Singh
(1932–2024)





Rotary
District 3212



VISION SCREENING *In Schools*



WE BELIEVE THAT EVERY CHILD DESERVES THE GIFT OF SIGHT
Vision Screening Project is not just about providing spectacles,
It's about giving children a brighter future.

For two decades, the Vision Screening Project has made a profound difference in the lives of countless students in and around Virudhunagar.

This remarkable initiative goes beyond simply providing free vision screenings and spectacles. It has played a crucial role in identifying and addressing congenital vision defects among children, ensuring they receive timely treatment and the opportunity to reach their full potential.

7,859 free spectacles donated. Providing corrective eyewear has empowered students with clearer vision, improving their academic performance and overall quality of life.

278,713 students screened in 68 Schools. This extensive reach has enabled early detection of various vision problems, including those present at birth. 5 Students with congenital vision defects have been identified so far and corrective surgeries have been performed.

The Vision Screening Project stands as a testament to our Rotary District. Their dedication to ensuring that every child has access to quality eye care is truly commendable.

The project helps to ensure that all students have access to the vision care they need to succeed in school and in life.

LEKHA Feb 25 FW

IDHAYAM
PROMISE OF HEALTH AND HAPPINESS



Project Chairman
Rtn. MAPR. Krishnamurthy



Project Director
Rtn. R. Vadivel

Inside



12

A scholar
Prime Minister



22

The missing
integrity
in politics



28

Fighting for
children



32

Shaping Rotary's
future



40

From rural farms
to urban forks




46

Revisiting tsunami
havoc in Sri Lanka



50

The saree's
timeless elegance

Rotary 

A publication of Rotary
Global Media Network

E-version rate Reduced

From July 1, 2024, our E-version subscription
has been revised from

₹420 to ₹324

Excellent coverage of the Kochi institute

The eagerly awaited Jan issue is in my hands. It mainly covered the Kochi Institute with the photo feature providing a colourful look to the pages for which editor Rasheeda Bhagat, Jaishree and Hemant deserve appreciation. Kudos for a perfect presentation.

I eagerly turned the pages and got a good grasp of the details and deliberations of the institute. To my surprise and delight, important moments of the mega event and hospitality extended by the organisers were nicely cocooned in the Editor's note, written in fine, simple English that is easily understandable. My compliments to Rasheeda for putting the best of efforts to bring out an informative magazine covering all aspects of Rotary.

Hats off to the convener and chair of the Kochi institute RI Director Anirudha Roychowdhury and PDG John Daniel for arranging a successful and perfect institute in every respect.

Raj Kumar Kapoor, RC Roop Nagar — D 3080

The cover photo of a Kathakali dancer in the January issue is colourful and attractive. RI President Stephanie Urchick explains well the need to attract new members and retain them by citing the example of a club in Japan.

The Editor's note gives a good account of a well-planned Kochi institute. Let me thank the leaders who managed it so meticulously. Both TRF trustee chair and trustee urge members to donate liberally to the Foundation, while RID Roychowdhury focused on



challenges we face today and ways to overcome obstacles.

The cover story 'World War III has begun...' is an eyeopener. All the Kochi institute reports and the picture pages are wonderful. Other articles in this issue are also noteworthy.

The Club matters photos are good, while the Go Green column titled *Tales of inspiration* by Preeti Mehra depicts a successful story of Diya and Sahiti who founded E-Cycl for processing e-waste.

As a whole, the maiden issue of this new year 2025 is excellent.

Philip Mulappone M T, RC Trivandrum Suburban — D 3211

It is quite revealing to read the cover story "Word War III has begun between man and nature". Man's activities have led to the present crisis which have created a WW III-like situation in which environmental degradation is posing the gravest yet threat to humanity. The article has also explained well the Ladakh school with its environment-friendly attributes. Kudos to the writer for driving home the message of adopting a sustainable and eco-friendly lifestyle.

S Raghavendran, RC Athur — D 2981

The article *World War III has begun... between man and nature* is wonderful and meticulously explained. Everyone knows it's end result — winner is nature.

Udaysingh Rajput, RC Belgaum Midtown — D 3170

Membership blues

I read with interest the article on membership attrition by Rasheeda Bhagat. Club leadership is critical to arrest membership decline in Rotary. Instead of using one's influence and power to induct new members, club presidents must take efforts to

identify service-minded individuals from different walks of life. Such professionals with interest in service must be invited to club meetings and should be attracted with our project initiatives.

Orientation sessions and workshops must be held for them as part of their grooming before

they are inducted into Rotary clubs. We need to exercise our intelligence in such workshops for non-Rotarians. Only if we attract such new Rotarians, we can expect them to stay in Rotary even if there is a leadership change.

S Mohankumar RC Pallikonda — D 3231

The article *Need to guard against "built in attrition" in membership* (Jan issue) is thought-provoking.

The clubs should be concerned with the views expressed by Rotary President Stephanie at the Kochi institute. Each time we lose a member, for whatever reason, Rotary's image is diminished, and it

LETTERS

is a definite indictment of our organisation. We should try to find out through exit interviews the reasons for people quitting Rotary. The questions we should pose are: What is wrong with us? Are we losing the primary purpose of service and fellowship? Are we giving any wrong impressions to new members?

A strong club leadership, meaningful projects and activities in our various avenues of service, warm fellowship, and involvement of every new member in club activities can improve the retention ratio. All the new members should be educated on the range of opportunities available in Rotary for service.

If the new members receive a clear message from the club leaders and senior Rotarians on what makes Rotary unique, knowledgeable Rotarians will never wish to leave Rotary during their lifetime except for age related problems. Only those members without a commitment to service will leave.

*R Srinivasan
RC Bangalore
J P Nagar — RID 3191*

House from plastic waste

Amongst all the wonderful articles in the December issue, an

article on a house fully built of recycled plastic waste stands out. A 625 sqft-house from 13 tonnes of single-use plastics made by an anaesthetist Balmukund Paliwal of RC Chandrapur with support from skilled craftsmen is commendable work to support the environment.

India produced around 9.5 million tonnes of various types of single-use plastics in 2023 whereas in the same period, China produced 75 million tonnes, and the world 414 million tonnes. The widespread pollution due to plastic waste is causing irreparable damage to the ecosystem and this is a really alarming situation. There are many ways to recycle plastic such as making clothes, bags, cutlery, bottles, food trays, shoes, and of course material used in construction.

Nothing beats the recycling or conversion of plastics into construction material. This model developed by him should be discussed at the highest level in Rotary and replicated.

*Balu Uphade
RC Navi Mumbai
Link Town — D 3142*

The cover story on anganwadi in the Dec issue is a remarkable project as Rotary is using AI to make the

anganwadis more efficient and transparent in providing education to children of poor families, apart from giving nutritious meal to them in Ghaziabad. It is good to note that this project is being replicated at the PM's constituency, Varanasi.

Rotary's big push to eradicate illiteracy in MP is a commendable project, while the feature on the house built from a plastic waste is a noble initiative by Balmukund Paliwal from RC Chandrapur.

I have been reading *Rotary News* over the last 28 years, and happy to

note that very interesting, informative articles are being published of late. Kudos to the editorial team.

*S N Shanmugam
RC Panruti — D 2981*

I am very impressed with LDG Raakhi Gupta after going through the Jan issue of *Rotary Samachar*. Her AMAR (add, multiply, adapt, retain) concept, if adopted by all clubs in true spirit, will definitely increase our membership manifold. Bringing more women into Rotary is also the need of the hour.

*O P Khadija
RC Jaipur
Kohinoor — D 3056*

Have you read **Rotary News Plus**?

This online publication is sent to the e-mail ID of every subscribing member.

Read **Rotary News Plus** on our website
www.rotarynewsonline.org

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.

Ripples of hope and change



This month, as we come together for the International Assembly and the Presidential Peace Conference, we celebrate *The Magic of Rotary* — a unique blend of global connection, vision, and action that empowers us to create lasting change.

One of the most inspiring examples is our Rotary Peace Fellowship programme, a cornerstone of Rotary's mission to build a more peaceful and just world.

For more than 23 years, Rotary Peace Fellowships have been transforming communities. Our Rotary Peace Centers, hosted at leading universities around the globe, have educated over 1,800 fellows who now work in more than 140 countries.

These centres cultivate expertise in fields like conflict resolution, sustainable development and peacebuilding, preparing fellows to tackle some of the world's most pressing challenges. This programme exemplifies how Rotary turns vision into action, creating a ripple effect of hope and change.

This month during the Presidential Peace Conference, we celebrate a significant milestone with the opening of our newest peace centre in Istanbul. This centre will focus on training leaders to address peacebuilding challenges in the Middle East and North Africa, further extending Rotary's impact.

Peace fellows are dedicated champions of transformation, addressing critical issues such as refugee resettlement, youth and women's empowerment, and reconciliation in conflict zones. Many founded vital organisations or hold leadership roles in governments,

nongovernmental organisations, and international institutions like the United Nations and World Bank.

One inspiring story is that of Ntang Julius Meleng, a 2024 Rotary Peace Fellow at Makerere University in Uganda. Through his Social Change Initiative, Julius has worked to empower young people in Cameroon to take active roles in peacebuilding and leadership.

His project provided training in conflict prevention, civic engagement, and leadership to youths and community officials in areas affected by conflict, equipping people to drive sustainable peace efforts.

Julius harnessed Rotary's global network to overcome obstacles, including limited funding and security risks, and make a meaningful impact.

The Rotary Peace Fellowship gave Julius the tools and support to turn his vision into reality. His work embodies *The Magic of Rotary* — the transformative power of connecting people, sharing resources, and uniting for a common purpose.

As we reflect on the achievements of our peace fellows and celebrate Rotary's enduring commitment to peace, let us also recognise the role that everyone in our network of 1.2 million members plays in creating magic through service.

Together, we can amplify our impact, inspire new generations of leaders, and build a brighter, more peaceful future.

Stephanie A Urchick
President, Rotary International



A gentleman Prime Minister

No other Prime Minister of India was subjected to the kind of abuse, humiliation and disdain reserved for Dr Manmohan Singh, who served as India's Prime Minister for two terms. Sadly, this was not only from the belligerent Opposition parties led by the BJP, which always launched its most shrill tirade against the soft-spoken man, who exemplified utmost dignity and decency in public life, but also from his own Congress Party. Remember Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, describing as "complete nonsense" and tearing up the ordinance promising non-disqualification of MPs who were jailed for two years or more? By doing so he clearly undermined the authority of Dr Singh, under whose leadership that ordinance was introduced.

Even though a brilliant scholar and economist, who as finance minister (1991–96) dextrously steered the Indian economy out of troubled waters, charting a clear path for the economic development that we enjoy today, Dr Singh never got the recognition and respect he deserved from Indian politicians or people, simply because he was a political lightweight, and a stranger to the art of self-promotion. Also, to put it bluntly, we as a people have a bizarre taste when it comes to our political leaders. We have a penchant for shunning people who are quiet, soft-spoken, dignified, educated and honest, never mind the wealth of knowledge and wisdom they may possess. But we are happy to embrace people who are loud and lewd, and willingly swallow their tall promises made through thunderous speeches. The late Manmohan Singh had none of these 'sterling' qualifications, and hence lost the only Lok Sabha election he contested from South Delhi. He was always ridiculed as the Gandhi family's slave, and even abused as a *goonga* (mute) Prime Minister, *maun baba*, etc.


But while India, its people and Opposition politicians dismissed Dr Singh as Sonia Gandhi's

puppet, it was a totally different scenario outside India. On the world stage, where leaders of the developed and more discerning countries assembled, Dr Singh's speeches on global economy were taken seriously. Former US President Barack Obama, another decent man in American politics unlike those who followed him, was a known admirer of the late Indian PM and described him as "wise, thoughtful and scrupulously honest". At a G20 summit in Canada he praised the "extraordinary leadership he has provided not only to India but also to the world as we navigate through difficult times. When Prime Minister Singh speaks, people listen, particularly because of his deep knowledge of economic issues."

A self-effacing man of exceptional humility, given his erudition and maturity, Dr Singh established a high standard for decency and personal integrity in public life. Asked about his term as prime minister, he once told the media: "I say it in all sincerity that I have tried to serve this country with utmost dedication, commitment and integrity. I have never used my office to enrich or to reward my friends or my relatives."

As we mourn the loss of one of India's most illustrious sons, let's acknowledge a sense of shame as we recall his famous anguished words: "History will be kinder to me than the contemporary media, or for that matter, the Opposition parties." These must probably be the harshest words the gentle Sardar ever spoke.

Rest in peace, Sir. You deserved better treatment from the country you served with such distinction and integrity.


Rasheeda Bhagat

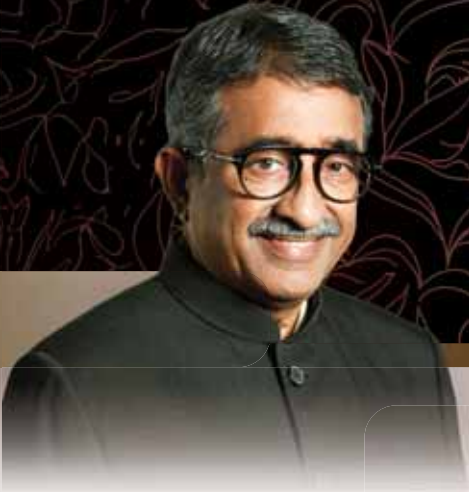
Membership Summary

As on January 1, 2025

Source: RI South Asia Office

RI District	Rotary Clubs	No of Rotarians	Women Rotarians (%)	Rotaract Clubs	Rotaract Members	Interact Clubs	RCC
2981	138	5,896	5.48	56	106	34	255
2982	91	3,965	6.03	30	434	96	188
3000	148	6,201	11.63	81	1,060	242	218
3011	136	5,298	30.88	72	1,717	229	41
3012	158	3,891	24.67	53	650	106	61
3020	82	4,546	8.03	33	446	118	351
3030	102	5,501	16.32	60	912	501	399
3040	102	2,352	14.84	35	733	62	216
3053	75	3,148	17.66	23	335	40	131
3055	83	3,327	11.90	47	682	58	391
3056	84	3,659	25.53	21	182	105	201
3060	100	5,043	15.70	52	1,856	78	152
3070	116	3,035	15.09	34	253	70	64
3080	110	4,324	13.51	58	1,878	207	127
3090	133	2,574	6.14	22	340	359	174
3100	115	2,171	10.64	15	81	41	151
3110	134	3,699	11.87	19	159	103	114
3120	90	3,717	15.71	34	487	43	58
3131	134	5,360	35.73	120	2,403	299	217
3132	97	3,741	14.54	29	339	148	226
3141	122	6,445	28.36	122	3,404	209	246
3142	115	3,952	22.80	56	1,628	130	99
3150	104	3,982	12.73	82	1,537	125	130
3160	78	2,453	8.97	24	62	95	82
3170	142	6,553	15.06	88	1,012	196	184
3181	87	3,679	10.76	39	395	120	122
3182	85	3,661	11.09	46	231	113	104
3191	90	3,291	19.54	72	1,743	178	36
3192	80	3,329	22.11	60	1,558	158	40
3201	167	6,513	10.15	107	1,897	108	97
3203	97	5,013	7.46	45	719	156	39
3204	80	2,597	8.12	22	185	19	17
3211	160	5,123	8.88	11	122	32	135
3212	120	4,631	10.73	85	545	211	153
3231	95	3,578	7.04	29	328	83	418
3233	87	3,027	18.80	52	1,529	54	63
3234	78	3,095	24.23	61	1,492	88	42
3240	100	3,515	17.10	42	742	69	248
3250	114	4,372	23.47	34	470	72	192
3261	100	3,401	24.40	18	108	37	46
3262	117	3,830	16.19	82	762	652	289
3291	144	3,741	27.32	NA	NA	92	766
India Total	4,590	171,229		2,071	35,522	5,936	7,283
3220	70	2,001	16.94	83	3,484	139	78
3271	108	1,436	20.33	103	418	275	28
0063 (3272)	76	1,116	19.80	48	283	23	49
0064 (3281)	239	5,058	17.40	185	995	120	211
0065 (3282)	137	2,728	8.65	167	1,097	25	48
3292	157	5,459	19.05	175	5,334	124	141
S Asia Total	5,377	189,027	16.18	2,832	47,133	6,642	7,838

Director speak



Rotary's commitment to peace, growth & giving

Dear Fellow Rotarians,
As we mark Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution Month, let's confront the stark reality of conflicts' devastating impact. The numbers are staggering: over 108 million lives lost since World War II, with 2,000 deaths daily. Today, 40 active conflicts have displaced 82.4 million people, including 26.6 million refugees. But beyond the statistics, we must recognise the human toll: families torn apart, communities shattered, and economies crippled. The \$14.3 trillion price tag of violence is a stark reminder of the urgent need for collective action.

As Rotarians, we're part of a global movement that's been championing peace and conflict resolution for decades. Our Peace Fellowships, global grants and grassroots projects empower communities to build bridges, foster dialogue and heal wounds. Let's recommit to supporting initiatives that bring people together, alleviate suffering and create pathways to lasting peace. By working together, we can ensure that Rotary remains a powerful force for good in a world that needs it now more than ever. I am pleased to announce that our next peace centre is being established at the Bahçeşehir University in Istanbul, Turkey. The Presidential Peace Conference is planned to commemorate the setting up of this new peace centre from Feb 20–22 in Istanbul. Let us attend this conference to understand and be a part of the Peace Mission of Rotary. Also, for the first time a South Asia Peace Conference is being held in Bengaluru on March 22 and 23. I encourage you to attend this conference and lend your voice to our efforts to create a more harmonious world.

In today's fast-paced, ever-evolving world, member retention is crucial for Rotary's continued relevance and impact. As our service initiatives grow in stature, attracting committed and successful individuals, it's essential that we meaningfully engage our members to foster a sense of belonging and purpose. By doing so, we can harness their energy, expertise and passion to drive positive change. If we fail to retain our members, we risk losing valuable talent, expertise and institutional knowledge, ultimately undermining our ability to adapt and thrive. However, if every Rotarian takes ownership of retaining just one new member, it will have a profound ripple effect, strengthening our collective impact and ensuring a vibrant future for our organisation. The need is sustainable membership growth to ensure that we have more hands to serve and strengthen our organisation.

The Rotary Foundation is our tree of life, nourished over a century and sustaining us today. To reach our \$2.025 billion target, we must work together, and I'm proud to see Zones 4, 5, 6 and 7 evolve from major recipients to significant contributors. However, with only a small percentage of members contributing annually, I urge you to open your hearts and wallets, recognising every gift, big or small, makes a difference. Let's promote a culture of giving and ensure our Foundation's continued impact, transforming lives worldwide and continuing our journey of creating magic in our communities and beyond.

Raju Subramanian
RI Director, 2023–25

2025
Convention

Rotaractor friends for life



Rotaractors bring the party! The proof is in their photos and videos documenting the Rotaractor experience at the Rotary International Convention. Group shots of members flashing peace signs or blowing kisses are captioned “Rotaract friendship for life” or “my family from around the world.”

These friends pose at host city landmarks, sometimes holding shopping bags and crave-worthy drinks like tall cups of milky boba tea. “If you are able to go to one convention, at least try it,” says Daniel Zavala, a member of the Rotaract Club of San Joaquín based out of Venezuela. “Try it because it will change your life. You are going to plan your vacations all around the convention.” We can’t wait to see Rotaractors’ cowboy hat

selfies in Canada at the rodeo or on the iconic Peace Bridge in Calgary.

Whether they’re at their first convention or their fifth, Rotaractors say they are wowed by the flag ceremony at the opening session and the inspiring speakers. One scheduled for Calgary is David LaMotte, who gave a TEDx talk and wrote

a book exploring how heroes don’t change the world on their own. He took a break from a folk music career to become a Rotary Peace Fellow.

Rotaractors’ convention snapshots show that the serious work of Rotary is full of joy. They don’t simply attend the convention — they help lead it, staffing House of Friendship booths and speaking at breakout sessions. In Singapore last year, Rotaractors leading a session about transitioning to a Rotary club suggested mutual empathy to strengthen bonds among members of different ages. Rotaractors will lead again in Calgary June 21–25. After all, Rotary + action = Rotaract.

Learn more and register at
convention.rotary.org

Rotary at a glance

Rotary clubs	: 36,382	Rotary members	: 1,151,109
Rotaract clubs	: 9,198	Rotaract members	: 127,554
Interact clubs	: 15,999	Interact members	: 368,069
RCCs	: 13,766		
<i>As on January 15, 2025</i>			

Governors Council

RID 2981	Baskaran S
RID 2982	Sivakumar V
RID 3000	Raja Govindasamy R
RID 3011	Mahesh P Trikha
RID 3012	Prashant Raj Sharma
RID 3020	Venkateswara Rao M
RID 3030	Rajinder Singh Khurana
RID 3040	Anish Malik
RID 3053	Rahul Shrivastava
RID 3055	Mohan Parashar
RID 3056	Raakhi Gupta
RID 3060	Tushar Shah
RID 3070	Parminder Singh Grover
RID 3080	Rajpal Singh
RID 3090	Sandeep Chauhan
RID 3100	Deepa Khanna
RID 3110	Neerav Nimesh Agrawal
RID 3120	Paritosh Bajaj
RID 3131	Shital Sharad Shah
RID 3132	Suresh Heralal Saboo
RID 3141	Chetan Desai
RID 3142	Dinesh Mehta
RID 3150	Sharath Choudary Katragadda
RID 3160	Sadhu Gopala Krishna
RID 3170	Sharad Pai
RID 3181	Vikramdatta
RID 3182	Dev Anand
RID 3191	Satish Madhavan Kananore
RID 3192	Mahadev Prasad NS
RID 3201	Sundaravadevelu N
RID 3203	Suresh Babu S
RID 3204	Santhosh Sreedhar
RID 3211	Sudhi Jabbar
RID 3212	Meerankhan Saleem
RID 3231	Rajanbabu M
RID 3233	Mahaveer Chand Bothra
RID 3234	Saravanan NS
RID 3240	Sukhminder Singh
RID 3250	Bipin Chachan
RID 3261	Akhil Mishra
RID 3262	Yagyansis Mohapatra
RID 3291	Krishnendu Gupta

Printed and published by **PT Prabhakar**, 15 Sivaswamy Street, Mylapore, Chennai 600004, on behalf of Rotary News Trust and printed at Rasi Graphics Pvt Ltd, 40, Peters Road, Royapettah, Chennai - 600 014, India, and published at Rotary News Trust, Dugar Towers, 3rd Floor, 34, Marshalls Road, Egmore, Chennai 600 008. Editor: **Rasheeda Bhagat**.

Contributions are welcome but will be edited. Content can be reproduced with permission and attributed to RNT.



Website

Board of Trustees

Raju Subramanian	RID 3141
RI Director & Chairman, Rotary News Trust	
Anirudha Roychowdhury	RID 3291
RI Director	
Dr Bharat Pandya	RID 3141
TRF Trustee	
Rajendra K Saboo	RID 3080
Kalyan Banerjee	RID 3060
Shekhar Mehta	RID 3291
Ashok Mahajan	RID 3141
PT Prabhakar	RID 3234
Dr Manoj D Desai	RID 3060
C Basker	RID 3000
Kamal Sanghvi	RID 3250
Dr Mahesh Kotbagi	RID 3131
AS Venkatesh	RID 3234
Gulam A Vahanvaty	RID 3141

RI Directors-elect

M Muruganandam	RID 3000
KP Nagesh	RID 3191

Executive Committee

Members (2024–25)

NS Mahadev Prasad	RID 3192
Chairman, Governors Council	
Akhil Mishra	RID 3261
Secretary, Governors Council	
R Raja Govindasamy	RID 3000
Treasurer, Governors Council	
Raakhi Gupta	RID 3056
Advisor, Governors Council	

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

Message from TRF Trustee Chair



Ambassadors of peace

By some measures, great progress has been made in building more peaceful societies around the world. Yet the reality of ongoing regional wars, skirmishes, and violence globally reminds us how far we still have to go. These conflicts affect the humanity of us all, whether they occur far from us or in our own communities.

So, what can Rotary do to build peace?

As a global force for peace and conflict prevention, Rotary addresses the root causes of conflict. Our role at the 1945 United Nations charter is a testament to this enduring commitment.

Another cornerstone of this work is the Rotary Peace Centers programme. Through The Rotary Foundation, these seven centres provide fully funded fellowships, empowering individuals to address the complex challenges of conflict and development.

More than 1,800 alumni now work in over 140 countries as champions of peace, creating lasting change in their communities. Consider alumni like Pablo Cuevas, a 2015 peace fellow who leads the Paraguay office of the International Organisation for Migration, aiding those displaced by crises. Leni Kinzli, a 2023 graduate, advocates for Sudan's humanitarian needs with the United Nations World Food Programme. Yuki Daizumoto, a 2007 peace fellow, supports life-changing agricultural and livelihood projects in Afghanistan with the Japan International Cooperation Agency. These individuals embody Rotary's investment in peace.

This month, the Foundation Trustees will consider a plan to establish our eighth Rotary Peace Center in Asia as part of our vision to have peace centres on every inhabited continent by 2030.

But our commitment extends beyond the peace centres. Through Rotary's partnership with the Institute for Economics and Peace, we have trained over 300 Positive Peace Activators from 60 countries. Our forgiveness and social cohesion curricula help members heal communities. Through our Foundation grants and service, Rotary members are fostering peace by engaging with youths, strengthening civil society, and resolving core issues that can lead to conflict.

At President Stephanie Urchick's Peace Conference in Istanbul this month, we will celebrate this work and the first class of the Otto and Fran Walter Rotary Peace Center at Bahçeşehir University.

Remember that you are also ambassadors of peace through service projects, exchange programmes, and as supporters of The Rotary Foundation.

My wish for 2025 is for peace to take root and flourish ever more widely, with Rotary playing an increasingly meaningful role in that noble pursuit.

Mark Daniel Maloney

TRF Trustee Chair

A scholar Prime Minister

Suresh Seshadri

*Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time*

H W Longfellow
Psalm of Life

These lines aptly signpost the inspiring legacy that India's former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, our first PM from a minority faith, and one who was neither a career politician nor a directly elected representative of the people, left behind when he shuffled off his mortal coil on December 26, 2024.

Dr Singh was a man of few words but someone who always knew his mind and weighed the import of every word he used. A scholar and a statesman, he never shied away from a challenge and rose from humble beginnings as a Sikh refugee from the partition-torn west Punjab village of Gah in today's Pakistan to the highest executive office in India in 2004.

A self-made man, Dr Singh realised early in his life the value of

education. With the help of publicly funded merit scholarships and educational grants he completed Masters in Economics from the Panjab University in 1954 before embarking to the United Kingdom to further pursue his study of economics. An Economics Tripos from the Cambridge University and a DPhil from the Oxford University rounded off his education.

His doctoral thesis on 'India's Export Trends and Prospects for Self-Sustained Growth' — in which he emphasised the need for developing economies to jettison their insular approach of import substitution and instead embrace free trade — was the seminal work that would go on to inform and undergird the sweeping economic reforms he ushered in, in 1991, setting the country on a new trajectory of higher



Former Prime Minister of
India Dr Manmohan Singh



Through merit scholarships and educational grants he completed Masters in Economics in Punjab and then went to UK to further pursue his study of economics at Cambridge and Oxford Universities.



Above: With Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Left: With former PM AB Vajpayee.

Below: With the then Congress president Sonia Gandhi.



Taking over as finance minister when a bruising balance of payments crisis had left our economy teetering on the edge of an abyss, the experienced economist ushered in the epochal reforms that prepared our arrival on the global stage.

economic growth and integration with the global economy.

Earlier, his relatively short stints at the UN's trade body UNCTAD in New York, and then as a professor of International Trade at the Delhi School of Economics were stepping stones to a long and distinguished career in public service.

Starting in 1971 as an economic adviser in the Ministry of Foreign Trade, Dr Singh went on to hold several key economic policy positions in the central government including secretary, Economic Affairs, in the Ministry of Finance and later served as the Reserve Bank governor for a three-year term in the early 1980s.

Stints at the Planning Commission, and the Geneva-based South Commission helped broaden, hone and anchor his policy positions from the wider perspective of social relevance and a development paradigm that placed the reduction of inequality in society in the forefront.

And so in June 1991, when Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao named Dr Singh to oversee the crucial Finance portfolio at a time when a bruising balance of payments crisis had left the country's economy teetering on the edge of an abyss, the experienced economist quietly took on the sherpa's role and ushered in the epochal reforms that set the course for India's ascent to and arrival on the global stage.

Concluding his famous Budget speech in July 1991, Dr Singh reflected on his roots and made a solemn promise: "I was born in a poor family in a chronically drought-prone village which is now part of

Pakistan. University scholarships and grants made it possible for me to go to college in India as well as in England. This country has honoured me by appointing me to some of the most important public offices of our sovereign Republic. This is a debt which I can never fully repay. The best I can do is to pledge myself to serve our country with utmost sincerity and dedication. This I promise to the House."

True to this pledge, he ensured that the policy frameworks he orchestrated over the next five years helped ensure that the Indian economy gradually but irrevocably

proceeded on a path of deregulation and liberalisation: opening up to investment, overseas competition and new ventures across a range of sectors from computer hardware and automobile manufacturing to the development and export of information technology and BPO services.

And 13 years later, when the Congress was returned to power as the head of the United Progressive Alliance, the party's supremo Sonia Gandhi turned to the architect of



modern India's economic transformation to helm the coalition government. Destiny had catapulted the distinguished technocrat to the highest executive office in the land.

Always conscious of the need to ensure that the government's economic policies, and particularly its new-found embrace of capitalism, did not widen economic disparities, Dr Singh had stressed in his maiden Budget speech in 1991: "We must restore the creation of wealth to its proper place in the development process. For, without it, we cannot remove the stigma of abject poverty, ignorance and disease. But we cannot accept social misery and inequity as unavoidable in the process of creation of wealth. The basic challenge of our times is to ensure that wealth creation is not only tempered by equity and justice but is harnessed to the goal of removal of poverty and development for all."

This concern for the public's well-being would be a defining feature of Dr Singh's understanding of politics and the conduct of his political life, first as the

finance minister and later as the Prime Minister.

Speaking to journalist Karan Thapar on the BBC's *Hard Talk* programme in 1999, when he made his only and unsuccessful attempt to win a Lok Sabha seat as the Congress candidate, contesting from South Delhi, Dr Singh observed: "Politics unfortunately has ceased in many ways to be a vehicle for social change." He was in politics, he stressed, to try and make a difference by ensuring that policies were always transparent and informed by the need to address the common people's concerns.

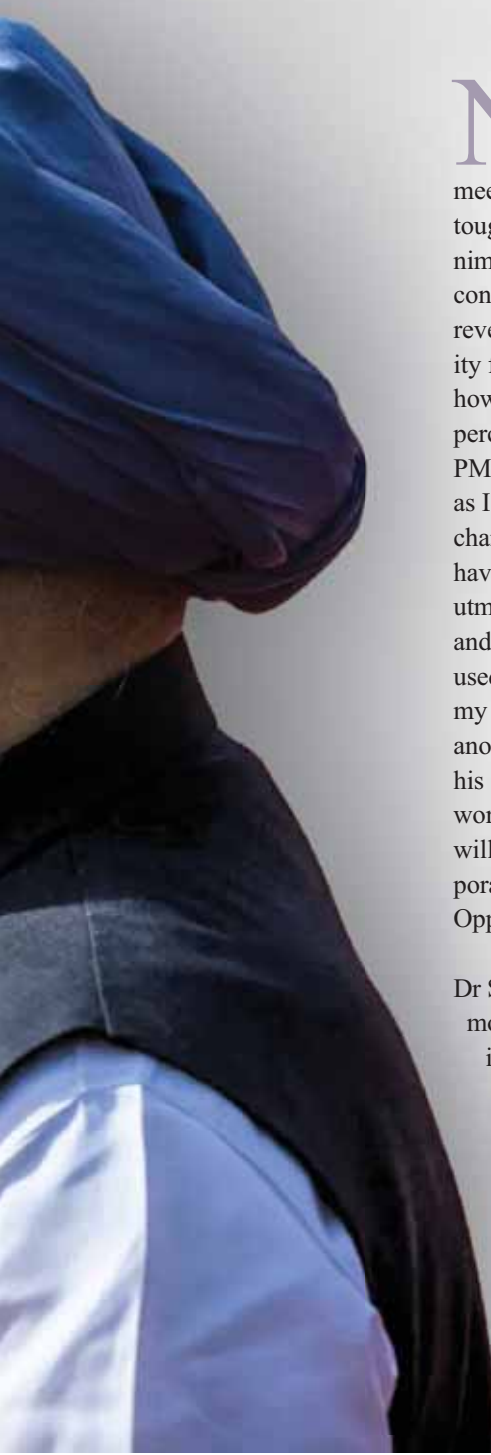
Always dignified, even when faced with the most vituperative attacks by the domestic media and the political opposition, Dr Singh set a new benchmark for decency and integrity in public life that won him international recognition and accolades.

Former US President Barack Obama, writing in his memoir, described Dr Singh as "wise, thoughtful and scrupulously honest", and "a self-effacing technocrat who'd won people's trust not by appealing to their

I was born in a poor family in a chronically drought-prone village which is now part of Pakistan. University scholarships and grants made it possible for me to go to college in India and England.

Former PM **Dr Manmohan Singh**





passions but by bringing about higher living standards and maintaining a well-earned reputation for not being corrupt.”

Never one to shy away from meeting the press or answering the toughest of questions with utter equanimity and poise, Dr Singh’s press conference as PM in January 2014 revealed the man’s boundless capacity for grace under pressure. Asked how he thought the common man perceived him as a politician and as PM, he said: “I am the same person as I was years ago. There has been no change. I say it in all sincerity that I have tried to serve this country with utmost dedication and commitment and utmost integrity. I have never used my office to enrich or to reward my friends or my relatives.” And to another question on how he viewed his legacy, he replied with the famous words: “I honestly believe that history will be kinder to me than the contemporary media, or for that matter, the Opposition parties in Parliament.”

Ultimately, what will mark Dr Singh apart as a man of “uncommon wisdom” was his prescience in warning of the perils that a less inclusive and unchecked globalisation posed to the world’s social and economic order. As country after country lurches increasingly rightwards, with populist political platforms espousing ultra-nationalistic and anti-immigrant views

gaining electoral legitimacy, it is but imperative that we remind ourselves of these words Dr Singh spoke as far back as in October 2006 while accepting an honorary Doctor of Law degree conferred on him by the Cambridge University:

“These achievements of the era of globalisation should not blind us to the new anxieties that globalisation has brought in its wake. The reach of globalisation is yet to touch many parts of the world. Moreover, the evidence suggests that the process has not removed personal and regional income disparities. In many developing countries growth is bypassing the rural areas.

The gap between the rich and the poor is widening. This, coupled with the inability of the public sector to provide adequate and quality services in health and education, and cater to the needs of the poor, is causing resentment and alienation. This is nurturing divisive forces and putting pressure on the practice of democracy.

These are real and palpable concerns and they cannot be ignored... We need to work for inclusive globalisation. This calls for a new global vision.”

Dr Singh’s life including his political and personal achievements leaves a lasting legacy beyond the world of economics, a legacy of how even in the midst of the hurly-burly of partisan politics one can always remain soft-spoken, polite, decorous and dignified.

*The writer is former
Business Editor of The Hindu*

Designed by Krishna Pratheesh S

When Manmohan Singh addressed RC Anna Nagar

Rasheeda Bhagat

From R: Former PM Manmohan Singh, GK Selvarajan, past president, RC Anna Nagar, and PDG CN Gangadaran.



Following the passing away of one of the most decent, gentlest and non-politician-like politicians, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, a post doing the rounds on social media caught my attention, as it was related to him and Rotary. But, to my surprise, it was being passed around on the Whatsapp groups of Freemasons. As my husband happens to be one, he showed it me.

It told a remarkable story... about this former RBI governor coming down to Chennai, without any fuss or fluster, even paying for his own airfare after refusing to let the Rotarians book his air ticket, to address members of the Rotary

Club of Anna Nagar and accept the *For the Sake of Honour* Award from it, on June 18, 1996.

In his post titled 'Rest well gentle Sardar', the then president of the Rotary Club of Anna Nagar GK Selvarajan recalls that reading about the former Prime Minister's passing away, his mind went back to the April of 1996, when Manmohan Singh "had laid down his office as the most successful finance minister of India, having brought the country back from economic brink and disaster."

As always, his club was on the lookout for distinguished persons to address them and one of his friends in Delhi, a very

senior bureaucrat, suggested why not invite the former finance minister and present him the *For the Sake of Honour Award*. Later, speaking to *Rotary News*, Selvarajan said that this bureaucrat had attended one of the iconic projects of his club — *Meals on Wheels* — that he had started during his year as club president, “along with so many other projects.”

Through the *Meals on Wheels* project, “every weekend we — Rotarians and Anns — would take home-cooked meals to various homes of the underprivileged in the city, such as orphanages, old age homes, juvenile homes etc. I started it and it became a big hit and was later taken up as a district project by Krishnan Chari when he became district governor (1997–98). My bureaucratic friend had visited the *Meals on Wheels* project and seen our other work, (other projects he started were a geriatric centre, Talk your way to Malaysia, etc) and was very impressed by the service done by the club members. He suggested I should invite Dr Singh,” recalls Selvarajan, who is a lawyer by profession.

Even though rather sceptical that a distinguished person like Manmohan Singh who had ushered in economic reforms and liberalised the Indian economy, would accept an invite to address a mere Rotary club in Chennai, Selvarajan made the call. To his utter surprise, the distinguished economist spoke to him for about 10 minutes, asked about the service projects his Rotary club did, and after a pause, said ‘Yes’!

But he turned down the offer to fly him down, came at his own expense, and at the airport, though a number of expensive luxury cars of Rotarians were waiting for him, “he chose to travel with me in my Honda City!”

Once the news spread that the former FM was in town, “topmost businessmen from Chennai, the Murugappa group, TVS, Amalgamations, and other top industrialists, as also journalists, kept calling for an interview with him. But he told all of them that Mr Selvarajan, the club president, is the host, and my itinerary will only be decided by him.”

The Rotarian was flabbergasted to get calls from the big business tycoons and media barons in the city asking for any time slot to meet the great man. Ultimately, with Manmohan’s consent, it was decided that a press conference, which would be attended by top businessmen in the city, would be organised at *The Hindu* newspaper’s office. At this event, with great ease the former FM handled questions relating to national and international economics, and explained where the economic reforms he had ushered in during the previous five years would propel the Indian economy.

Recalling that meet, Selvarajan says, “I was amazed at the love, respect and goodwill Dr Singh commanded among the who’s who of Chennai. It was a treat to watch and hear the top icons vying to rub

When news spread that the former FM was in town, topmost businessmen and industrialists from Chennai, as also journalists, kept calling for an interview with him. But he told all of them that Mr Selvarajan, the club president, is the host, and my itinerary will only be decided by him.

shoulders with this global star. The next day all the leading newspapers exhaustively covered his visit to the city (including his club event) along with pictures. Our club members were thrilled as he had breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner with us, and willingly joined us in the photo sessions. The Rotary Anns were thrilled to be photographed with him.”

Through the day, “he insisted that he will travel only with me in my car; the hall at the Ambassador Pallava Hotel where our meeting was held, was packed, not only with our members and Anns, but the who’s who of Chennai, perhaps South India too.”

During his speech, which he acknowledged was his first ever to a Rotary club, Manmohan dwelt on his years as FM and said that decentralisation, empowerment, correct utilisation of funds and changing the mindset of the people were the key areas he had focused on while ushering in the economic reforms. “At the end of the day, I am immensely satisfied because my successors — the shortlived BJP government as well as the United Front government — have followed the policy of liberalisation even though many of these parties had opposed it earlier.”

Comparing the performance of the Indian economy with that of China, South Korea and Taiwan, he said, “The per capita income of South Korea is \$10,000, whereas the figure for India is a mere \$370. This is saddening because India was supposed to be a developing nation even in 1963, when these nations were nowhere in the picture.”

Underlining the rationale behind the reforms during his five-year term as FM, he said India had to grow faster economically if it was to realise its full potential and shape the destiny of South and Southeast Asia.

He expressed anguish that during the previous five years, attempts had been made by some people to divert attention from the economic reforms and derail them. He explained that by seeking to increase foreign industrial investment by liberalising the economy, his objective was to improve management and technological capabilities. But this was derided as a move that would result in loss of India's economic sovereignty. His efforts to create a competitive environment by reducing tariff barriers and interior barriers, like industrial licensing, were criticised as the route to the deindustrialisation of India. "My attempt to restructure public sector units and push them to operate in a market system and pay heed to market signals by disinvestment was flayed as an anti-public sector policy," he told the Rotarians.

But at the end of the day, his successors pressing on with the economic reforms he had introduced, had vindicated his policies, and his "bitter critics in Parliament, who had opposed my stance that public sector units should be run efficiently, have

At the airport, he never allowed me to carry his suitcase, gently smiling and saying that he was young enough to carry it himself.

now realised that this is the only way we can realise India's vast potential."

He also stressed that the focus of the people of India has to be on "nation-building and not divisive issues like caste, religion and region. If we do not wake up now, our marginalisation in world polity will become a reality," he said.

"His speech was not only excellent and full of nobility and wisdom, there was no bragging and he was full of humility. The audience gave him a standing ovation," says Selvarajan.

He still remembers, after almost 30 years, how when he went to the airport to drop him the next morning,

"he never allowed me to carry his suitcase, gently smiling and saying that he was young enough to carry it himself. At the airport, we were welcomed by the top officials of the Airport Authority but he never allowed anyone to assist him. He insisted on standing in the long queue to check in. I felt as though the whole airport was glittering by his charismatic presence," says Selvarajan, who unfortunately left Rotary a few years ago, after being a Rotarian for over 26 years. He is now elected the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of India, the highest rank in Freemasonry in India.

In the check-in queue, a little boy, barely 9, "stared at him for a while and then asked, 'Are you Manmohan Singh uncle?' His father tried to hush his son for being disrespectful by calling him by name. The renowned economist gave a broad smile, patted the boy's cheek and politely answered 'yes', said he had come to attend a meeting in Chennai. He then asked the boy's name, where he was studying, etc. The short conversation between them was beyond age, status and all barriers. The scene was so poetic. After seeing him off, I returned profusely thanking God for blessing me with an entire day with not only a highly respected and admired person, but one of the finest human beings I have ever met, who was an embodiment of all the virtues embedded in our (Masonic) rituals."

Selvarajan got a beautiful 'thank you' note from Manmohan Singh after he reached Delhi "in his own handwriting, which I cherished for a long time; June 18, 1996, remains one of the most memorable days of my life." ■





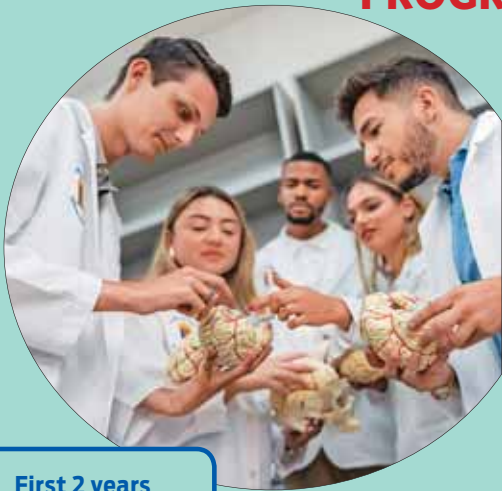
XAVIER UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND KLE ANNOUNCE



6 YEARS

PRE-MED TO

DOCTOR OF MEDICINE / DOCTOR OF VETERINARY MEDICINE PROGRAMME



First 2 years

Start @
KLE, Campus
Karnataka, India

Next 2 years

Continue @
Xavier's Campus
Aruba, Caribbean
island - Netherlands

Next 2 years

Complete @
Xavier's affiliated
Teaching Hospitals
USA / Canada

First 2 years

Start @
KLE, Campus
Karnataka, India

Next 3 years

Continue @
Xavier's Campus
Aruba, Caribbean
island- Netherlands

Final year

Complete @
Xavier's affiliated
Teaching Hospitals
USA / Canada

TO ATTEND WEBINAR REGISTER NOW XUSOM.COM/INDIA/

**Limited
Seats**

Admission dates, May & September 2025

To apply, Visit:
application.xusom.com
email: infoindia@xusom.com

**XAVIER
STUDENTS ARE
ELIGIBLE FOR
H1/J1 Visa
PROGRAMME**



Diplomacy has an integrity missing in politics

Shashi Tharoor

Rasheeda Bhagat

Congress Lok Sabha MP Shashi Tharoor held the participants of the Kochi Institute spellbound with his special brand of wit, charm, humour, his flawless English and faultless diction. Answering a volley of questions from past RI director A S Venkatesh, also known for his quick wit and repartee skills, the diplomat-turned-politician good naturedly and graciously accepted a couple of cheeky comments on his penchant for using

“seven-syllable words”, diplomacy, politics and a brief stint as a stand-up comedian.

But despite the camaraderie and the laughs raised at the session, Tharoor left the audience with a couple of scary messages, one being how we are living in a much more troubled world than we appreciate.

Asked to comment on his switching to the world of politics after spending nearly 30 years as a diplomat



Institute Convenor RI Director Anirudha Roychowdhury honouring Lok Sabha MP Shashi Tharoor as (from L) PRID A S Venkatesh, RI Director Raju Subramanian, Institute Chair PDG John Daniel and Vidhya Subramanian look on.

at the United Nations where he almost became the secretary general, and to compare the two vocations, Tharoor said: “There’s no real comparison; they’re two completely dissimilar professions, and there’s a certain amount of dissimulation in both. The first and only point in common is that people don’t always say what they mean or mean what they say.”

Also, in diplomacy, there are certain standards of conduct, “a certain level of, shall we say very bluntly, integrity that is often missing in our politics. And at the same time, there is a desire to please, which should be, and is sometimes, there in politics. But that desire to please is always deceptively worn around the mask of civility and politeness and courtesy. I’ve often joked that a diplomat is somebody who can tell you to go to hell and make you look forward to the trip!”



Coming to Indian politics, the MP said here there were challenges which are “very different from those of other democracies. First of all, we have a parliamentary system, which is in many ways grossly unsuited to our culture and our people’s conduct and expectations. Our people vote for individuals rather than ideologies or parties.”

The second challenge was that “the politicians themselves, for the largest part, seem to be rather bereft of ideology or conviction. They are there because they see many of these parties as vehicles to come to power, and that’s essentially what they’re interested in. These challenges are specifically unique to us.”

Another bane of Indian politics was “the absurdly low spending limits on elections, which are violated routinely so that every elected parliamentarian begins with a lie about his expense accounts.” But while these were the unattractive features of our political system, “in a democracy, what better way is there to make a difference to your people? Where you can go out and seek their approval for what you stand for, appeal to them, provide enough services, and then ask them to keep sending you back to your responsibilities.”

Tharoor said he ended up from diplomacy to politics since “the one goal I had in life, whether at the UN, my writing or in politics, has been to try and make a difference for people, and that’s what I’ve been trying to do.”

To the question on what he had to “unlearn” to manage the switch from diplomacy to politics, Tharoor

You have to second-guess yourself a lot in politics to ensure that anything you say, in all innocence and sincerity, may not be twisted to damage you politically.

said, “In diplomacy, when one chose one’s words, one was reasonably sure that the person one was talking to would understand what you meant or were trying to convey. In politics, the lesson I learnt very quickly in my first few months was the truth of Shakespeare’s old line that the ‘success of a jest lies not in the tongue of the teller, but in the ear of the hearer.’ It almost doesn’t matter what you intend to convey, all that matters in politics is what people believe they heard, or are meant to believe they heard. And therefore, you have to actually second-guess yourself a lot in politics to ensure that anything you say, in all innocence and sincerity, may not be twisted to damage you politically.”

He had learnt this bitter lesson during his first year in politics while accompanying the then PM Manmohan Singh to Saudi Arabia as a minister. In an interview, he had described Saudi Arabia as a “valuable interlocutor, which is standard UN diplomatic language for the person who is speaking directly. That’s all I meant. But the media maliciously twisted that comment to say I was making Saudi Arabia an intermediary.” This controversy completely

Tharoor-speak on various issues

Changing India to Bharat

The argument to do so is so absurd that it is laughable because let's look at the notion of the word India and where does it come from. When the Persians spoke of people beyond the Indus, they didn't have the letter 's' in their language so they called people beyond the Sindhu, the Hindus. And when the Greeks came, they learned of this place from the Persians and they called it India. Now this is 300 BC, so we've been known as India by the Persians and the Greek and the Romans for about 2300 years. So how can the same people who reject 'India', go around saying *garv se kaho hum Hindu hei?* Hindu and India come from the same origin.

Maulana Azad has written that the people who went to Mecca — whether the Pashtoons from today's Pakistan or the Tamils from South India — would be called Hindis as they were all from Hind.

Playing the role of a standup comedian

I am occasionally game for taking a gamble like that. I don't gamble with money but I do gamble with my reputation. In 2019, when Amazon Prime did a session with 'celebrities' on stand-up comedy, they wanted one politician and turned to me. I was amused by the idea and as the filming was scheduled between the casting of votes and counting for the 2019 general elections, it was a period of irresponsibility when you don't know whether you're coming back into Parliament or not. So I did it and it went rather well. Though a lot of my political jokes on the then

government, which got re-elected, got deleted. Amazon Prime, in its wisdom, edited those out!

Adapting quickly to technology

I was better when I was younger; I was one of the first to use a video camera. When the Internet era began, I was in the US and caught on to technology early, and took to the phone for my emails and so on. But with age and advancing seniority, I lost the enthusiasm to keep up with every new trending technology. I got on Twitter urged by a young aide and my son; though it caused some trouble too in my first untroubled career. The media resented it because Twitter was a way to bypass them. When I became the first Indian minister in decades to visit Liberia, nobody in India even reported it. People learnt about it from my tweets. But it created hostility and controversy. But social

media consumes so much time; I get 1,000 messages a day on WhatsApp. How the heck does one keep up?

On writing over 25 books

An era of darkness came about when my publisher called me after my Oxford speech in 2015. In the first 24 hours, three million people had downloaded it and he said you have to turn this into a book. And I said don't be silly everyone knows this stuff and he said 'you don't be silly. If everyone knows it, why did it go viral?' For the first time I engaged researchers, because I wanted to be on solid ground with facts. I took thousands of pages of research material on a drive to the hills of Bhutan... luckily the Indian sim card didn't work in Bhutan those days so no one could reach me. I worked 18-hour days (for 12 days) distilling the info and the first draft was done.



On getting ideas for his books

Since I am a columnist, from my columns ideas for books emerge. A request to write a book on foreign policy as I was conceived to be an international figure, gave me the idea of writing on India's foreign policy for Indian readers (*Pax Indica: India and the World in the Twenty-first Century*), and it has done extremely well. I'm told that even 12 years after it was published, UPSC aspirants are still reading and studying it. My most recent book *The land of words* is a direct result of a column for *Khaleej Times*, which had asked me to write a weekly column. I did it for two and a half years and was able to expand it into a book. It depends on what material is there. There are things that I would like to write that I'm not writing at all, and above all, in that list comes fiction. Of my first five books, four were fiction. And then I had to give that up because of my life in politics.

Why he hasn't written more fiction

Fiction requires not just time, which is scarce enough for a busy man, but also a space inside your head to create an alternative universe, to populate it with characters, episodes, dialogues, concerns that are as real to you as those you're encountering in real life. So you've got to build a sort of glass palace in which your story is enclosed and visit it every day. You are not able to, as you're constantly interrupted by the real world. That palace will start developing cracks, and if the interruptions are too frequent and too long, the entire glass palace will crumble and crash upon you.

In the first decade of the 21st century, my laptop was littered with the beginnings of at least three or four novels... five pages

for one and almost 100 for another. But I could never get it to stride because each of them was interrupted by the realities of my work. I finally realised that I'm better off writing non-fiction because non-fiction is interruptible. Going back to what you've written, even if you interrupted it for six weeks of campaigning in an election, you can just reread what you've written, pick up the thread and keep writing. About my fiction I always joke that one day the voters might return me to the world of literature!

Malayalam: Well, I'm comfortable enough in it to win four elections. Though I will admit that Sahitya Malayalam is a stranger to me. I have very colloquial, orally learnt Malayalam because I was not educated in Kerala. I was born in London, brought up in Mumbai, went to high school in Calcutta, college in Delhi and a life in multiple countries around the world, and then back to India in a pan-India kind of way. But I have read a lot of Kerala literature in English translation. So my Malayalam is fluent, comprehensible, but far from being as sophisticated as I would have liked it to be.

Advise to Rotarians: I am a huge admirer of everything you do. Service before self is a terrific motto. You're all successful in your fields and yet you've chosen to share the benefits of that success with the less fortunate.

Favourites: My favourite food is idli and the honest answer to holiday destination is Thuvananthapuram. A day without agenda? Cricket, but Test match! ODI is like reading a short story; but Test match is novel.

We live in a far more troubled world than we imagine, and there is every risk that 2025 will be a little too much for the world.

overshadowed the PM's visit. In politics and a world filled with multilingual countries, "people can say things that make sense in one language and sound awful in translation."

On the relevance of the UN in today's world, Tharoor said if looked purely from the viewpoint of the UN's ability to maintain peace and security around the world, "clearly the very persistence of the Russian-Ukraine war and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict make the UN look helpless and impotent. But if you look at the UN from the broader lens of all that it does in the world, it's making an enormous difference in setting the agenda on many important issues that came to the fore through UN conferences." Global debates on the environment and climate change are a crucial example, as are historic issues such as decolonisation and the anti-apartheid.

He'd say the UN had "shaped the world the way it is today on many issues. But

if you look at it purely in terms of can it stop every war, no, it can't, but it has been a useful forum to prevent World War III."

After WW II, world leaders set up the UN to ensure that the countries that could go into war had "a common place to meet. The UN is very unusual in that it is both a stage and an actor; a stage where world leaders and governments can meet to discuss issues, sort out their differences and reach an agreement. And then when they have agreed on something, it is an actor in the form of the secretary general, his agencies, and so on." But people tend to confuse the two roles, he said.



Lok Sabha MP Shashi Tharoor and PRID Venkatesh.

When PRID Venkatesh reminded him about Rotary's role in the UN charter in 1945, Tharoor reiterated Rotary's closeness to the UN, and recalled that while at the UN, he had facilitated so many Rotary conferences on UN premises, for which Rotary had made him a life member.

On the question of India being denied a permanent seat at the UN

**I'm comfortable enough
with Malayalam to win
four elections. Though
Sahitya Malayalam is a
stranger to me!**

Security Council, Tharoor agreed that the Council's "composition reflects the geopolitical realities of 1945, certainly not of 2025." He then delved into the difficulties and intricacies in reforming the UN charter. In essence, "you need a formula simultaneously acceptable to two-thirds of the world and not unacceptable to the five permanent members... a very, very tall order!"

Apart from India, which had 17 per cent of the world's population, other claimants for a permanent seat are "Japan and Germany, the second and third largest financial contributors to the UN after the US." Others included Brazil and South Africa, which are immense in their sub-regions, and so on.

Tharoor then walked the audience through the intricate ways in which the powerful nations of the world have a say in the UN, and alternative bodies such as G20, BRICS, etc which had emerged, but none of these could "claim the merit of being a totally universal body" or having a substantial say

in maintaining peace and security in the world. "Therefore it is in the interest of everybody to make sure the UN remains viable."

Asked about NATO, he said this was a military alliance and had become the excuse for the Russian President Vladimir Putin, who had later driven "two neutral countries, Sweden and Finland, into arms of NATO," to invade Ukraine.

Tharoor said given the situation in Syria where President Assad's 24-year-rule was about to be replaced (when he was addressing the meet) by a very strong Islamist group, the tensions between China and Taiwan, Ukraine and Russia, Israel and Gaza, "we are today living in a world which is in a very, very troubled state, much more than we fully appreciate. We inevitably tend to be focused on our own problems and our own immediate neighbourhood, but there is every risk that 2025 will be a little too much for the world."

Pictures by Rasheeda Bhagat



Mrs. Stephanie A Ulrich
Rotary International President 2024-25



POG Mr. T N Subramanian
Rotary International Director 2023-25



POG Mr. JILL K F Nagabh
Rotary International Director Elect 2025-27



Mr. N S Mahesh Prasad
Rotary District Governor, RID 2342 2024-25



Mr. Aniljitha Roy Chandrabu
RI Director of Zone 5 & 6(2021 - 2025)



Mr. Shankar Srinivas
Chairman, South Asia International Peace
Conference 2025

JOIN
NOW

REGISTER
NOW!

SOUTH ASIA INTERNATIONAL PEACE CONFERENCE - 2025

GET YOUR EARLYBIRD OFFER
NOW..!



"Healthier World, Greener Tomorrow"

Let's create a world where Peace is
nurtured by nature and well-being!



Date & Venue:
22nd & 23rd
March 2025
@ KTPO
Whitefield,
Bengaluru,
India

SAVE THE DATE

Goals & Outcomes - Health

- Promote Access to Healthcare
- Enhance Health Education
- Support Disease Prevention and Treatment
- Improve Maternal and Child Health
- Address Mental Health Issues
- Strengthen Healthcare Infrastructure
- Support Clean Water and Sanitation
- Empower Healthcare Workers
- Foster Collaboration and Innovation

Join Rotary in India for an extraordinary gathering dedicated to fostering peace through critical global issues: the environment and health. This landmark conference will bring together thought leaders, policymakers, and change makers to explore how sustainable environmental practices and better healthcare can lead to lasting peace. Be part of the dialogue, take action, and help shape a future where peace thrives through a healthier planet and healthier people.



Scan for Registration



www.saipc.in

FOR QUERIES, PLEASE CONTACT: INFO.DGOFFICE2425@GMAIL.COM,
MOBILE NO. +91 8123303888 / +91 81233 84222,
OFFICE POSTAL ADDRESS: # 192, 3RD FLOOR, 18TH CROSS, 20TH MAIN, MRCR,
VIJAYANAGAR, BENGALURU- 560 040
KARNATAKA, INDIA



7 days of global military expenditure can educate 200 million children

Rasheeda Bhagat

All of us are aware of the highly dangerous and troubled world we live in today. But the critical issue is that “most of us, particularly the leaders and intellectuals of the world, know what are the major problems of the world... illiteracy, poverty, crimes, wars and so on. And they also know the solutions. For illiteracy, you have to invest in education; it’s simple and not such a big deal. Only a week’s global military expenditure can help in educating all the children of the world... 200 million children who are out of school can go to schools with just seven days of global military expenditure,” said Nobel Peace Laureate Kailash Satyarthi, delivering the keynote address at a plenary of the Kochi Zone Institute.

Along with the problems, the solutions were also known, but unfortunately the gap between the problem-solvers and the creators of the problems was growing wider. “Every day we keep creating new dialogues,

phrases and jargon to say this is the solution and that is the solution, but nothing happens.”

In a world where new technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence and a myriad other technological tools are emerging, what is required today is “compassionate intelligence”. Showering praise on the assembled Rotarians, he said, “Thousands of transformers of society are seated in front of me. You transform the world. Someday if a book is written on goodness of humanity, then I promise that your children, your grandchildren and greatgrandchildren will see your signature on that book of goodness. You’re making this world a better place. You have shown moral compulsion, a sense of moral responsibility towards the world. I congratulate you for that.”

And yet, despite all the good work Rotary, and many others did, the fact remained that “the world has never been so broken, so divided, so fragile, as it is today. We have never

faced such compounded crises and multiple challenges at one time as we do today,” he said.

But at the same time, “the world has never been so wealthy and so filled with information and knowledge, advance in technology as now. On the one hand, every week, the world is creating two new billionaires, but during that same week, almost 10,000 children drop out from schools globally.”

Striking a poignant note, and echoing another Nobel Laureate, Bob Dylan, who wrote and sang the song *The answer my friend is blowing in the wind*, Satyarthi asked the delegates to ruminate over the fact that “every week almost 10,000 children are pushed into child labour and slavery. And these are not just numbers but breathing bodies and hearts. They will not come and knock on your doors; we have to have those ears to listen to their cry of silence. We have to have those eyes that can see the faces of invisibility. I am sitting here because I have faith in you, my dear Rotarians.”

The world was facing “a compounding crisis. The visible challenges,





From L: Rashi, PRIP Shekhar Mehta, Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi, RI President Stephanie Urchick, PRID Mahesh Kotbagi, Institute Convenor RI Director Anirudha Roychowdhury, Shipra, Institute Chair PDG John Daniel and Meera.

the war and violence we all know. But we don't know how many innocent children in Gaza have been bombarded, or what is happening to the rest of the Israeli children and women kidnapped and kept in captivity by the terrorist group Hamas."

What we did know was that "160 million children are working at the cost of their education, freedom and future to produce wealth for you and me. Children have never been responsible for wars." The adults, the wealthy, knowledgeable and people

Numbers speak

* **2 billion** people living in war zones, of which **468 million** are children, living in danger and fear.

* **2 new billionaires** created every week; same week **10,000 children** drop out of school and fall prey to child labour, slavery.

* **200 million children** who are out of school can go to school

just with **7 days** of the global military expenditure.

* **160 million children** are working at the cost of their education, freedom and future to produce wealth for you and me.

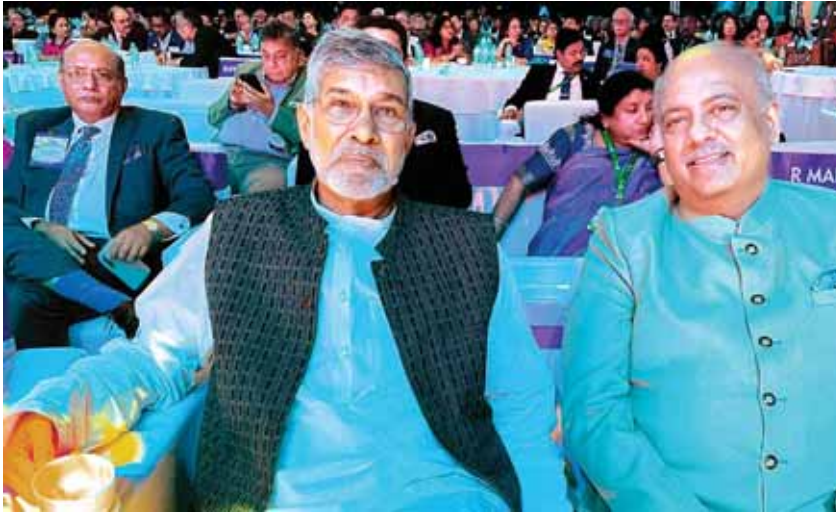
* By 2023-end, **one per cent of the richest** people in the world held **two-thirds** of the world's wealth, while **50 per cent of the poorest** people held only **2 per cent** of this wealth.

The world has never been so broken, so divided, so fragile, as it is today. We have never faced such compounded crises and multiple challenges at one time as we do today.

in power were responsible. "With their warmongering, divisive mindset, hatred and revenge, these are the people responsible for this situation. Nearly two billion people (nearly a quarter of humanity) are living in war zones or countries facing conflict and wars; of these, 468 million are children living in danger and fear in those war-torn countries and conflict zones. Their brains are shaped in that environment of hatred, revenge fear and violence. What kind of world are we going to give our children," he asked.

It was heartbreaking for him to "come across various situations where children are involved in making footballs, but they can never play footballs. I know of so many children in Sub-Saharan and other African countries, who work in cocoa fields, so that you and I and our children can enjoy chocolates. And those children have never tasted a chocolate. Whose children are they? You can say they are Pakistani, Indian, African, American or European, Muslim, Hindu, Jew or Christian children, but I say they are your, mine and our children."

If we couldn't protect these children, "then we cannot protect humanity. If one single child is in danger, entire humanity is in danger."



PRIP Mehta with Satyarthi.

I have launched the Satyarthi Movement for Global Compassion with 13 universities such as Harvard, Oxford, MIT, Indian IITs etc to find solutions for a violence- and conflict-free world.

Expressing concern over the growing inequality between the world’s rich and poor, Satyarthi said by 2023-end, one per cent of the richest people in the world held two-thirds of the world’s wealth, while 50 per cent of the poorest people held only two per cent of this wealth and this divide is growing.

Coming to AI, Satyarthi said it provided a great opportunity, and could be used for many of the world’s solutions, if used in the right areas such as health and agriculture. But if

All religions and social transformations were born out of compassion, when somebody felt the suffering of others as his own suffering, and took action to find a solution.

any artificial learning lost touch with the human component, then there was the risk of misuse and manipulation, triggering even more problems.

“I believe that the human component in AI is needed. That’s why I call for compassionate intelligence in solving global problems. Normally compassion is considered a human, social, spiritual and moral value and goes deep into all religions. In my opinion all religions and social transformations were born out of compassion, when somebody felt the suffering of others as his own suffering, was drawn in to and took action to solve the suffering of others. And thus religions, revolutions and social transformation were born. But now, the core, the energy, source, spark that should exist in all institutions that work for the betterment of society, government, judiciary, law enforcement and faith, need the oxygen of compassion.”

The children’s rights activist had a simple message to deliver — develop the culture of problem-solving that is selfless and filled with compassion... do it as a mother would do something for her child without expecting anything in return.

Returning to the danger and problems confronting our world, he said

while the creators of those problems and perpetrators of injustice and violence are growing stronger, those who could find solutions are becoming silent spectators.

“That is why I have launched the Satyarthi Movement for Global Compassion. If each of us, who is born with compassion in our hearts, could reinvigorate and launch that compassion, a solution is yet possible.” To raise that ‘compassion quotient’, he was working with several universities such as Harvard, Oxford, MIT, some Indian IITs, Ashoka and Washington. We have created a roundtable of 13 such universities with 20 top scholars to discuss this idea of compassion quotient, and have launched a global academy of compassionate leadership at the UNESCO headquarters. This is my new movement, and we are currently analysing data, information, research material, using everything, including AI.”

Maintaining that “silent spectators do not change history, as history is created by those who have the courage to jump inside the ring and solve problems,” he invited Rotarians to join his movement to find solutions for a better and conflict-free world.

Pictures by Rasheeda Bhagat

Keeping our children safe

Kiran Zehra

Rotary Club of Agra, RID 3110, has initiated a programme to raise awareness on safe and unsafe touch among schoolchildren. “Recognising this as an essential part of education, our club is working to teach children about their right to personal safety and protection, and the need to integrate this knowledge into the school curriculum. Helping children recognise inappropriate behaviour empowers them at a very early stage in their lives to protect themselves. This is crucial education,” says club president Namrata Panicker.

Namrata Mishra, an advocate and a specialist in the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, recently led an awareness programme organised by the club at the Queen Victoria Girls’ Inter College, Hariparvat, Agra. “India has a significant number of child abuse cases, with studies indicating that a large percentage of children experience some form of abuse. Discussions about personal boundaries are often avoided in many communities, leaving children vulnerable. Children in rural and underprivileged areas are particularly at risk, making sensitisation efforts necessary,” she says.

Through storytelling she taught the students to distinguish between safe and unsafe touch, and guided them on how to respond to uncomfortable or harmful situations, and report inappropriate behaviour. Cultural norms discourage children from speaking up against abuse, says Namrata Mishra. “Children have the right to refuse action that make them uncomfortable, even if these come from elders or authoritative figures.

Open communication between children and trusted adults is the key to curb child abuse.”

The session also highlighted the risks associated with social media. “With increasing access to smartphones and the Internet, children face new forms of exploitation. They must avoid sharing personal information online and be cautious about digital interactions. Predators often exploit the innocence of young minds to commit online sexual abuse.”

Posters explaining safe and unsafe touch, along with helpline numbers, were released during the session. Club

members Shailendra Nath Sharma, Vinod Gupta, Jitendra Jain, Richa Agarwal and Manoj Kumar helped in organising the event.

School principal Joyce Sylas thanked the club for addressing this issue and said, “Workshops like these help students make informed decisions about their safety and reduce underreporting of abuse by creating awareness and providing tools for children to seek help.”

The club aims to organise workshops and awareness camps in schools to shield children from the threat of sexual abuse. ■

Advocate Namrata Mishra teaching a student about good and bad touch.





Shaping Rotary's future

Jaishree

Stepping into leadership means more than overseeing your district. It means shaping the future of Rotary. You are the driving force that will steer Rotary through times of change and ensure its continued strength and relevance," said Institute convenor and RI Director Anirudha Roychowdhury at the inaugural training session for DGEs and DGNs at the Kochi Zone Institute.

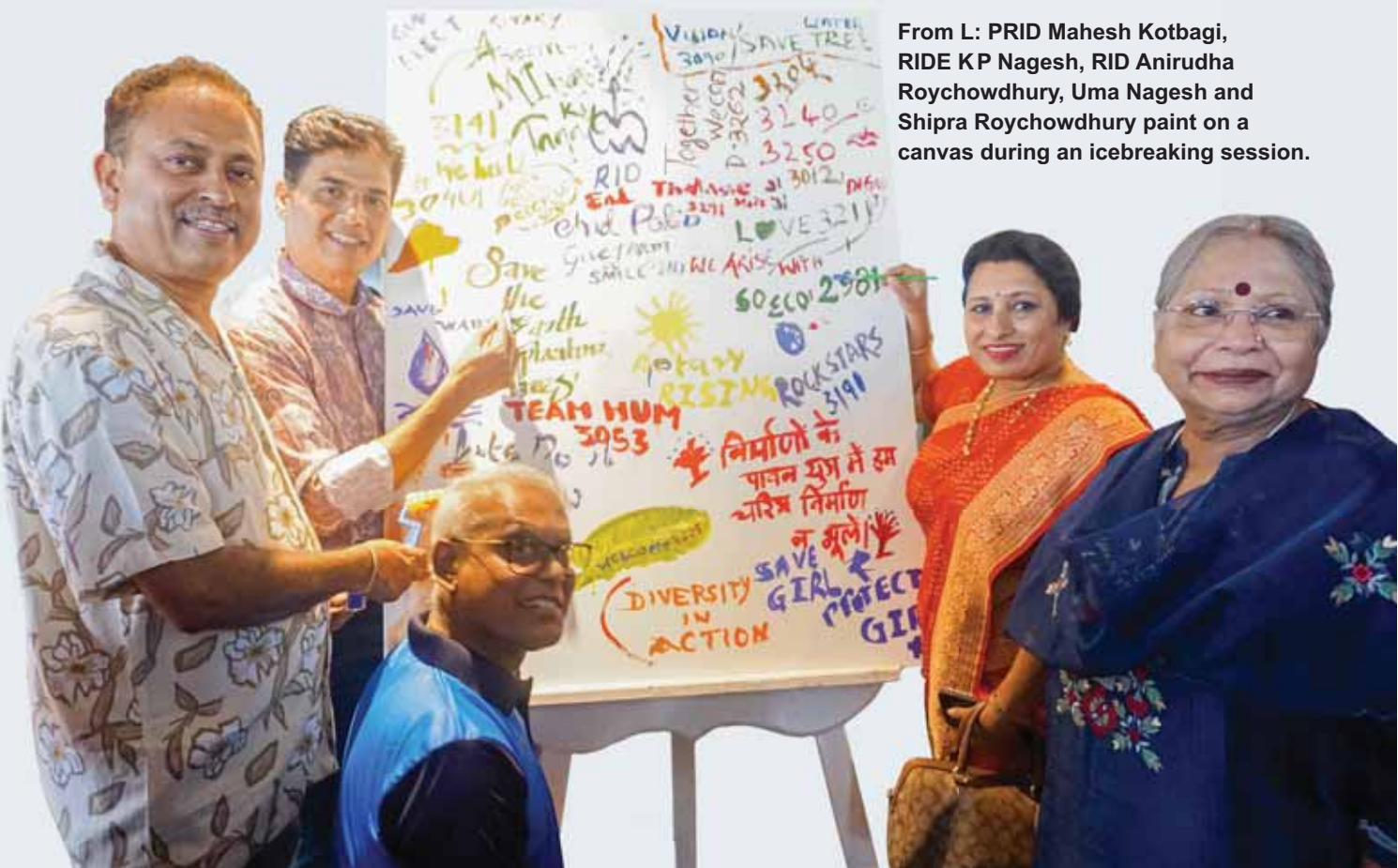
This year the training seminars for incoming district leaders, traditionally known as GETS (Governors-elect Training Seminar) and GNTS (Governors-nominee Training Seminar), were renamed GELS (Governors-elect Learning Seminar)

and GNLS (Governors-nominee Learning Seminar). "As district leaders, you hold the power to drive change through your club leaders, who understand well their local communities. This seminar equips you with the tools to fulfil this vital role," said Roychowdhury.

RIPN Sangkoo Yun shared inspiring examples of Rotary's global impact, such as its partnership with the WHO in Gaza, which enabled vaccinations for 90 per cent of children there through a \$500,000 Rotary contribution. "Rotary's work demonstrates

that together we can create miracles. Whether eradicating poverty, improving health or expanding education, our collective efforts are changing lives. Let's continue to build on this momentum," he said.

PRIP Shekhar Mehta urged leaders to rise above challenges with a visionary approach. "Like an eagle soaring above the storm, dream big when you have a vision. Of the 5,000 people in your district, you were chosen because they believe you have a vision greater than theirs," he remarked. Reflecting on Rotary's achievements, such as the polio eradication drive, he noted, "Rotary's initiative saved 20 million children — equivalent to the casualties of World War I. Clear goals and detailed



From L: PRID Mahesh Kotbagi, RIDE KP Nagesh, RID Anirudha Roychowdhury, Uma Nagesh and Shipra Roychowdhury paint on a canvas during an icebreaking session.



A drum circle session for the DGEs.

plans turned this dream into reality.” He encouraged leaders to communicate their goals, delegate tasks and involve others in their journey.

PRIP KR Ravindran highlighted Rotary’s role in shaping global peace efforts, including its contribution to the formation of UNESCO and the UN. In 1942, a meeting organised by RC

London helped draft a framework for UNESCO, he said. When the UN was officially established in 1945, 50 Rotarians participated as part of official delegations; 27 Rotarians were key leaders in task forces. Paul-Henri Spaak of RC Brussels became the first president of the UN General Assembly, and in the subsequent decade, five other Rotarians assumed the role, he said.

Talking about the power of collaboration he noted, “Too often, we operate as if we are individual islands, limited by our own shores. But imagine if we behaved like an archipelago, where individual islands are interconnected, forming a stronger, unified whole. In Rotary, service is the glue that binds us together. Collaboration multiplies our impact, enabling us to achieve far more than any single club or individual could on their own.”

Ravindran also described the partnership with the Sri Lankan government and corporate funding that helped Rotary set a goal to eradicate cervical cancer in the country by 2030. “One of our major tea companies promised us ₹7.5 crore, provided we match it. Armed with this commitment, we

turned to the government which agreed to contribute 50 per cent of the pledge. Rotary stepped in with the balance, completing the required funding. And we are on track to achieve our goal,” he explained.

TRF Trustee Bharat Pandya reiterated that polio eradication remains Rotary’s top priority, despite challenges in regions like Pakistan and Afghanistan. “This fight is about saving children and securing their futures,” he said, urging leaders to expand the donor base for PolioPlus, Annual Funds and the Endowment Fund. He also announced plans for a new peace centre in Asia with Kyung Hee University in Seoul and Symbiosis University in Pune as potential centres.

RID Raju Subramanian stressed early conflict resolution at the club and district levels, recommending dispute redressal mechanisms in club bylaws. “Rotary thrives on mutual respect and collaboration. Foster a culture of listening and understanding,” he advised.

**You are the driving force that
will steer Rotary through times
of change and ensure its
continued strength
and relevance.**

Anirudha Roychowdhury
RI Director and Institute Convenor



From L: Sumathi Muruganandam, Uma Nagesh, Vanathy Ravindran, Shipra Roychowdhury, Madhavi Pandya, Catherine Gump and Vinita Venkatesh at the partners' session.

PRID Mahesh Kotbagi, the general facilitator for the learning sessions, noted that impactful leadership requires identifying community needs and delivering effective solutions. "Leadership is about execution, trust and empowering others to contribute to a shared vision," he said. PRID AS Venkatesh emphasised member retention through

meaningful experiences, advocating for deeper diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts. "True DEI goes beyond gender diversity to embrace people of all backgrounds, abilities and perspectives, so that all members feel valued and respected," he said.

RIDEs K P Nagesh and M Muruganandam outlined their

plans to focus on membership growth, increasing AKS members and securing directed gifts.

The partners of DGEs and DGNs also underwent orientation sessions, convened by Shipra Roychowdhury and Vidhya Subramanian. The sessions included an introduction to Rotary's structure, preparation for the International Assembly and guidance on professional presentation, etiquette and networking.

Amita Kotbagi provided insight into Rotary's Areas of Focus and grants, while Madhavi Pandya discussed TRF's funds and polio eradication efforts. Experienced leaders such as Vinita Venkatesh, Vanathy Ravindran, Uma Nagesh and Sumathi Muruganandam shared practical advice on social integration and relationship building, ensuring that partners are well-prepared to support their roles as Rotary ambassadors.

PDG Kishore Cherukumalli served as the GELS chair, with PDG Sandeep Narang chairing GNLS.



From L: DGEs Elizabeth Cherian (3192), Nisha Shekhawat (3053), Tina Antony (3211), Namrata Sanatan (3250), Amita Mohindru (3012) and Pragma Mehta (3056).

Pictures by Jaishree

Manila charms women Rotarians

Team Rotary News

It was once-in-a-lifetime experience for the 42 all-women 'Shegulls' team from RID 3000 as they went on a week-long expedition to Manila, Philippines. They initiated five projects in the country in a joint endeavour with local clubs of RID 3820 with whom they had flag exchanges at interactive sessions.

All the 35 Rotarians, plus seven Annets, from RID 3000 women's empowerment team, RC Tiruchirappalli Shakthi and other clubs, turned pink ambassadors to create awareness on breast and cervical cancer. And their bus was covered with flex boards to promote the Rotary project. At the venue they distributed pamphlets, and the pink stoles worn by the visitors were handed over to the local Rotarians.

Yellow balloons with big smileys were released to carry the message of love to mark the World Kindness Day (Nov 13). On the very next day, blue balloons and blue bands spread the message of preventing diabetes among the Filipinos. On the International Day for the Prevention of all forms

of Transnational Organised Crime (Nov 15), observed for the first time in the world, members of RC Theni Stars distributed flyers and leaflets, and released white balloons in the air. World Tolerance Day (Nov 16) was marked with similar distribution of leaflets by members of RC Madurai Blossoms.

It was a solemn occasion at the candle-lit vigil to mark the World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims (Nov 17). Orange balloons rose up in the sky to spread the message of road safety among drivers and commuters in Manila. In this event, members of RC Madurai Malligai led the visitors, thus creating an impact among the locals in Manila. Bowled over by the Filipino hospitality, the Shegulls team from Tamil Nadu enjoyed the Indian lunch, visited the Okada Musical Fountain that attracts many tourists, then went to Intramuros, a quaint walled colony having Spanish buildings and homes reflecting the colonial rule of a bygone era.

The visitors were impressed by the cobbled street that led to San Augustin

Church and Fort Santiago in which their national hero was imprisoned before his execution in 1896. "Be it the Manila Cathedral, the imposing stone-and-wood Casa Manila or the Cultural Centre of the Philippines, there was no dearth of excitement or wonder for foreign travellers," said Allirani Balaji, secretary of the district's Women's Empowerment Team.

The boat ride on dugout canoes towards the crater during the Taal Volcano Island tour was nothing short of high adrenaline rush. "Travelling in a native banca amidst rocks and boulders at steep gorges and lush vegetation to reach the Pagsanjan Falls is something we can't forget at all," she said.

The Rotarians rounded off their Manila trip with a shopping binge at the Festival Mall, bamboo rafting and a museum tour at Villa Escudero, a must-see destination that is replete with local heritage and traditional landscape. Rtn Babu Kannan coordinated with PDG Meanne Solomon, RID 3820, to arrange a hassle-free, joyful experience of their week-long stay in Manila. ■

Women Rotarians from RID 3000 in Manila, Philippines.





Rotaract district leaders with (from L) PDRR Arun Teja, PDG BM Sivarraj, PRID Mahesh Kotbagi, RI Director Anirudha Roychowdhury, RI President Stephanie Urchick, RI Director Nominee Tom Gump, RIDE KP Nagesh, PDG VR Muthu and RSAMDIO President Sahil Gandhi at the Rotaract session in the Rotary Zone Institute in Kochi.

Bridging generations

Jaishree

We should have fun and enjoy the fact that we are creating magic. While we're changing people's lives, we're also enriching our own," said RI President Stephanie Urchick, addressing a gathering of 46 DRREs and DRRNs at the Kochi Rotary Institute. She stressed the importance of fun and engagement in sustaining interest and participation in Rotary's initiatives.

She highlighted the need for collaboration and smooth transition from Rotaract to Rotary. "Misconceptions

exist on both sides, Rotarians often view Rotaractors as inexperienced; Rotaractors see Rotarians as outdated and disconnected. Mutual learning, especially reverse mentoring, is essential for growth," she noted, emphasizing that Rotary is not just for older individuals, but for anyone passionate about service.

Referring to the landmark decision to elevate Rotaract at the 2019 CoL, she said more structured measures are needed to make this transition effective. She urged district leaders to

actively engage Rotaractors and sustain their initial enthusiasm. "There is something for everyone. The challenge lies in identifying the spark and nurturing it. It's easy to get somebody to come into our world. But retention requires effort," she said.

The RI President praised Rotaract for fostering inclusivity and diversity. "Rotaract clubs are already achieving milestones in gender diversity, with 50 per cent female representation globally, compared to Rotary's sub-30 per cent. Strengthening diversity leads to



Jaishree

projects. “Your energy is vital, but you must embrace the legacy of Rotary to take our prestigious organisation into the future.”

RI Director Raju Subramanian noted that Rotaract membership has drastically dropped since the introduction of membership dues. “Weigh the benefits of being a part of Rotary, the personal development it offers, the amount of good you can give to your community and the networking opportunities. Rotary extends its hands to help you become better individuals,” he said, and observed that no Rotaract district has come up with a global grant project, a transformational aspect of the ‘Elevate Rotaract’ resolution.

PRID Mahesh Kotbagi called upon them to “identify the less privileged around you and give them the opportunity to grow. Whatever you do, maintain your integrity.”

RIDE M Muruganandam recalled his days as a Rotaractor. “Times have changed, but one thing remains clear: the importance of a structured approach, or cadence, in our work,” he said, and highlighted Rotary’s three critical aspects — its strength, its unwavering commitment to service and embracing responsibility.

“Rotary is not just a name — it’s a movement, a platform that unites 1.4 million people through shared values

stronger organisation.” She suggested forming satellite clubs for Rotaractors that can “help bridge the gap while preserving their vibrant culture.”

Institute convenor RI Director Anirudha Roychowdhury expressed concern over the dwindling Rotaract strength. “India has the largest contingent of Rotaractors, yet we lost 17,000 Rotaractors this year. We bank on you for fresh ideas; you are the future of Rotary,” he said, and called to Rotary and Rotaract clubs to work together and collaborate for effective service

and a commitment to service. Together, we protect not just the health and wealth of India but of the world. Let us continue to grow, inspire and lead with purpose.”

Highlighting India’s achievement, he said, “Rotary India is thriving. India stands tall, not just in numbers but in the quality of service we deliver. Out of over 220 countries, India ranks second in growth and service.” He urged the youngsters to “embrace responsibility. Rotary offers everyone this opportunity — to step up, take charge and create meaningful change.”

Muruganandam also shared the 1:2:3 formula that he, along with RIDE K P Nagesh, will focus on to strengthen membership. “For every new Rotarian inducted, two Rotaractors and three Interactors must be inducted. Similarly, for every new Rotary club, two Rotaract and three Interact clubs must be chartered,” he said. He encouraged Rotaract clubs to organise RYLAs for Interact clubs in government schools.

RIDE Nagesh stressed the need for a mindset shift among both Rotarians and Rotaractors to foster better collaboration. “Rotarians need to stop viewing Rotaractors as “kids” and recognise their potential, while Rotaractors should appreciate the experience and wisdom Rotarians bring. Rotaractors excel in adopting new technologies and innovative approaches. Rotarians should acknowledge this strength and integrate these ideas into their traditional methods for mutual benefit. The future of Rotary depends on this understanding,” he said.

He suggested Rotaract clubs should sponsor Interact clubs and inspire Interactors to join Rotaract. For better coordination between the Rotaract and Rotary leaders of districts, Nagesh suggested a joint session for DRREs and DGEs at the upcoming Disha training seminar. ■

Rotaract clubs have achieved milestones in gender diversity, with 50 per cent female representation globally, compared to Rotary’s sub-30 per cent.

Stephanie Urchick
RI President

A life of grit, valour

V Muthukumar



Institute Convenor RI Director Anirudha Roychowdhury presenting a memento to interior designer Annika Fernando. Also seen are (from L) LGBTQ activist Zainab Patel, Srimoyi Bhattacharya, founder, Peepul Advisory, and RID 3030 PDG Asha Venugopal.

After her family threw out Zainab Patel onto the streets, “I begged and even had to sell my body to make ends meet.” That was the toughest phase of this transgender activist’s life in Mumbai, she said, addressing a plenary session at the Kochi Institute. Despite adversity, Zainab completed a Management course at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, and now holds an MBA in Human Resources, and has acquired over a decade’s experience working in a UN body. Here, “interactions with people, and seeing all the good, bad and ugly motivated me to start the NGO, Saksham Trust,” she said.

Through the NGO she was engaged in empowering the LGBTQ community, sex workers, and providing help to migrant labourers, vulnerable women and children. She is also the founder

of the Transformation Salon and Academy, which is managed by a team of transgenders, and The Trans Café, a restaurant that delivers 500 meals every day throughout Mumbai. She expressed her gratitude to RC Bombay for providing resources and help in setting up the two ventures. Zainab is also the Diversity, Equity, Inclusivity, and Culture (DEIC) leader of India ABO (Area Business Office) at Cummins.

Annika Fernando, an interior designer from Colombo, who comes from a family of mixed ethnic identity, thanks to her Dutch mother, said that when she migrated from Australia to Sri Lanka, she took to interior designing “to reflect the island’s historical legacy.” Her work conveys the “message of healing and peace as Sri Lanka has witnessed a civil war since the 1980s, and is now into reconciliation.” She, along with her sister, holds a grand

exhibition in Colombo every year to mark the Black July 1983 massacre of Tamils “who were brutally killed by the armed forces,” she said.

Calling for regular people-to-people contact between Sri Lanka and India, she said, “Cultural exchanges will do a world of good for both nations.” Though the civil war is over, “the plight of Tamil plantation workers who moved from India around 250 years ago is still a concern,” and Sri Lanka with a “crazy past” is yet to fully resolve the differences and ill-will between the communities, she added.

Branding Rotary

It is time for Rotary to go for an image-makeover through collaborations with like-minded organisations such as the Agha Khan and Kochi Biennale Foundations for an aesthetic shift and branding to attract the youth

towards Rotary clubs, said Sunil Vysyapraph, director, Motherland Joint Ventures, who designed the *Make in India* campaign in 2014.

Speaking on the topic of public image, the creative designer, credited with the promotion of IndiGo and Royal Enfield as iconic brands in India through successful advertising campaigns, recalled that after he was approached by the then Industries secretary Amitabh Kant “we created the *Make in India* as a platform, rather than an advertising campaign, to attract foreign investments and give a push to quality manufacturing through branding.” They built an interactive ecosystem in *Make in India* platform for a global experience with the help of the Central and state governments. “Art and design can push for better quality

branding and thinking, and they also effect policy changes,” he said.

He recalled the *Incredible India* campaign in 2002 when “tourism was down, 9/11 terror attack had just happened, and travel embargo was in force for people travelling from this part of the world.” The campaign played the ‘brand aesthetically’ with an image shift from India as a land of snake charmers and superstitions. The world of branding has seen “massive changes since the 1990s as companies evolved from owning to sharing, ego to empathy, opacity to transparency.” For example, sports shoemakers, Nike has latched on to a simple tagline ‘Just do it’ to become part of the pop culture across the world cutting across sports, movies, fashion and lifestyles. “Now we associate Nike as a global brand, rather than just a shoe company.”

There are very few enterprises that are “truly enlightened as Rotary is with its hugely impactful work including its efforts for polio-free and hunger-free world.” But RI’s work needs to be better packaged with a lot of excitement built around it through collaborations, he said, and cited examples of TED Talks, and the Barack Obama’s presidential campaign 2008 through collaboration with a street artist Shepard Fairey who created a ‘Hope’ Obama poster that caught the imagination of voters to show that a branding requires an ‘aesthetic shift’ to be successful in reaching out to the targeted consumers.

Vysyapraph called for “making Rotary cool and acceptable to the younger generations” through collaborations for new aesthetics and vibrant energy. ■

Rotaractors bag CSR Grant

Team Rotary News

RID 3170 DRR Nikhil Chindak has been instrumental in bagging a CSR grant of ₹25 lakh from Ayu Foundation, the CSR wing of Vijaykant Food and Dairy in Belgaum. “The funds will be used to provide cervical cancer vaccines to 1,000 young girls in schools,” says Chindak, a member of RAC Belgaum South. “We had decided on the project last year before beginning my term as DRR and the costs worked out to ₹20-25 lakh for 1,000 vaccines,” he adds. Serum Institute will provide the vaccines for the project.

The CSR partner was introduced to him by his mother who is the president



DRR Nikhil Chindak (L) with schoolchildren after gifting them school bags.

of the Karnataka Rollball Association. Chindak is a champion skater having won national level awards, including the Asian Championship Trophy recently at Goa. His next plan includes enlisting CSR support to set up a blood bank in the city. “It would cost at least ₹1 crore. We are in the process of identifying a partner,” he says.

To promote literacy in rural regions, the DRR has encouraged the district Rotaract clubs to distribute schoolbags to students under the project, ‘One Club, One School’. Each club will be sponsoring bags for a school. Chindak has personally sponsored 10,000 bags which were distributed by the zonal representatives to various schools. ■

From rural farms to **urban forks**

Rasheeda Bhagat

In an admirable bid to connect rural farmers in the Pune belt in Maharashtra to urban consumers, 12 Rotary clubs in RI District 3131, aided by the district's economic and community development team, has attacked a deep malaise of Indian agriculture. This involves the huge gaps in the marketing practices of agricultural produce that leave the farmer with a



very low price for his produce even when the end-user pays a fair price for the agricultural products they buy from the market.

In a day-long event organised by the district's 12 Rotary clubs at the College of Agriculture, Pune, rural farm producer companies and urban buyers were connected to support and boost agricultural incomes. Prominent agripreneurs of the region such as Balasaheb Gitte, Kavya Dhobale and Sameer Dombé were invited to

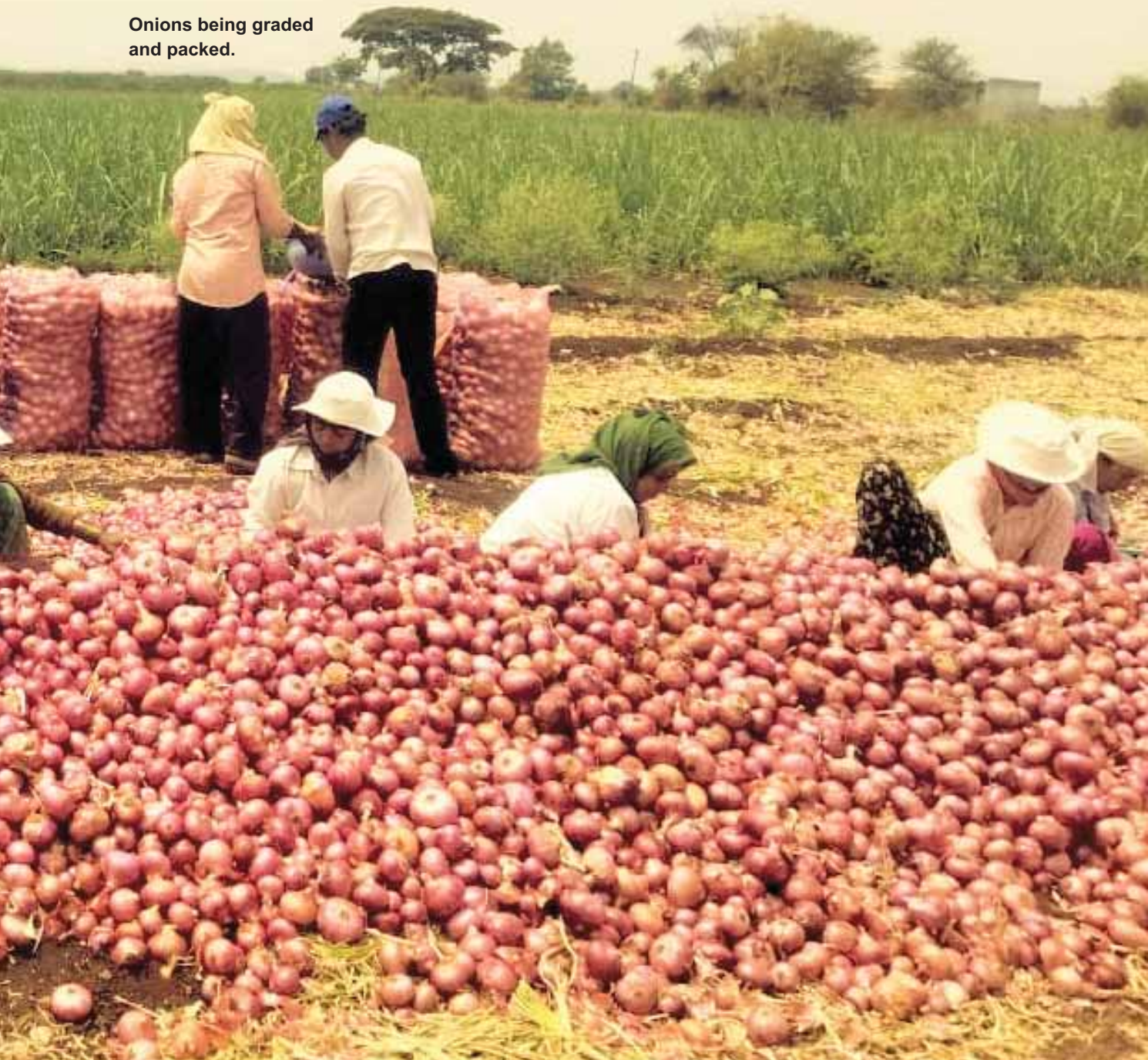
the meet "to share their knowledge and wisdom along with challenges they face in their journey as agripreneurs. This initiative was supported by the Department of Agriculture of Maharashtra," says Pradip Khedkar, secretary of the district's economic and community development team.

He is very involved in this project, as his background is from agriculture (animal feed). "I've always believed that a lot more effort needs to go into developing the economy in rural areas,

particularly in improving the income of rural farmers. Through Rotary we have been trying to improve the connect between agripreneurs and rural farmers, so that the benefit is reaped by both the groups," he says.

In this region there are about 15 to 20 agripreneurs working in different areas of agriculture. During

Onions being graded and packed.



A farm producer-buyer meet in Pune.





the buyer-seller meet, some of them were connected to the farm producer companies which comprise farmers growing different crops, who come together so that their interest can be better protected. These groups are also eligible for some government subsidies and concession in various taxes for the first three years. “We connect the farm producer companies with potential buyers and thus provide domestic and global opportunities to the farmers with help from the agriculture department of Maharashtra which is very proactive in supporting such farmer-friendly initiatives,” he adds.

Both the state’s agri department and NABARD have shown great interest in working with Rotary to improve the livelihood and income of farmers, says Khedkar. Some 250 people participated in the one-day event, and “we had invited potential buyers for the farmers’ produce that included malls, marts, restaurants, and big companies which use farm produce for their food products.”

The agri experts who participated in this mega event included Sanjay Patil from the NGO BAIF Development Research Foundation, which works in remote rural regions in animal breeding and other areas of agriculture. “He has done some major work in the conservation of indigenous crops, wild edible plants for nutritional security and on vital issues related to climate change for the states of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Odisha over the last 18 years and has been given the District Vocational Excellence Award,” he added.

BAIF has its own seed production and works in indigenous seed conservation. “In partnership with this NGO, we in Rotary are planning to develop a seed bank of various indigenous crops, because we believe that while hybrid crops are expanding, we have to

encourage our farmers to grow indigenous crops too.”

Kavya Dhobale is a nurse-turned-agripreneur; she left a secure and well-paying job as a nurse in a Mumbai hospital with a monthly salary of ₹75,000, to promote sustainable farming in Junnar, Maharashtra. She now makes vermicompost, creates awareness about chemical-free cropping, and has trained 200 vermicompost entrepreneurs. Balasahab Gitte works in the drought prone Marathwada region infamous for a maximum number of farmers’ suicides. “He has developed a dairy-related model, in which milk is collected from farmers, converted into milk products and then marketed through a farm producer enterprise.”

Sameer Dombe is a technocrat, who has developed his own brand of *anjeer* (figs) which he collects from different farmers in a small village specialising in growing figs and sells them under his brand; he has a patent for this product. All these initiatives improve the income of the farmers who work so hard to grow their crops.

Khedkar who had conceptualised the event, said this was the second year this useful event was held, where the farmers did not only get a direct connect to the buyers, but were also given useful information on

improving their yield through better farm practices. “Since this is our second year, we already have a network of some 200 people connected through a WhatsApp group, where buying and selling activities have already started. But our plan is to take this a couple of steps forward by improving our connect and providing export opportunities to the farmers.”

The objective is to set up an export agri centre where “we can give people guidance on how to export and connect them to potential buyers in foreign countries.” Asked to spell out areas where special opportunities were available, Khedkar said at the moment there is a huge opportunity for millet products in European and Gulf countries,

An agripreneur at her tomato farm.





Vegetables being graded and sorted.



particularly Dubai and also Saudi Arabia. There was also a good opportunity to export a particular kind of bamboo called mesh bamboo which is used in certain areas, particularly furniture-making, and one particular enterprise was in the process of patenting this.

He is happy that at this meet, attended by some 250 people, the farmers were able to do “substantial business” and moving forward, “Rotary will take the initiative to set up a facilitation centre to improve the connect of these farmers with the buyers and potential exporters. We don’t want this to remain a one-time initiative, but want it to become a continuing activity, with a pucca data base of farmers, customers, manufacturers of agri produce, and so on,” says Khedkar.

Apart from the farmers and agripreneurs, the event was attended by RID 3131 DG Shital Shah, RID 3132 IPDG Swati Herkal and DGE

Santosh Marathe (3131). The participating Rotary clubs included RCs Alephata Central, Junnar, Manchar, Rajgurunagar, Chakan, Talegaon Dabhade, Nigdi, Pimpri Elite, Pimple Saudagar Central, Pune Camp, Pune Heritage and Pune Lokmanyagar.

At the end of the day, it is all about improving farmers’ incomes, and Khedkar says, “Definitely, through our initiative farmers’ incomes have improved. We’re giving them a remuneration, technical guidance and knowledge on how to use fertilisers and some special techniques to bring down the cost of production. Knowledge is imparted through regular training sessions and seminars conducted by experts such as those mentioned earlier.”

Right now this initiative is limited to farmers in the villages around Pune, “but we are joining hands with other Rotarians to expand this initiative to the rest of Maharashtra,” he adds. ■

Revisiting the tsunami destruction in Sri Lanka

A school in Randoombe
in the Southern Province
destroyed by the tsunami.

K R Ravindran

December 26, 2024 marked the 20th anniversary of the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami; my thoughts go back to that fateful day and how Rotary Sri Lanka, RID 3220, responded to the tragedy. We did not simply sit back and accept it as an act of God, or stop with the initial assistance we gave those impacted. We reacted much more strongly to complete one of the largest service projects undertaken by a single country in the Rotary world. As we look back, we are filled with deep emotion and gratitude for what we accomplished through our *Rotary Schools Reawaken* project.



The calamity claimed over 35,000 lives in our country, yet despite this unimaginable loss, we found the strength to create a legacy of hope and renewal. Rotary Sri Lanka, with courage and resolve, agreed to the monumental task of building 25 new schools across the country. This was no ordinary project and would be a testament to the spirit of resolve, collaboration and service that defines Rotary. We persevered

against countless challenges, including land allocation issues, security concerns in conflict zones, death threats to our leadership from interested parties and the sheer scale of the undertaking.

To return to the beginning, I will never forget the day Krish Rajendran, Dion Schoorman, Thariq Thulba and Lucky Pieris came to my office in Kelaniya for our initial meeting to discuss the government's invitation to us to help build schools. When we set out to build 25 schools, we had no

The calamity claimed over 35,000 lives. Despite this unimaginable loss, Rotary in Sri Lanka found the strength to create a legacy of hope and renewal.

Children enjoying play equipment at the Dharmarama Kanishta Vidyalaya, one of the reconstructed schools.



drawings, no idea of cost, no land and no money.

Preliminary discussions estimated the building cost at a staggering \$12 million. We wondered whether we were taking on too much, but we succeeded to an extent we never thought possible. Twenty-four schools were completed across 21 sites, with one partially built school repurposed as a hospital. These schools stand as beacons of opportunity, serving thousands of children and embodying the promise of a bright future.

We express our immense gratitude to the clubs that oversaw the schools they were partnered with, and appeal to them to return to those schools and help them in any way possible.

Our achievement at that time was nothing short of heroic. Through meticulous planning, innovative problem-solving and tireless efforts, we built schools and hope. The Ministry of Education hailed our work as exemplary, and the Central Bank governor referred to our project as

a “best practice” model for tsunami recovery efforts. One of our schools, the Uthayapuram School in Batticaloa, even received the prestigious Geoffrey Bawa Award for Excellence in Architecture. This honour underscores the quality of our work.

Our efforts placed Rotary Sri Lanka firmly on the global map. The project garnered international acclaim for its transparency, professionalism and impact. Rotary leaders, including RI Presidents, directors, general secretary, TRF trustees and global sponsors, visited our schools and participated in their inaugurations.

Their recognition is a testament to the extraordinary contributions of every stakeholder — architects, engineers, donors, government officials, and, above all, Rotarians — who made this vision a reality.

This was not just a construction project; it was a movement. We transformed a tragedy into an opportunity to uplift communities and change lives. Today, our schools

accommodate over 15,000 students, far exceeding the original capacity. We turned empty plots of land into vibrant learning centres, proving that anything is possible with determination and unity.

As we reflect on this journey and celebrate the indomitable spirit that made it possible, we cannot forget our partners and supporters. Our principal partners, Standard Chartered Bank and its (then) CEO,

The estimated building cost was a staggering \$12 million. We wondered if we were taking on too much, but succeeded to an extent we never thought possible.

Vishnu Mohan, contributed cash and resources throughout the project. He flew down from London, to attend the inauguration of the first school, along with a host of RI leadership, including the then President-elect Bill Boyd. PDG Pubudu de Zoysa, then a new Rotarian, managed the construction and made sure the school was ready to accept visitors.

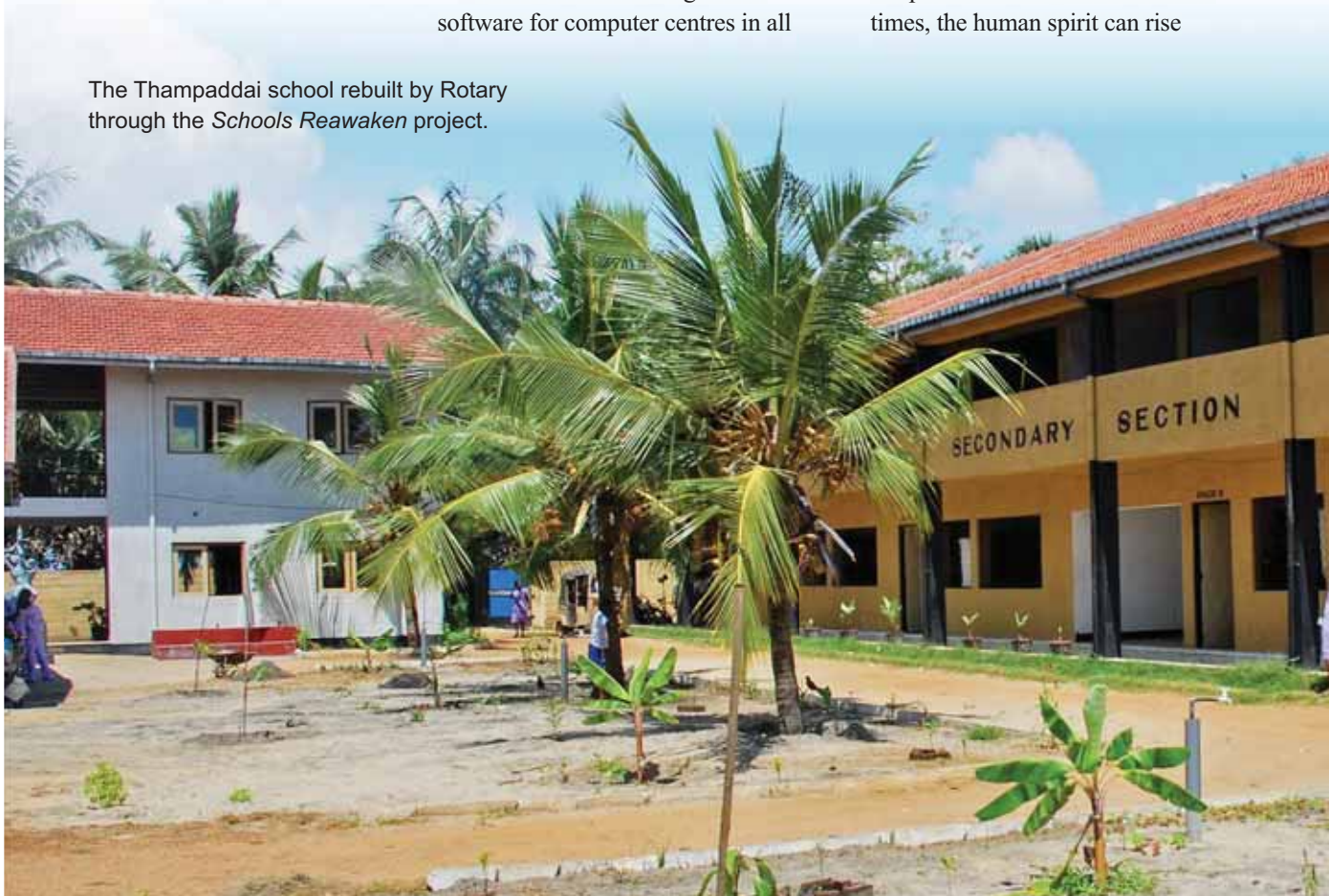
The Ministry of Education, whose members served on our Board, extended every possible cooperation in getting all the red tape through for each school. The Director of School Works, her staff, and the regional directors supported and assisted us at key stages.

The Rotary Foundation directly contributed over \$3 million, as did a few overseas Rotary clubs that paid for the construction of some of the schools.

Microsoft Sri Lanka gave the software for computer centres in all

the schools and provided basic training for all the staff. The American Red Cross assisted us with the plumbing, sewerage and sanitary works in all the schools, whilst Room to Read USA provided us with fully-equipped libraries in all the schools. FJ & G de Saram, a leading law firm in Sri Lanka, provided free legal and secretarial services throughout the project. PricewaterhouseCoopers and HLB Edisrisinhe, on concessionary terms, handled this trust company's cash handling, accounting and auditing functions. Our CEO Dion Schoorman was the central pillar, personifying "service above self" and spending hours working individually and collectively with the rest of the Board and team to maintain our momentum. Together, we turned despair into hope, and devastation into opportunity. We proved that even in the darkest times, the human spirit can rise

The Thampaddai school rebuilt by Rotary through the *Schools Reawaken* project.



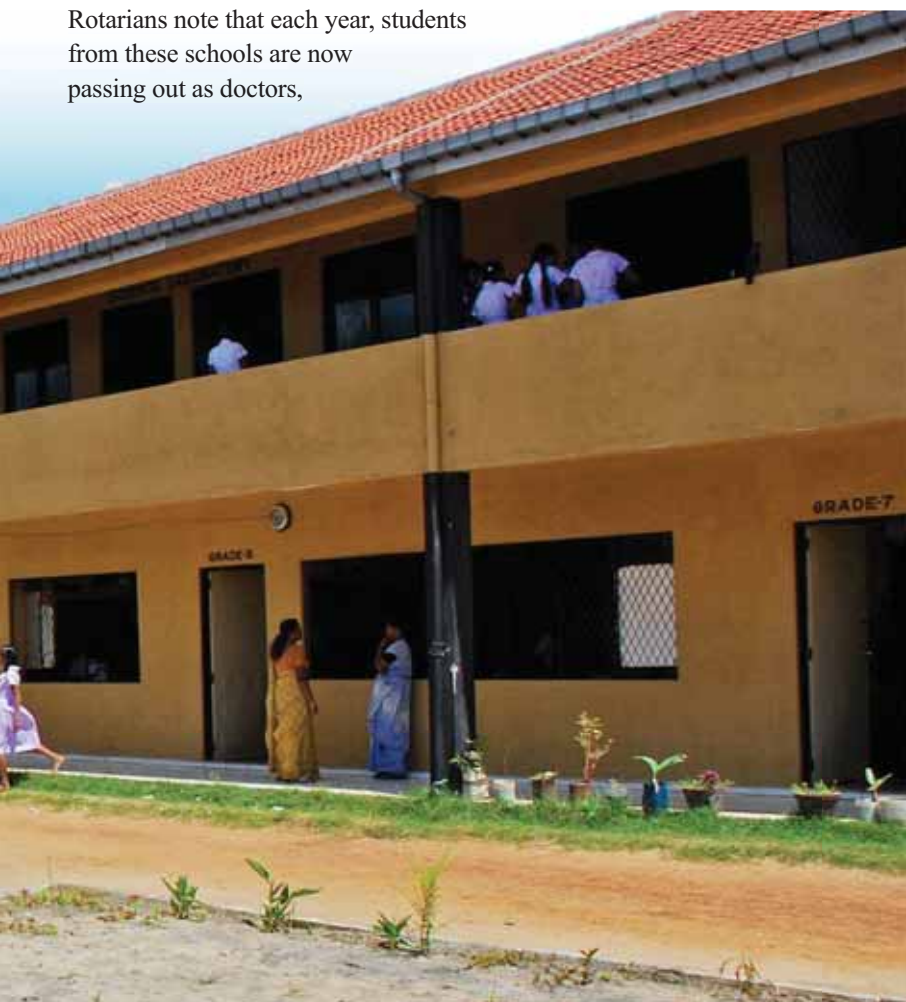
More than buildings, these 25 schools are monuments of resilience, compassion and belief that every child deserves to dream and achieve.



A tsunami-affected school in Thampaddai in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka.

above adversity and create something extraordinary. These schools are more than just buildings; they are monuments of resilience, compassion and the enduring belief that every child deserves the chance to dream and achieve.

It is with great pride that we Rotarians note that each year, students from these schools are now passing out as doctors,



lawyers, teachers or engineers, from our universities, and are now the new leaders in society.

As we mark this 20th anniversary, let us remember not just the lives we lost but the lives we touched, the futures we shaped, and the hope we rekindled. Our collective effort is a testament to what is possible when we come together with a shared purpose and an unyielding commitment to service.

Let this anniversary be not only a moment of reflection but also a call to action — a reminder that Rotary's spirit can move mountains, change lives and leave a legacy that inspires generations to come.

Thank you for being part of this incredible journey. Together, we truly made history. Let us continue to dream big, act boldly and serve selflessly, knowing that our action can create ripples of change far beyond our imagination.

The writer is a past RI President

Across cultures and generations, the saree has symbolised grace, versatility and resilience, making it a treasured emblem of identity for women. Deeply rooted in Indian culture, it is worn in various styles across the country. Nepali women prefer the saree for formal occasions, while the Kandyan saree of Sri Lanka has a unique draping style. The garment holds an enduring appeal in the Sindh region of Pakistan, the Indian Malaysian community and Bangladesh.

To honour this rich legacy, World Saree Day is observed annually on December 21. The day's significance includes honouring artisans whose craftsmanship breathes life into the garment, while also promoting handloom weaving. The day is a tribute to heritage, creativity and the unifying spirit of tradition.

Rotary clubs of RID 3234, Chennai, commemorated this day with a vibrant event titled 'Emwrap', conceptualised by Bharathi, wife of DG NS Saravanan, and Punita, wife of PDG J Sridhar. "We came up with this idea during a brainstorming discussion on engaging Rotary Anns and women Rotarians," said Bharathi.

At the event, Vinita Venkatesh shared her love for sarees, recounting how the collections of her "mother and mother-in-law inspired her to cherish the six-yard wonder."

Kamala Ramakrishnan, past International Inner Wheel president, provided an overview of South India's rich handloom legacy, exploring the intricate beauty of Kanjivaram, Uppada, Pochampally and Dharwad silks. Lavanya Srinivas, a storyteller and NIFT Chennai associate, highlighted the growing popularity of the indigo dye and its appeal among millennials.

Celebrating the saree's timeless elegance

Jaishree



From L: Bharati Saravanan, Vinita Venkatesh and Puneeta Sridhar.



The showstealer of the event was the 'thematic Saree Fashion Walk,' featuring 18 teams of women from 18 Rotary clubs. Each team styled their sarees to reflect the diverse cultural heritage of India's states. A fascinating highlight was the recreation of Raja Ravi Varma's iconic paintings. "This blend of old and new allowed the women to not only honour Varma's legacy but also reimagined his art for a contemporary audience," noted Bharathi.

Adding to the festivities were stalls showcasing sarees and jewellery by budding homepreneurs, along with a live demonstration of handloom weaving experience by Kalaiyarasi, a weaver from Erode. Women weavers from Kancheepuram were honoured, and 100 sarees were donated to Thuli, an NGO supporting under-privileged communities.

A Saree Zumba session had the delegates groove to upbeat music, blending fitness with the elegance of the six-yard drape. The energy was infectious, leaving everyone inspired to celebrate the saree's enduring legacy. ■

A girls' empowerment project takes wings

Rasheeda Bhagat

Y*adhumanaval*, the programme to empower girls, particularly in the smaller towns and villages of India by PDG VR Muthu, RID 3212, has picked up traction and is being implemented in other districts with help from Muthu, his club RC Virudhunagar and his *Yadhumanaval* team led by a retired professor of English and motivational speaker Jayanthasri Balakrishnan.

Under the leadership of District 3231 Governor M Rajan Babu, this programme was held in five colleges



and caught the interest and imagination of around 8,500 college girls from private and government colleges in the cities of Vellore, Tiruvannamalai, Tirupattur, Kancheepuram and Tiruvallur, in Tamil Nadu, with the sessions being sponsored by PDG Muthu's Idhayam group.

Saritha Muralikrishnan, the district chair for women's empowerment, who was in charge of this project is wonderstruck when she describes to *Rotary News* the mindblowing interest that the girls, "most of whom are from rural backgrounds, showed in

this project. In DG Babu's hometown of Tiruvannamalai, the session was attended by nearly 3,000 girls, and as the rooftop auditorium had open sides, the girls were literally overflowing in the verandas, trying to get a glimpse and hear what was being said.

"In my hometown of Kancheepuram, the hall had a capacity of only 1,500, but there was so much of demand for this programme that the girls themselves volunteered to remove the chairs, saying that this would accommodate over 300 more girls. The hall was overflowing and from the veranda,

more girls were peeping in, listening to the talk and lapping up the question and answer session," says Saritha, who is a member of RC Kanchi Infinity.

She said that for lack of space only second and third year students were invited, and the "first year students were so angry and asked why they had been left out. So I told them there was no place inside and I would upload the whole session on YouTube and share the link with their vice-principal."

An interesting sidelight she gives is that "after this programme, the principal, who had earlier been indifferent,

Jayanthasri Balakrishnan, an educationist and motivational speaker, addressing students in RI District 3231 as part of the *Yadhumanaval* programme.



held my hand and thanked me. And later, she called me twice and said that if you do more programmes like this, please come to our college!”

As the Tamil word *Yadumanaval* implies (she is everything), this project is all about women’s empowerment and self-esteem, and while talking to the girls the lead speaker Jayanthasri talked about the important role that education will play in their lives giving them not only self-esteem and self-confidence but also a meaningful career.

DG M Rajanbabu (fifth from L) with Jayanthasri at a programme in one of the colleges. PDG A Sampath Kumar is on the right.





DG Rajan Babu who had attended a session overflowing with a whopping number of over 3,000 college girls in Tiruvannamalai was amazed at the response the speaker managed to generate from the girls. “Basically, most of these girls are from a rural background. It was really surprising to see how interesting and lively the Q&A session was, and the girls asked so many questions about how to overcome fear and face social norms and taboos. I was impressed to find them boldly speaking out even about things like infatuation, which is an issue adolescents grapple with. We found that this was a super hit programme in all the five centres it was organised. I am really grateful to PDG Muthu and the Idhayam group for sponsoring this programme,” he said.

On the kind of issues which are occupying the mindscape of girls from small towns and rural India, Saritha said that most of them asked questions related to the practical

ways in which they can improve their lives... make their living conditions better. Most of them were not aware of so many things, including the importance of education, or what is going on in the world around them. “They wanted to know what should be their priorities and what field they should choose for a better future. They asked about so many things including the need to use sanitary napkins, and often we found tears rolling down our cheeks when we learnt from their interaction that they do not have the money to buy even the most basic necessities.”

She adds that the team including Jayanthasri and Rtn D Vijayakumari from RC Virudhunagar, who is the overall head for this programme, were very happy to note how seriously the girls took what was suggested during these sessions. “They were not shy to ask questions, and even Muslim girls, who are normally very shy, opened up when the Q&A session began. Once the questions started flowing in we were not able to stop the students. We had kept about 20 minutes for the questions but the girls kept asking and we had



to extend the 90-minute session to two hours and more. Even after we came down from the stage, the girls approached all of us and kept talking about their concerns and what is important to them,” said Saritha.

Two interesting takeaways from these five sessions in RID 3231 were “complaints about parents. They said our parents keep fighting with us all the time, so that we find very little peace in the house!”

The other related to attraction to boys or doubts on how to decide about a possible relationship with the opposite gender. “They would beat around the bush a little and put it indirectly. For instance, they would not say what do I do when I am attracted to ‘someone’; they’d say ‘when I am attracted to something’! As expected, the questions were loaded, or veiled. They’d ask

if someone asks us to do something, what should we do? But the meaning was obvious and Jayanthasri would advise them to first of all themselves analyse whether the step the girl decides to take would be right or wrong for her own future.”

Next, to take that analysis further, they should talk to a genuine, reliable, level-headed and mature friend, an elder sister if they had one, or even their parents. “As always, adolescents face many emotional problems and as elsewhere, in these areas too, there are cases of girls getting misled, giving up their education, eloping and facing pregnancy at such a young age. During these sessions, the girls were told how important it was for them to realise the value of completing their education to secure their future.”

Summing up the entire initiative, Saritha says a lot of effort went into selecting the right institutions and areas to conduct the programme. “There was so much demand for

these sessions which were held in four districts, that Vijayakumari could give us only five sessions, even though we’d have liked to do at least two more as we realise that these kind of sessions should go hand-in-hand with academic courses.”

Overall, the students asked questions related to their future goals, freedom, growth, success, depression, inner battles, how to deal with low self-esteem and achieve their potential. “We were so moved to find a few girls bursting into tears during the interactive sessions, proving that they had opened out their hearts to the speaker,” says Saritha.

She is happy that through this project, the district team was able to empower the girls sufficiently to be able to stand up and ask questions, clear their doubts and seek advice from an expert on women’s empowerment. “For after all, when we empower a girl, we are empowering her entire family and our nation as well,” she adds. ■

Interactors do eco-friendly projects

Team Rotary News

In a move that promotes education of poor children, even while helping protect the environment, the Interactors of St John’s School, RID 3055, collect unused pages from old notebooks of students of all classes, sort and send them for binding to make them into upcycled notebooks. “Each year, this project creates 800–1,000 repurposed notebooks which are then gifted to schools attended by less privileged children,” said school principal Uma Shyam, a member of RC Abu Road, which has sponsored the Interact club.

The Interact club also distributes refurbished toys and bags to children in slums and lower-income colonies. A 24-hour paper bag-making marathon was held recently. Interactors converted old newspapers into eco-friendly paper bags using wheat flour paste as glu. These bags carry messages from Rotary’s areas of focus, RI and Interact logos. They distributed neem twigs to children in slum and tribal areas while teaching them about oral health and hygiene through some peppy songs. “This hands-on dental initiative not only introduced children to traditional and sustainable oral care methods but also encouraged lifelong healthy habits,” said Uma.

Unused wooden desks were donated to schools that lacked basic amenities. The young members distributed woollen sweaters, plates, glasses, cans, medical kits, play equipment, school bags and stationery items, all of which were happily received by children from less privileged families.

This interaction fostered a sense of empathy and compassion among St John’s students, explained Usha.



Refurbished bench-desks given to a school.



Students with the repurposed notebooks given to them by the Interactors.

Through this series of projects for schoolchildren, “our students are learning the value of reducing waste, promoting education and giving back to society, thus making a difference in

the world around them,” said Rtn K A Shyam Kumar. The Interactors were supported by Rotarians Uma Shyam, Shyam Kumar and mentor Dr Vinod Mehta in their endeavour. ■

Meet



Dinesh Mehta

Steel maker

RC Thane Lake City

RID 3142

Your

Governors

V Muthukumaran

A Rotary centre in Thane

A Rotary Knowledge Enhancement and Faculty Centre will be built in Thane to train Rotarians through a CSR grant (₹75–80 lakh) by Raymond Lifestyle. “The 4,000 sqft building will have a 200 seat-auditorium, a boardroom and skilling centre. While the Thane municipality has given land on lease, three clubs will build the edifice,” says Dinesh Mehta. With 115 clubs having 4,100 Rotarians, he is aiming for a 10 per cent net membership growth.

Out of 500 paediatric heart surgeries planned, “we have completed 150 till now funded by a mix of CSR (\$100,000) funds and two GGs of over \$140,000.” His clubs donated 200 computers to eight municipality schools (Goldman Sachs’ CSR: ₹1.6 crore) in partnership with RC Bangalore West.

Free dinner is provided to over 450 patients and their attendants at the Tata Memorial Hospital. “Project Annapurna has benefitted over 50,000 needy people so far this year.” For TRF, he aims to collect \$2 million. Having joined Rotary in 2001, Mehta enjoys doing community service as “I want to give back to society by sparing time, effort and donating for noble causes,” he smiles.



Rajpal Singh
Machinery supply
RC Saharanpur
RID 3080



Meerankhan Saleem
Gold jewellery
RC Nagercoil Town
RID 3212



M Venkateswara Rao
Paediatrician
RC Vizianagaram
RID 3020

Medical projects aplenty

A bunch of medical projects are underway across Chandigarh, Himachal Pradesh, parts of Uttarakhand, Punjab and Haryana. While artificial limbs are being distributed to over 200 amputees (GG: ₹30 lakh), a mammography van will screen over 500 women for breast and cervical cancer, thanks to Tera Hi Tera Mission Hospital.

HPV vaccinations were given to 1,000 school girls (GG: ₹25 lakh), and “another 500 will benefit from this drive against cervical cancer,” says Rajpal Singh. Cleft lip and palate procedure was done on 40 children so far, and “we will reach out to 100 more in a tie-up with both Smile, an NGO, and a Dehradun hospital.”

Four paediatric heart surgeries (GG: ₹40 lakh) have been done this year. Pink toilet blocks are built at 170 government girls’ schools with the CSR partners Jaquar and Kajaria. While 200 new Rotarians have already joined, “we will add 150 more to our strength of 4,370,” he added.

Two clubs have been chartered and three more will be added, taking the total number of clubs to 116 in the district. His TRF target is \$500,000. He joined Rotary in 1991 “drawn by its charity and networking.”

Toilets for govt schools

Not one to hanker after big posts or rewards, Meerankhan Saleem is quite content “to work silently, doing social service for the underprivileged.” Having 4,750 Rotarians across 120 clubs, he aims at a 10 per cent net membership growth, and will charter six more clubs. Four have already been formed under his watch.

Thirteen toilet blocks are under construction at government schools (KA Latex’s CSR grant: ₹60 lakh); 17 dialysis machines are being distributed to four hospitals (GG: ₹1.5 crore); and 500 hi-tech robotic limbs imported from Germany were fitted on leg amputees (district grant: ₹2.5 crore). “One of my priority areas is environment, and our clubs have planted over two lakh saplings so far this year. We will present electric autos to 25 needy people (GG: ₹1 crore) as part of our efforts to reduce carbon emission and ensure livelihood to poor youth,” he explains. Saleem has collected over half of the targeted \$1.2 million TRF funds.

He joined Rotary in 2006 to enjoy fellowship, but over the years “I got motivated to do service. If my health is good and God willing, I will continue my work for humanitarian causes,” he adds.

Three human milk banks

Instead of starting new clubs, retaining the existing 82 clubs in the district “will be a challenge as two of them were terminated due to low membership. While I have inducted 250 new Rotarians, a number of old members had quit, hence I aim at a net gain of 100 taking the membership to 5,000 by June 30,” says Venkateswara Rao.

HPV vaccinations are being given to 5,000 girls (9–14 years) under a GG project worth \$380,000, “though our target is to cover 10,000 adolescent girls this year. RC Anakapalle is doing 1,000 free cataract surgeries (GG: \$30,000) with the help of Merchant Association Eye Hospital; and over 100 health camps were done by clubs, and 200 more such NCD camps will be held,” he says.

At least three human milk banks will be set up at hospitals in Vizag, Rajahmundry and Kakinada, “for which we are scouting for CSR partners.” He and his wife Dr Padmakumari, district general secretary, have pledged to become AKS couple in three years. His TRF-giving target is \$750,000. Rao joined Rotary in 2000, thanks to his doctor friend Maturu Satish, to expand his charity.

Designed by N Krishnamurthy

Making a difference

Rotary to upgrade TN govt schools

At the ‘Namma School Namma Ooru Palli’ (NSNOP) Conclave hosted by the Department of School Education, Tamil Nadu, and the Confederation of Indian Industry in Trichy, RIDE M Muruganandam gave a consent letter to school education minister Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi, assuring Rotary’s participation with CSR support to upgrade government schools across Tamil Nadu. NSNOP is a flagship project of TN government which aims to upgrade the infrastructure in corporation/municipality schools across the districts. ■



RIDE M Muruganandam gives the Rotary’s consent letter to state minister Anbil Poyyamozhi. Also seen are PDG ISAK Nazar and TVS Motor Company chairman Venu Srinivasan.



From R: DG Raja Govindasamy, RIDE M Muruganandam and RC Kodaikanal president Rajkumar with students at the event.

New Generation events at Kodai

Around 1,250 students from 24 schools displayed their extracurricular skills under *Project New Generation* of RC Kodaikanal, RID 3000. RIDE M Muruganandam and DG Raja Govindasamy addressed the students. The contestants fought hard in different segments covering arts, culture and public speaking and leadership skills to win around 400 awards. Project director Jeya Prasad oversaw this interesting, multifaceted event. ■



Mega eye camp in Moradabad

More than 900 patients were examined at a mega eye check-up camp hosted by RC Moradabad East, RID 3100. Fifty people were identified for cataract operations. Medicines and spectacles were distributed. The club launched its mobile eye clinic equipped with laser surgical machines (GG: \$72,000) to prevent blindness in premature babies. DGE Nitin Agarwal inaugurated the eye camp which was visited by Moradabad commissioner Aunjaneya Kumar Singh and mayor Vinod Agarwal. ■



The eye check-up camp in progress.



DG Shital Shah and his spouse Ragini with a fruit vendor.



Giant umbrellas for street vendors

Large umbrellas were given to over 2,400 street vendors across Pune and Raigad districts of Maharashtra under *Project Chatrachaya* of RID 3131. The initiative had a participation of 105 Rotary clubs and was led by RCs Bibwewadi Pune and Pune East. The project was part-funded by Quick Heal Technologies. ■

RC Chennai Icons sets world record with 225 charter members

Jaishree

On Jan 1, 2025, RI District 3233 achieved a remarkable milestone with the formation of RC Chennai Icons, inducting 225 charter members — setting a probable new world record. The previous RI record stood at 221 charter members, while in India, a Rotary club in Bengaluru had held the record with 151 members, said DG Mahaveer Bothra. “At 225 members, RC Chennai Icons has broken all records,” said Mahaveer Karnawat, the club’s mentor. Mahaveer Jain was installed as club president and Punit Kochar, secretary.

Speaking at the club’s installation event, RIDE KP Nagesh urged the newly inducted members to embrace Rotary wholeheartedly. “Be patient and stay with Rotary for at least three years. Its vastness and connectivity will grow on you, and you will come to love Rotary,” he said, and encouraged members to actively participate in club activities. He urged the new president to identify the interest of each member, ensuring their engagement.

He explained how Rotary can hugely benefit its members. “Conventions give you the opportunity to connect with global citizens. You get to learn about their culture

and share yours. Rotary allows you to do impactful service projects collectively, transforming lives, and in the process, transforms you into a better human being. It empowers you with leadership and networking skills.”

Looking ahead to his and RIDE M Muruganandam’s term as director in 2025, Nagesh outlined their ambitious goals. “We want to induct 1,000 AKS members and 100 ‘million-dollar donors.’ Currently India has seven ‘million-dollar donors’, with 30 more identified. Let us aim for 70 more with your support.” He also urged every charter member to contribute \$1,000 to TRF, saying, “This could make your club ‘the largest

DG Mahaveer Bothra presents a memento to RIDE M Muruganandam at the Green Rotarians Conclave. Also seen (from L): PDGs N Nandakumar, ISAK Nazar, R Srinivasan, event chair TD Prashanth, PDG Babu Peram and DGE D Devendran.





Jaishree

RIDE K P Nagesh puts on the collar on charter president Mahaveer Jain. From L: PDG Nazar, DG Bothra, RC Chennai Icons secretary Punit Kochar, PDGs R Srinivasan, Raja Seenivasan, club mentor Mahaveer Karnawat, PDGs G Chandramohan and Babu Peram are also seen.

PHF club in its charter year’ — a record to be proud of!”

Recognising that most of the members are gold and diamond merchants, Nagesh suggested channeling CSR funds into TRF, promising that their contributions would create a transformative impact worldwide.

PDG ISAK Nazar, the district’s counsellor, congratulated the three ‘Mahaveers’ — DG Mahaveer Bothra, Mahaveer Karnawat and charter president Mahaveer Jain — and said, “There will be challenges, but keep the flock together, and keep the club functioning against all odds. With 35-plus years of experience I have seen system-driven and people-driven clubs. The foundation will be strong for a system-driven club and that will keep it rooted against all storms.”

RC Vijayawada Midtown with 804 members, and RC Karur with 480 Rotarians, were models of active engagement and unity. RC Vapi was “a small-town club with 220 members. Over the years it has established a higher secondary school, three polytechnic colleges, four engineering colleges and a nursing college. Imagine the vitality and unity among its members. Three years from now, we must still feel proud of your club. Do not let ego or discord come in the way; maintain the same cheer and camaraderie always. Look for opportunities to elevate Rotary to greater heights,” said Nazar.

DG Bothra said, “My vision is to strengthen the district and grow our membership. Leadership requires clarity of vision and being a role model.”

Past and incoming governors of RID 3233 participated in the event.

Green Rotarians conclave

In December 2024, DG Bothra organised an orientation event for 700 new Rotarians inducted since July. PDG R Srinivasan, along with Rotarians TD Prasanth and VS Sashikumar, curated the sessions to retain members, and make them passionate Rotary ambassadors.

RIDE M Muruganandam highlighted Rotary’s global impact, fostering friendship, service and peace. DGE D Devendran and DGN Shriram Duvvuri used mobile technology to deliver an immersive learning session on Rotary’s fundamentals. PDG N Nandakumar, along with Team Apollo, conducted a ‘Scan Your Health’ segment. PDG Nazar spoke about Rotary’s pivotal role in polio eradication, and past DRFC Ambalavanan highlighted TRF initiatives and CSR grants. ■



The inspiring journey of a Rotary icon

Atul Bhide

On July 24, 1991, Dr Manmohan Singh put India on the world map by liberalising the Indian economy. Just three weeks before that, on July 1 another Indian made a mark on the international canvas. Rajendra Kumar Saboo, member of Rotary Club of Chandigarh, RID 3080, became the President of Rotary International, an organisation with presence in more nations than those which are members of the United Nations.

There could be hundreds of Rotary members with better professional success, much wealth, or better track record in community service but Saboo stands out in what he has achieved in nine decades of his existence on planet earth.

My Life's Journey, A Personal Memoir is a fascinating autobiography of Saboo, a Marwari, born in 1934 in Birlapur, on the banks of the Hooghly River, a fourth child amongst six siblings. Brought up in Calcutta, he went on to establish a successful business empire in Chandigarh and reached the pinnacle of Rotary International in 1991.

At the mere age of eight, the child, in response to Mahatma Gandhi's Quit India movement, launched and led a procession of 150 youngsters shouting 'Vande Mataram' and ended up in jail. Graduating from St Xavier's College in Calcutta, he had a unique privilege

of not just meeting the Mahatma twice but also walking along with him... with Gandhiji putting his hand on his shoulder.

The 'House of Birla' had a deep influence on the Saboo family. It was GD Birla who took Raja's father under his wings. He not only offered him a job but rewarded his hard work with more responsible positions and promotions throughout his life. The son's hard work and entrepreneurial skills were also initially supported by the Birlas. His smart move to collaborate with Groz-Beckert, a German business house, laid the foundation for his professional success and today's Saboo Group of Companies is led by his two sons and grandsons.

Rotary was always a part of Saboo's life as Tara Chand Saboo, his father was a member of RC Calcutta. The son joined RC Chandigarh in May 1961, and in a few months, the then Punjab CM P S Kairon and the Union minister for industries Manubhai Shah inaugurated his Chandigarh

factory. When it comes to luminaries from government, Saboo has been privileged to rub shoulders with chief ministers, governors, cabinet secretaries, vice-presidents and even the President of India. His smart moves and right connections at high places in various governments have always supported his entrepreneurial zest, leading to not only his further professional progress but also

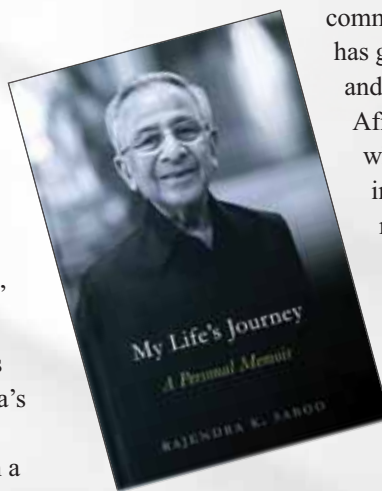
support for the exemplary community service he has given to Chandigarh and India. As also the African continent, which has benefitted immensely from the medical missions he organised in that continent.

The several interesting anecdotes on his Rotary journey, friendship with

Bollywood stars and singers, penned in an immensely readable style, showcase Saboo's versatile persona. Mother Teresa too blessed him with her love.

Saboo became club president in 1970-71 and district governor in 1976-77. His encounter with Sanjay Gandhi, his help in organising family planning camps during the Emergency period on Sanjay's request, or the chairman of Hero Group Brijmohan Lall Munjal's withdrawal in favour of Saboo for the DG's post, and many such anecdotes shared in the book, keep the reader glued to the pages of this interesting book.

Saboo has made a difference to every aspect of Rotary when it comes to India. The book describes how he was instrumental in revamping *Rotary News* and got it officially recognised and certified as a Rotary regional magazine for South Asia in 1983.



Usha, his better half, was not just a force behind Saboo, but a fellow contributor and traveller in his journey as a family man, an entrepreneur and a Rotarian.

Thanks to his efforts, the RI South Asia branch office was set up in New Delhi in October 1984.

The role of ‘right connections’, recommendations and groupism in climbing up the hierarchy at RI is seen throughout this book through various anecdotes. One may term it as ‘politics’ in Rotary. But Saboo has minced no words and has candidly shared several interesting incidents as a matter of fact, naming the individuals too. Right from his journey to DG to RI President, at every step he was able to overcome the ‘politics’ and emerge a winner. Unfortunately, it was an Indian Rotarian whose unscrupulous methods created drama and hindered Saboo’s way up to the RI President’s post. The book describes the lengthy procedure to nominate an RI President as “selection of the Pope, except for the white smoke.”

This narrative tells us how as President-elect, Saboo was offered a permanent apartment by RI in Evanston. “However I chose not to accept it as Rotary was going

through financial difficulties.” So he and Usha stayed at Hotel Orrington, in an upgraded suite for close to 200 days. This is one among many such examples that shows the kind of dedication with which he served Rotary. At the end of his tenure as RI President, thanks to his judicious spending, there was a surplus in RI’s account.

In this autobiography, his trips as RI President, across the globe, and the UN, meeting 28 heads of nations, are shared in detail. Each of those meetings makes an interesting read. The unfortunate incident during his Presidential year, involving the then RI general secretary and Saboo’s firm action on it, or his special kind gestures for the RI staff, shows his leadership as an able administrator and a warm human being.

Saboo’s deep concern to ‘better Rotary’ is seen when he identified the need for having a standard Training Manual for club presidents, which was drafted by three senior Rotary leaders and approved by the RI Board.

In Rotary’s polio eradication drive, from ideation, initial resistance of a few senior Rotarians and then to finalisation of the programme, Saboo played an active role at the highest level of RI. His dedicated efforts and persuasion of the GoI led to the initiation of NIDs (National Immunisation Days).

Post his RI Presidentship, when he chaired The Rotary Foundation, he made efforts and worked for the launch of Rotary Peace Fellowship.

Even if one ignores his mammoth work for Rotary and the community from his year as club president, district governor, RI director, RI President and TRF chair, and just goes through his 30 medical missions to various nations in Africa from 1998 to 2020 and rural parts of India from 2006 to 2024, one will be amazed by the energy, efforts, dedication and warmth towards fellow human beings that Saboo has always displayed. What makes it more noteworthy is that during all those medical missions, he was past 64, and continued attending them till he turned 90. No wonder Swami Brahmeshanand of the Ramkrishna Mission calls him the “modern sanyasi”.

It must be mentioned that throughout, Usha, his better half, was not just a force behind Saboo, but a fellow contributor and traveller in his journey as a family man, an entrepreneur and a Rotarian. This can be experienced on every page of this memoir. One cannot imagine Saboo without Usha.

The book, embellished with many memorable photographs, starts with a moving foreword by Past RI President KR Ravindran who is like family to the two of them.

None of us were there when the great son of India, Swami Vivekananda began his Chicago speech with the magical words ‘Dear brothers and sisters’ that re-introduced India to the world in 1893. But here is an opportunity for all of us to know another son of India, living among us, who, almost 100 years after Swami Vivekananda, speaking in the very same city of Chicago, appealed to the world with three very simple but profound words ‘Look beyond yourself’ and has been living his life on the same note... Rajendra Saboo.

The proceeds of this book will go to The Rotary Foundation.

The writer is a member of the Rotary Club of Thane Hills, RID 3142

**My Life’s Journey,
A Personal Memoir**

Published by
Alpha Beta Gamma

Pages: **470**

Price: **₹950**



RID 2981

RC Cuddalore Coastal City

Rotarians distributed relief material consisting of edible items, groceries, blankets and other essentials to families affected by Cyclone Fengal in and around Cuddalore.



Club matters



RID 3011

RC Delhi Southex

Sixty students from Class 6–8 at the Sarvodaya Vidyalaya, Masjid Moth, displayed their creativity at a painting competition organised by the club. Prizes with goodies were given to the winners.

RID 3030

RC Nasik

Heart surgery was done on 15 children from rural areas of Nandurbar district of Maharashtra under a global grant project at the Magnum Hospital, Nashik. In the last four years, 100 children had benefitted from this project.





RID 3060

RC Bharuch

A chess tournament for visually-impaired saw 32 contestants proving their mettle and will power in closely fought games. The event was held jointly with the Bharuch District Chess Association and the National Association for the Blind.

RID 3000

RC Karambakudi City

Rice bags, biscuits, t-shirts, nighties, lungis and blankets were sent to families hit by Cyclone Fengal in Villupuram and Cuddalore districts with the help of local tahsildar. Relief materials were mobilised through local donations.



RID 3132

RC Solapur Smart City

Bhau Beej festival that celebrates bonding between siblings was celebrated at Gulvanchi village. Around 50 destitute women were given sarees, sweets and snacks to mark the occasion.



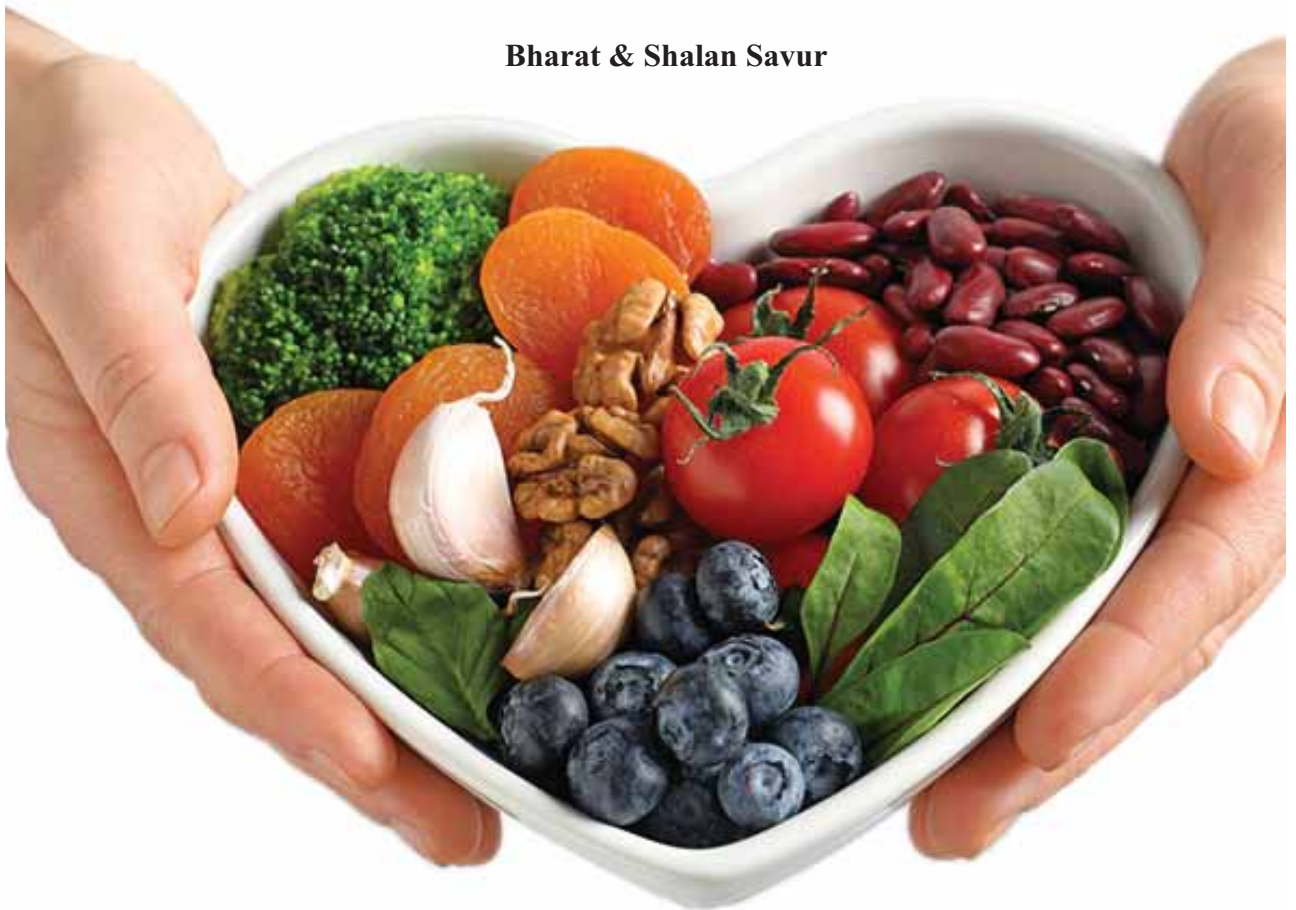
RID 3160

RC Gudur West

The club joined hands with RCs Gudur Town and Tirupati to distribute groceries and bedsheets to differently-abled people to mark World Disabled Day (Dec 3). The project was sponsored by Rtn Yealsiri Gopala Reddy.

Heart under siege

Bharat & Shalan Savur



Stress is spread over our daily bread. Office work stretches beyond the eight-hour shift quite naturally. Because the sun doesn't rise or set on it because service industries, in particular, can seldom be conveniently compartmentalised into global time zones. Back-office stress stalks the post-Covid back-to-office routine as increasing globalisation goes loco. For example, a male employee in Mumbai addresses the clients' requirements in a Manhattan-set timeline. The man from Matunga now competes with someone from Madurai, Madrid or Mexico. Outsourced work crosses geographical borders and time zones. And the red-eyed corporate traveller catering to the western multinational corporation (MNC) is accompanied today by the

India-based, blurry-eyed work-from-home/call-centred colleague. This trend is entrenched and extended as shrinking western economies seek new bases and bigger markets in Asia. And India.

Mumbai, our national financial capital, bears more than its share of the burden as the centre of economic, financial and stock market-based gravity is centred here. In this instant age of the Internet, commercial action and reaction occur at the speed of light, the blink of an eyelid. Mumbai, for all its apparent apathy, has always displayed a big heart. Whether it be flooding or absorbing and employing a migrant work force. They once said what happens in Bombay today happens to the rest of India tomorrow. This instant age

has made this statement irrelevant, and stress universal.

Stress-induced heart problems are now not just common among senior citizens. The Cardiological Society of India recommends that Indians should start checking the cholesterol levels in their twenties. A recent online survey of 547 people by the pharma company Wockhardt shows that 67 per cent of 152 people rarely checked their blood pressure. And 62 per cent of 103 people ignored their cholesterol levels. Which brings us to you. When did you last check your blood pressure and cholesterol level? Disregarding age and stage, modern lifestyle changes and challenges such as smoking, drinking, overworking and stress are the chief culprits for rising heart attacks among younger people.

Especially male. Consult your physician if you haven't already. Unfortunately, the old saying 'hard work killed nobody' is no longer true.

Fatal heart attacks in Mumbai strike every 55 minutes accounting for 27 deaths in the city daily according to a report released by Mumbai's civic health department which adds that heart attacks killed 10,000 people amounting to 11 per cent of the annual deaths in Mumbai in 2023.

Life-threatening diseases like hypertension and diabetes have lowered the age barrier. Checking more than four lakh people over two years at BMC sites, its survey showed that nine per cent revealed ailing hearts and 12.3 per cent had diabetes. Another door-to-door check covered 21.6 lakh people in the past 18 months. The survey found that 18,000 Mumbaikars were unaware of their hypertension though 34 per cent aged 18 and 69 had high blood pressure problems.

Incidentally, India is the world leader in diabetes. And ranks number three in obesity. Both killers in their own right, and reason for fatal cardiovascular attacks. WHO reports CVD mortality rates in India as 349 per 100,000 men and 265 per 100,000 women. A sharp contrast to the US, itself a largely obese nation which records 170 male and 108 female for the same number of 100,000.



In a heart attack, the individual is conscious and needs to be rushed to the hospital. Under cardiac arrest, immediate CPR is vital for revival.

Heart attack across age groups in Mumbai

Age-group (years)	Male%	Female%
25-35	100	-
35-45	89	11
45-55	82	18
Overall	86	14

'Heart failure' was a common expression in relatively more ignorant times. This term doesn't differentiate between cause and consequence. When the body 'fails' so does the heart. Today, there is a similar lack in distinguishing between a heart attack and cardiac arrest. This ignorance itself can be fatal as the immediate urgent follow-up medical measures are different. In a heart attack, the individual is conscious and needs to be rushed to the hospital. Under cardiac arrest, immediate CPR (Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation) is vital for revival.

Skipping is an anaerobic high-impact sport that brings the trunk-down body into play — mainly hip, knee and feet joints. Hence, wear socks and well-padded sneakers. Its dynamic action strengthens the body and increases stamina.

These are stressful times. In almost every case it's not what you eat, but what's eating you that stresses you. Fortunately, Mother Nature has an answer as she most often does. Going back to her and living and eating off what she naturally provides — including fruits and vegetables — retracing the steps of our ancestors in the process, helps reduce blood pressure.

Four hundred and fifty nine adults with normal or high blood pressure were tested in a clinical trial published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 1997 which served as a starter for the DASH diet (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension). The subjects were given typical American food for the first three weeks — relatively low in fruits,

vegetables and dairy products, and high in snacks and sweets. For the next eight weeks, they were randomly selected for three different diets. The first continued with the same American plan or diet. The second, ditto with added fruits and vegetables. The third lot were treated with the DASH diet.

The study established that the group that followed the DASH diet showed much better readings and reduction in blood pressure compared to the others. In fact, the lowering was in line with those prescribed blood pressure lowering pills.

The DASH diet

For a 2000 calorie per day-diet, the first 1,000 calories require 4-5 helpings of fruits and vegetables each per day — 50 per cent of your intake. Accompanied by 6-8 (mostly whole grains) servings. Two to three helpings of reduced or no-fat dairy products and up to six one-ounce helpings of lean meat, poultry and fish to complement the meals. DASH also suggests 4-5 servings of nuts, seeds and legumes spread over a week. The plan accommodates up to five servings of sweets per week. Vegans could skip dairy products and make up with other associated food groupings.

The best way to welcome the diet is: start slowly — only one serving of a fruit or vegetable added to one meal per day for a week. And double it the following week.

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

Winter kindness drive

RC Kanpur, RID 3110, runs the *Neki Ki Diwar* (Wall of Kindness) at Rotary Shahid Park, Phoolbagh. During winter, this facility offers warm clothes, blankets, and other essentials to those in need. With active support from club members and the Rotaract Club of Kanpur Star, over 1,000 items have already been distributed this season.



Club members assist a beneficiary in selecting the pants of his choice.

Building blocks of hygiene

RC Mumbai Bandra Kurla Complex, RID 3141, supported by KPT Pipes' CSR initiative, has built a state-of-the-art six-block toilet facility at the Zilla Parishad School, Mangrul, Palghar, addressing the sanitation challenges in this rural area. The club will also conduct hygiene awareness programmes for students and staff to ensure a sustainable impact.



Rotarians, along with staff and students, at the newly inaugurated toilet block.

A literacy initiative

RC Katwa, RID 3240, has inaugurated an Adult Literacy Centre at the Akhra Free Primary School, Katwa, with 40 adult women learners. This programme is expected to be completed within three months, paving the way for the next batch of 40 students.



An adult literacy class in progress.

Eye-opening gift

The *Rotary Rajan Kinder Eye* project was recently launched at the Rajan Eye Care Hospital in Chennai in association with RC Madras T Nagar, RID 3233, and Kinder Eye, US. This initiative aims to provide free spectacles to underprivileged schoolchildren up to the age of 15. DG Mahaveer Bothra presided over the launch event.



Dr Mohan Rajan(2nd from left), DG Mahaveer Bothra and Narendra Srisrisimal, president, RC Madras T Nagar, along with beneficiaries, of the *Rotary Rajan Kinder Eye* project.

Let's
Gift a
POLIO-FREE
WORLD
to Future
Generations...

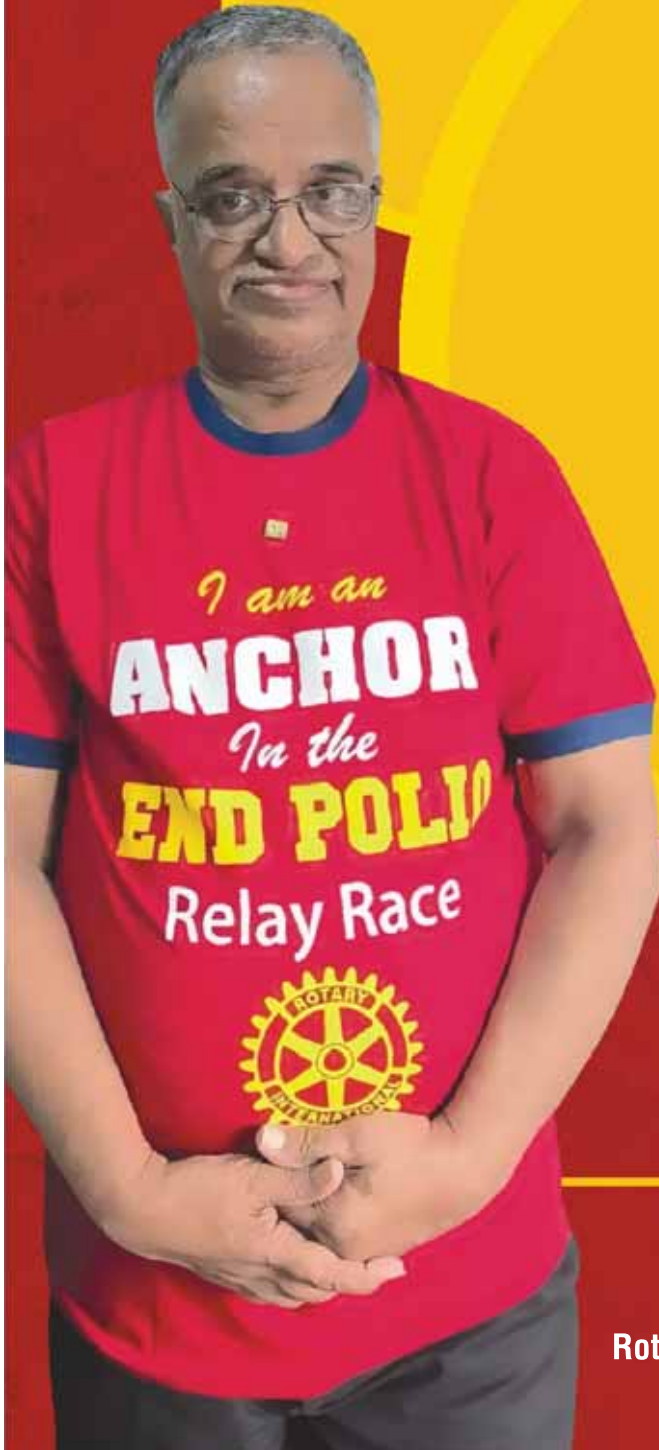
**Donate to
Polio Fund.**

at your service,

Rtn. AKS. Dr.K.Srinivasan

Rotary Club of Tiruchirappalli & Erode Central

Zone - 5





Build your own kitchen garden

Preeti Mehra

Growing healthy vegetables at home can be a rewarding experience.

A wise man once said that gardening is one of the purest human pleasures. Indeed, the patch of green you tend to and watch over lovingly is where you are in communion with nature and meet it halfway every morning or evening. A friend who takes great pride in her kitchen garden, where she grows herbs and an impressive assortment of vegetables, likens looking after her plants to nurturing a child or caring for a pet. “It is pure joy to watch the seeds sprout, grow and bear flowers and fruit,” she says.

Each morning after her walk, she spends time with her favourite plants. She talks to them in soft, loving, dulcet

tones, like a mother to her baby. She claims that speaking “nicely” to plants helps them grow better, although I cannot vouch that this helps. But what I can say with certainty is that her garden yields a bountiful harvest of fresh, organic, pesticide-free vegetables and herbs, which she magnanimously shares with her friends.

Science tells us that even though plants can’t understand or hear what we speak, they pick up vibrations caused by our voices. So harsh words spoken loudly give our green friends bad vibes. If those who subscribe to the ‘talk affectionately to plants’ theory are to be believed, then low-level vibrations between 115–250 hertz are ideal for promoting photosynthesis and

plant growth. At any rate, being happy and cooing to your plants will elevate your mood and can do you no harm.

Setting aside the science of talking to plants, let us consider starting our little kitchen garden. Since we have eleven more months to go this year, it would not be a bad idea to include this project — if you do not already have your patch of green — as part of your resolutions for 2025. If you do, you could use the information being shared to improve your kitchen garden.

So, where does one begin? Location is of prime importance. You must choose a spot that enjoys four to five hours of sunlight, preferably during the first half of the day. Post-noon sunlight can be harsh on plants, particularly



during the peak summer months. If you can't find the ideal location, you could provide a light cover for your plant, available at most nurseries, or make one with a thin cloth that does not entirely block sunlight and air. The cover you make must be tied or mounted above the plants, leaving sufficient space for ventilation.

If you are lucky enough to own a house with a backyard or terrace, the ideal location will be there. However, most people live in flats in highrises and must find space in balconies or window sills. Once you have fixed the area for your kitchen garden, you must zero in on where your plants will be grown. Old bathtubs, buckets, and clay pots with perforation at the bottom to allow water to drain can all serve as receptacles for the soil in which your plants will grow.

The soil you choose must be nutrient-rich to support your plants. You could get soil from a nursery and add natural manure (cow dung), compost (from decomposed plants and food waste) and coir peat. The last mentioned is the fine particles and dust from the inner husk or pith of the coconut, which is commercially available for use in home gardens. Coir peat has water retention capacity, binds the soil and allows root penetration. It is also said to be antifungal.

It is now time to sow the seeds. It would be best to go with open-pollinated seeds rather than hybrid ones. If you are serious about gardening, you will opt for the former since you can replant seeds from your harvest year after year. Open-pollinated seeds promote greater genetic diversity and adapt to local growing conditions over time. However, hybrid seeds are often recommended since they offer higher yields in the short term.

After zeroing in on the vegetables you intend to grow — tomatoes and chillies are recommended for beginners

since they are easy to grow — you can get down to the serious business of sowing the seeds. To enable drainage, you could start with a seed-starting tray or a single pot with a perforation at the bottom. Make a hole twice the size of the seed, cover it with soil and water it enough to keep it moist. Covering the seeds with a net would be good to keep away birds, squirrels and other pests from eating them.

Once the seed sprouts and the plant has its third leaf, transplant it into a larger pot. Ensure enough space is left between plants for them to grow. Water once daily in the morning or evening and watch the plant grow and bear fruit in about three months. You can check by pressing your fingers into the soil to ensure that the soil has enough moisture. Additional water may have to be provided during the summer months.

A kitchen garden can grow a variety of vegetables and herbs, including tomatoes, spinach, brinjal, chilli, okra or bhindi, bitter gourd, coriander, peppermint, basil and lemongrass. And with experience, you will discover more delightful plants you can grow in your patch of green.

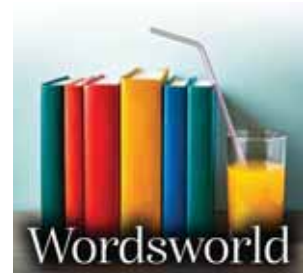
You may initially require the services of a local gardener or *mali* to set up your kitchen garden and later tend to it when you are pressed for time. But ensure he/she does exactly what you want them to do. *Malis* have a bad habit of introducing hybrid seeds, chemical fertilisers and pesticides for better results. However, the vegetables and herbs that are produced may not be any better than what you can source from the market. That defeats the very purpose of a kitchen garden.

Finally, now that you have the basics, it is time to get started. And as they say, the proof of the garden is in the gardening!

The writer is a senior journalist who writes on environmental issues



In tune with words



Creative geniuses raise our mundane lives to dizzying heights of bliss. May we never ever lose our capacity to float on the wings of inspiration.



Sandhya Rao

An image doing the rounds recently on WhatsApp caught my attention. It featured Zakir Hussain, Dr Manmohan Singh, Shyam Benegal and Ratan Tata, and was captioned 'Our Heroes in Heaven'. A further caption described it in these words: *A Parsi, a Muslim, a Sikh and a Hindu passed away in 2024 and the whole nation mourned and remembered them only as Indians*. In the last month of the year, we lost many precious souls, including writers MT Vasudevan Nair and Bapsi Sidhwa. Inexorably, we are losing a whole generation that inspired us by their lives, their work, their leadership, their capabilities, their imagination, their magic. While we mourn in these dark times, Mark Antony's words niggle at the back of my mind.

Remember his eulogy at Julius Caesar's funeral in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*? '...the evil that men do live after them, the good is oft interred with their bones...' I wonder, indeed, I fear: In the end, is this the legacy we shall leave behind?

Bapsi Sidhwa lived in the US for many years but surely everyone remembers the film that Deepa Mehta made based on her book, initially titled *Cracking India* and later, *Ice Candy Man*. The film was called *Earth 1947* and was set during Partition. Gripping, shocking and moving in turns, it drew nuanced performances from all the actors, including Maia Sethna as Lenny, a Parsi child central to the novel and the film. It also features what I believe is one of the best love songs ever, written by Javed Akhtar, tuned by AR Rahman and sung by Hariharan: *Dheemi dheemi, bheeni bheeni, khushboo hai tera badan...* Imagine my delight when, just a few days ago while I was watching an

interesting 2023 Pakistani serial called *Working Women*, I saw one of the characters shown reading *Ice Candy Man*! I came across the abstract of a study on the novel in light of New Historicism which sees how this novel 'challenges Eurocentric and colonial concepts by elevating the voices of people who are marginalised' while describing events in Lahore during the partition of India and Pakistan. New Historicism is described as a literary theory that looks at understanding history with the help of cultural context and intellectual history.

The following passage from *Ice Candy Man* quoted in *City of Sin and Splendour* sits in direct opposition to the WhatsApp image described earlier: 'It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves — and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols. Ayah is no longer just my all-encompassing Ayah, she is also a token. A Hindu. Carried away by a renewed devotional fervour she expends a small fortune in joss sticks, flowers and sweets on the gods and goddesses in the temples. ... Imam and Yousuf, turning into religious zealots, warn Mother they will take Friday afternoons off for the Jumha prayers ... Godmother and my nuclear family are reduced to irrelevance — we are Parsee. What is God?'



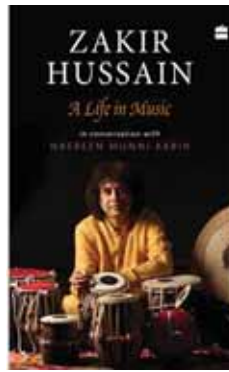
Making the voice of the marginalised emerge from the cacophony of the world was Bapsi Sidhwa's special skill and although she will be missed, her books will live on. As will the stories and writings of that consummate Malayalam writer, MT Vasudevan Nair, whom we shall meet in a future column.

In 2018, Nasreen Munni Kabir published a long conversations-based book titled *Zakir Hussain: A Life in Music*. If you are a music-lover, this is a must-read. Expectedly, it is replete with lovely anecdotes involving music/musicians, but it has so much more about life and living, and so I would recommend it to everyone. Zakir Hussain says, early in the conversation, how the sitar maestro Ravi Shankarji 'was the only person I knew then who could talk on any subject. Whenever we travelled together by plane, he would buy ten magazines at the airport... and read them all during the flight. I started doing that too. I learned much more about language through reading than I had learned at school.' He says he loved fiction best because 'I'm basically an escapist' and his favourite was the Foundation series by Isaac Asimov.

We've seen an outpouring of expressions of affection with Zakir Hussain's passing, and what he shares in this book reinforces the many reasons we feel this loss so deeply. For instance, when NMK asks him if he wanted to be like his father, Allarakha, both as a musician and as a person,

Zakir Hussain's response is that he realised he should not try to be like his father, just as his father was not and did not play like his guru, Mian Qadir Baksh. He tells us why. When, after a concert, someone told Allarakha that he should be so proud of his son, he played exactly like his father, the latter responded saying that since he had become Ustad Allarakha, another Ustad Allarakha would be merely a copy. 'What is the point of that?' he said. He prayed 'he'll be better than me, do something new and different' and bold. 'My father taught my two brothers, Fazal and Taufiq, and me, and also all his students that we had to find our own style. He was very comfortable with the idea that his sons would not be like him...' explains Zakir Hussain. Look around and you will observe that this kind of approach or attitude is rare even today, not just in the creative sphere, but in other areas of endeavour as well.

Returning to Bapsi Sidhwa, that keen observer of life and morals, as well as history and cultural idiosyncrasies... As a Parsi, the Parsi view of life runs like a thread through all of her work, which is also woven in with her Pakistani heritage, her South Asian identity, and her consciousness as a citizen of the world.



This is brilliantly laid out in her short story collection, *Their Language of Love*. She herself acknowledges that she is a novelist, not a short-story writer. So, yes, most of the stories in this collection are on the longer side. And no, not all of them fall typically

into the category, in the sense that they do necessarily pivot around the resolution of a single idea or issue. Instead, they emerge and evolve out of a head-on meeting of cultures where differences of language, class and creed must be engaged with. Layer this with her local/global vision, and you get situations, characters, ideas that demand your attention, that urge you to reflect. Yet the narrative never flags, it keeps the momentum going. Which is why I was able to read the book practically in one sitting.

Two of the stories transformed themselves into novels: *An American Brat* and *Cracking India (Ice Candy Man)*. The denouement in 'Defend Yourself Against Me' brought tears to my eyes as it boldly, bravely walks the slippery line between the sublime and the ridiculous. How Bapsi Sidhwa pulls it off is her genius. Perhaps because her writing fundamentally draws from lived experiences. For me, especially, the vivid picture she paints of Pakistan — a country not many Indians can hope to visit — the place, the people, the languages... all these enhanced the reading experience, expanding both mind and heart.

Now, Bapsi Sidhwa and Zakir Hussain, all we can do is take solace in your legacy.

The columnist is a children's writer and senior journalist

“Inexorably, we are losing a whole generation that inspired us by their lives, their work, their leadership, their capabilities, their imagination, their magic.”

Membership Awards	Zone 4	Zone 5
Highest membership growth	Ghanshyam Kansal (RID 3090)	Anandtha Jothi (RID 3000)
Highest membership growth in %age	Ghanshyam Kansal (RID 3090)	Anandtha Jothi (RID 3000)
Highest expansion	Ghanshyam Kansal (RID 3090)	
Highest women membership growth	Jeetender Gupta (RID 3011)	
Highest existing membership retention	Nihir Dave (RID 3060)	Anandtha Jothi (RID 3000)
Highest new member retention	Mehul Rathod (RID 3055)	



RI President Stephanie Urchick presents an award to IPDG Jeetender Gupta. From L: RPIC PDG Pinky Patel, RI Director Raju Subramanian, Deepti Gupta and RI Director Anirudha Roychowdhury are also present.

Public Image Champion Awards*

Zone 4	Zone 6	Zone 7
Nirmal Kunawat (RID 3056)	Asha Venugopal (RID 3030)	Subbarao Ravvuri (RID 3020)
Ghanshyam Kansal (RID 3090)	Nilesh Agarwal (RID 3240)	Manjoo Phadke (RID 3131)
Jeetender Gupta (RID 3011)	Rajendra Prasad Dhoju (RID 3292)	V Srinivas Murthy (RID 3192)
Nihir Dave (RID 3060)	Jayashree Mohanty (RID 3262)	

* Zone 5 Public Image Awards will be announced at a later date.

Public Image Awards - 2023–24

Membership Awards	Zone 6	Zone 7
Highest membership growth	SP Bagaria (RID 3250)	Swati Herkal (RID 3132)
Highest membership growth in %age	SP Bagaria (RID 3250)	Swati Herkal (RID 3132)
Highest expansion	Rajendra Prasad Dhoju (RID 3292)	Swati Herkal (RID 3132)
Highest women membership growth	Rajendra Prasad Dhoju (RID 3292)	Manjoo Phadke (RID 3131)
Highest existing membership retention	SP Bagaria (RID 3250)	BC Geetha (RID 3182)
Highest new member retention	Nilesh Kumar Agarwal (RID 3240)	



RID 3234 PDG J Sridhar receives the International Service Award for a Polio-free World from President Stephanie. Also seen: PRIP KR Ravindran and RI Director Nominee Martha Helman.



President Stephanie presents an award to IPDG V Srinivas Murthy. RPIC PDG Kishore Kumar and RID Subramanian are also present.



From L: PRID Kamal Sanghvi, RIDN Tom Gump, RID Subramanian, Vaishali and IPDG Nihar Dave, RIDN Martha and RID Roychowdhury.

Pictures by V Muthukumaran



RID 3170

RC Honavar

DG Sharad Pai inaugurated a two-day chess competition for visually-impaired held jointly with the All-India Chess Federation for the Visually-Challenged. Thirty-one players from across the country displayed their spirit of resilience and grit overcoming their physical disability.



Club matters



RID 3201

RC Cochin Muziris City

A self-defence training session was held for girl students of NSS unit at the SNV Sanskrit HS School, N Paravur, to mark World Girl Child Day (Oct 11). Police officials led by Assistant SI Rossa from Ayyampuzha Police Station trained the girls.

RID 3211

RC Anchal

Toys, dolls and sweets were distributed to children at the Kuttankara Anganwadi, Anchal. Pedestal fans were also donated to the centre. The project cost ₹15,000.





RID 3250

RC Patna Kankarbagh

Over 170 students from Class 1–8 at the Navin Adarsh Madhya Vidyalaya, Lohianagar, were examined at a health check-up camp. A team of doctors checked the general health parameters of children.

RID 3191

RC Bangalore City Centre

In its monthly *Project Zero Hunger*, the club distributes food to over 300 poor beneficiaries costing ₹15,000 per event. The initiative has lifted the public image of the club in the neighbourhoods.



RID 3261

RC Sambalpur Central

A WASH in School project was executed at a government school devoid of handwash and drinking water facilities, and a pipeline was laid for the toilet block which would benefit around 180 students.



RID 3291

RC Calcutta

Project Vision for All has provided eye check-up, spectacles and cataract surgeries to over 15,000 patients till now. It targets 100 eye camps and 100 surgeries with a budget of ₹75 lakh for the year.

Compiled by V Muthukumar

District Wise TRF Contribution

As on December, 2024

Annual Fund (AF) includes SHARE, AoF and World Fund.
PolioPlus excludes Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Source: RI South Asia Office

(in US Dollars)

District Number	Annual Fund	PolioPlus Fund	Endowment Fund	Other Funds	Total Contribution
2981	47,869	11,361	0	38	59,269
2982	28,571	6,351	10,421	41,968	87,310
3000	32,037	2,681	1,000	295,336	331,055
3011	46,557	5,053	29,251	717,011	797,872
3012	7,032	151	1,500	641,188	649,871
3020	75,779	10,982	26,000	4,857	117,618
3030	26,990	3,375	4,190	74,000	108,555
3040	3,679	90	0	15,723	19,492
3053	46,946	300	0	0	47,246
3055	27,733	3,968	2,071	61,065	94,838
3056	16,241	1,218	60	133	17,651
3060	144,132	6,338	3,499	101,960	255,929
3070	15,837	682	0	0	16,519
3080	11,943	5,884	17,384	9,561	44,771
3090	14,066	109	17,000	0	31,175
3100	19,745	3,980	0	34,765	58,490
3110	15,231	777	1,129	183,643	200,780
3120	46,787	1,211	8,337	26,413	82,748
3131	405,593	15,704	48,524	242,463	712,284
3132	43,877	2,365	15,000	13,636	74,878
3141	356,169	26,964	104,000	1,442,227	1,929,360
3142	359,051	15,281	50,060	223,824	648,215
3150	96,590	12,394	92,251	734,364	935,599
3160	4,163	3,204	1,000	5,787	14,153
3170	32,633	20,135	2,000	93,014	147,782
3181	63,630	16,266	50	0	79,947
3182	56,120	3,298	12	8,509	67,939
3191	28,221	2,642	0	130,970	161,833
3192	94,453	3,008	1,000	33,105	131,566
3201	54,858	28,686	3,190	81,581	168,316
3203	30,805	9,651	15,000	4,690	60,147
3204	15,897	3,561	36,000	81	55,539
3211	16,261	3,287	0	11,212	30,760
3212	272,511	14,092	59,000	105,483	451,086
3231	14,449	5,346	65,115	30,400	115,309
3233	11,896	18,372	2,571	327,657	360,496
3234	104,891	24,261	69,746	725,960	924,858
3240	165,219	27,283	50,000	14,370	256,872
3250	136,590	4,677	1,000	53,327	195,594
3261	1,517	268	8,335	5,205	15,325
3262	62,712	2,187	1,307	0	66,206
3291	111,296	9,466	118,500	125,861	365,123
3220	Sri Lanka 43,188	3,072	4,052	17,247	67,559
3271	Pakistan 9,318	40,036	0	10,500	59,854
63	(former 3272)* 2,420	1,887	0	0	4,306
64	(former 3281)* 13,381	2,815	1,000	1,050	18,246
65	(former 3282)* 767	1,046	0	0	1,813
3292	68,575	21,629	30,026	100,052	220,283

* Undistricted

More than membership, let's build a community

Sukumaran Nair



Before eagerly urging people to join Rotary, it's essential that they understand its roots — its purpose.

Just like every life born into this world, Rotary was born with a meaning, shaped by the vision of one man: Paul Harris. His idea was simple yet profound, professionals from diverse backgrounds coming together to share ideas, foster friendship and find purpose in service. This was never meant to be just another club; it was the start of a movement. Over the years, Rotary's mission grew to encompass global humanitarian efforts, like the fight against polio, which began in 1979 and has reduced the disease from 125 affected countries to just two.

Rotary is not just a place where people gather to socialise. It's a family bound by values, by the passion to make the world better. I remember joining Rotary after moving into a township with thousands of residents. Frequent travel for work made it hard to connect, but with Rotary, I was instantly part of a community — a family of 40-plus members who welcomed me. Our bond grew quickly, and soon we weren't just acquaintances; we were partners on meaningful projects to uplift the underprivileged in our community. It's incredibly moving to see the diversity in background, age and social status, all coming together with a shared goal of creating change.

The beauty of Rotary is that it shouldn't focus on simply inducting

members. It needs volunteers with open hearts who feel a natural call to contribute. Rotary should be a place where people join for projects they resonate with, bringing along their families and friends. This transformation from wanting to be part of something bigger to needing to be part of it is what creates enduring bonds. Like the bubbles of champagne in fermentation, these connections become inseparable, creating a vibrant, lasting community.

Too often, in the drive to meet age and gender quotas, clubs bring in members who may not truly align with Rotary's values, and they quickly realise they don't fit. I remember attending a meeting in Bangladesh where the club president highlighted the "three Ts" for membership: Talent, Time and *Takka* (money). Members need to bring creative solutions, make time for meetings and projects, and understand that doing good often requires resources. True involvement means more than paying dues — it's a commitment of heart and hand.

Gender equality is crucial, but pushing too hard for specific demographics can distract from Rotary's mission. I've never felt gender-based barriers in my club or any other club that I've visited. Instead of quotas, Rotary needs citizens who bring informed perspectives and passionate hearts — people who want to connect deeply, serve authentically and make lasting impact. Rotary needs not just hands, but hearts to foster enduring bonds, both with our members and those we aim to uplift through our service.

Let's break down boundaries, set aside divisions, and become a united Rotary. Together, we can achieve more, inspire others and drive larger, more impactful projects as a testament to the power of one — One Rotary, One World.

*The writer is a member of
RC Hiranandani Estate, RID 3142*



WhatsApp blues

TCA Srinivasa Raghavan

LBW



Until last month I was in around 15 WhatsApp groups. Then one day I quit all but six family and professional groups. The remaining members of the groups which I left were hurt, appalled, angry and puzzled. I tried to explain to them that I had left because WhatsApp had brought together on one platform people who I had spent a lifetime avoiding. It is one thing to say hello, how are you, once in about ten years and quite another to wake up each morning to find these fellows behaving as if they know everything about everything. This is true of family groups, too, but as someone said, unlike friends you can't choose your relatives. Atal Behari Vajpayee had said the same thing about neighbours like China and Pakistan.

One big problem I have with these social media groups like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp is that they allow mere acquaintances and even people you don't know to be rude to you. In fact, even good friends cross the line sometimes. Recently I posted an innocuous joke on one of the college groups and got a prompt reprimand that this was in poor taste and had no place in a group like ours. I told him to have some *isabgol* and quit the group.

Indeed, it was for the same reasons that I left both Facebook and Twitter a few years ago, and have never got on to Instagram. I honestly can't understand why anyone would want to continue to be a member of a WhatsApp group that has a motley crowd

of old and young people who either never engage but remain members in a voyeur-like way, or, when they do engage, it's either to express an uninformed opinion or to send out countless forwards. I mean, why not do it bilaterally, choosing your interlocutors carefully? One man's riveting news is usually trivia for everyone else.

To my horror, what ultimately happened, I must confess rather sheepishly, is that I had become a compulsive forwarder of all sorts of things that I assumed the others would find funny or interesting. This dismaying realisation was an important factor in my quitting the various groups. In all of these there were only one or two or perhaps three who shared my interests. So why was I trying to share things with the rest? The answer became blindingly obvious: because I could. It was like going into a room with lots of people and talking to them merely because they were there. In other words, I had probably become an awful bore. Sorry, not probably.... but definitely.

There was also the addiction. What was fun in the beginning when you established contact with long-lost acquaintances gradually turned into an obsessiveness. I know it's like that for others too. They may not post anything but they do keep checking their phones. I once gave a lecture at a university where the audience of about 800 students hardly heard a word of what I said.

They were all busy checking their phones... ■



Rotary
District 3212



NOW, PROJECT PUNCH IS FOR THE HEALTH CARE INDUSTRY TOO

Project Punch – A 3-day Spoken English Programme for B.Ed. students, Arts & Science students, Engineering students, Teachers and Health Care staff!

A 3-day Spoken English programme to make India access globally.



Programmes in 37 months

As on 1 January, 2025

No. of Occurrences **106**

No. of Beneficiaries **11,616**

15 Official Visits to IDHAYAM

Edible Oils Factory,

along with interactions with PDG Rtn. AKS V.R.Muthu, Chairman, IDHAYAM Edible Oils, have been arranged for the students of Project Punch from various institutions till January 1, 2025.

600 students of Project Punch

have got benefitted out of the industrial exposure and sharing of entrepreneurial experiences (by PDG Rtn. AKS V.R.Muthu) during the Factory Visits.

Do you wish to conduct **Project Punch?** Contact:

Project Chairman
Rtn. A.Shyamraj
97502 07464



PROJECT PUNCH



What is Project Punch?

Project Punch is a 3-day Spoken English Programme sponsored by IDHAYAM Edible Oils and supported by Rotary Club of Virudhunagar. Initially, the programme benefitted the students of B.Ed. institutions and now, it is available for the students of all streams with the need for development in English.

The programme builds confidence and courage in students to stand up, open up and speak in English. Our expert team presents the needed evaluation and correction patiently to each student after his/her performance. Through necessary inputs, evaluation, appreciation and motivation, we find extraordinary results. By the end of the programme, the students leave with the self-assurance that they can take it forward by themselves from there.

IDHAYAM
PROMISE OF HEALTH AND HAPPINESS

LEKHA 08/ Feb 25/BIW

RJ MANTRA ENGLISH SCHOOL

IDHAYAM RAJENDRAN CHARITIES, AFFILIATED TO CISCE-TN 082.
VIRUDHUNAGAR, TAMILNADU.

ADMISSIONS OPEN 2025-2026



learn *the*
Magic
of learning

This is the
Composition of
RJ Mantra's
Learning
Community

 Curious Learners **01**

 Ignited Minds **02**

 Inspiring Hearts **03**

For More Information

 9489067789
8903660689

www.rjmantra.com