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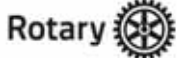
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## A spontaneous gesture

I was really touched to read in the August cover story about the efforts of a single Rotarian — Rajkumar Raman from RC Kodaikanal, who raised the money and put in so much hard work to build 14 homes for tribal families in a village near this hill station. What was really inspiring was the picture of a smiling and confident Malliga, who looks as though she has conquered the world. I read in your article that this project is facing a funding gap for the last bit — electricity supply. I am sending a humble contribution of ₹1 lakh for this noble work.

*PDG VR Muthu — D 3212*



Raman who made this dream come true for them. Our congratulations to editor Rash-eeda Bhagat for beautifully summarising the project and the hardships faced during the project.

In Rotary, you should do such service to satisfy both your mind and soul. This article has definitely created a spark in us to do such impactful service. The pictures reflect the happiness of the beneficiaries.

*C Pandian, RC Dindigul — D 3000*

I found the cover picture interesting and arresting; such joy on the tribal woman's face! It was amazing to read about the construction of concrete houses for the Vazhaigiri tribals in Kodaikanal. It is said, 'try building a house and getting a daughter married' — both are Herculean tasks for middle-class families. And here Rotary has built homes for tribals for whom owning a house is a pipedream. Hats off to Rtn Rajkumar

The cover picture, its feature and photos were beautifully presented. Rajkumar Raman, past AG of RID 3000, is an example of what a Rotarian should pay attention to before starting a project. That the project cost of ₹70 lakh for the construction of 14 houses was raised by an individual without the support of Rotary or club funds teaches us how everyone should work. The author has given a detailed account of how the project was done, including the search for donors and using government officials to help the poor. Kudos to Raman.

*K Paulsamy, RC Srivilliputtur Friends — D 3212*

## Leadership challenge

I was impressed with the views expressed by Rasheeda Bhagat on leadership in her Editor's note in the August issue. She posed a question in the headline whether 'Leadership is a challenge or opportunity'. My answer is: It is both in respect to Rotary. In Rotary, leadership exists within a group of service-minded people, and is irrespective of positions like club president, secretary, etc. All our Rotarians accept various positions with many challenges but most of them consider the position as an opportunity to serve the organisation and the community. Most of them achieve success. The secret lies in learning how to identify and bring out the hidden potential of the team. This, I feel, should not be compared

with the managership of a company or enterprise, which is positional or hierarchical. But, in Rotary which is a service organisation, leadership is gaining a place in the hearts of people through personal relationship.

In my long years in Rotary, I have come across people who were experts in company affairs or business dealings, but weren't able to perform or shine in their roles as club leaders and in rendering service to the community. A good leader in Rotary is one, who inspires his fellow Rotarians to achieve worthwhile things and reach greater heights. What is required is simplicity in outlook, thorough Rotary knowledge, and good communication skills.

*R Srinivasan, RC Bengaluru  
J P Nagar — D 3191*

In the August issue, RI President Francesco Arezzo's statement is golden words of Rotary wisdom. He says: Membership growth isn't just about numbers. It's about opening doors. It's about inviting more people who are ready to give their time, talent and hearts to a cause greater than themselves.

"When we welcome new members, we bring in fresh ideas and new energy. We expand our impact, strengthen our clubs, and ensure that Rotary continues to evolve with the world around us." The truth is: When we celebrate numbers, we might gain a member. But when we celebrate people, we grow a Rotarian.

*R Murali Krishna  
RC Berhampur — D 3262*



## LETTERS

Once again a beautiful issue containing the valuable editorial, chat with RI President Francesco Arezzo, and a nice article *Teach your children well* which is informative and thought-provoking.

The article rightly states, “Today’s children are tomorrow’s citizens.” So, catch them young. The idea of fostering a culture of environment-friendly behaviour among the children is critical. We need to include in school curriculum topics such as climate change, pollution and water conservation to enable students to understand the multidimensional crisis.

We should also practice basic environmental rules at home like waste segregation, reducing plastic use, and conserving water and energy. Children will follow us in toto.

*Raj Kumar Kapoor  
RC Roop Nagar — D 3080*

### A touching article

My heartfelt appreciation for the touching article titled *RC Bhavnagar gives hope to underprivileged children* featured in the July issue.

The story of Sanjay and Nehal, and the commitment of RC Bhavnagar through its Rotary Child Educare Centre is inspiring. It is an example of sustained service that not only transforms individual lives but uplifts entire families and communities. The dedication of the Rotarians and Rotary Anns over the years reflects the essence of *Service Above Self*.

As a Rotarian, I feel proud of this achievement; it reaffirms our shared belief that Rotary can be a powerful force for doing good and creating lasting impact. This story reminds us that even a small push in education can transform someone’s life.

Thank you for highlighting such impactful projects that remind us of

Rotary’s lasting power to bring hope and dignity to the most vulnerable.

*Raj M Khooblall, RC Rose  
Belle — D 9220 (Mauritius)*

The illustration on the cover page of the July issue was fantastic. The Editor’s note *Grace in giving* was magnificent, while TRF trustee Bharat Pandya’s message was superb. Congrats to RID 3132 Rotarians for providing digital classrooms to 100 rural schools in Maharashtra. Jaishree’s article *One roof, many services* was interesting. Kudos to RC Bombay Bay View, RID 3141, for doing 320 projects worth ₹4.5 crore touching one lakh lives during 2024–25.

*Daniel Chittilappilly  
RC Kaloor — D 3205*

The July editorial titled *Grace in giving* is a true reflection of today’s needs. A family’s honour lies in the woman; if she is educated, her entire family benefits. Keeping this in mind, I have been paying the college tuition fees of poor students for the past eight years. Three students have completed their education with this help and are now in good jobs. Currently, two students are studying engineering.

**On the cover:** A woman farmer receives a coconut sapling as a gift in Sindhudurg, Maharashtra.

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*Messages on your club/district projects, information and links on  
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### Inviting service project videos

We invite Rotary clubs to share on [rotarynewsmagazine@gmail.com](mailto:rotarynewsmagazine@gmail.com), short videos of your service projects. We will upload them on our website, [rotarynewsonline.org](http://rotarynewsonline.org).

Make the video a candid one, highlighting the beneficiaries and how your project has changed their lives. It should not exceed two minutes and be of good quality with a good narration.

As a member of the IKYAM Feeding Hope organisation, we provide food once a week for the needy. I take pride in being a member of a Rotary club that carries out all these activities in an organised manner. Your editorial motivates me to take up more such activities. Thank you!

*Sivaperumanl Subramani  
RC Walajapet — D 3231*





## Peace through education

When I stepped into the role of Rotary International president, the moment came swiftly and unexpectedly. It got me thinking how the world can change in an instant, and how Rotary has the power to be a steady force for good in that change. This month, Rotary's Basic Education and Literacy Month, we have a clear call to action: to strengthen the foundation of learning in every community we serve.

Millions of people worldwide remain unable to read. Millions of children lack access to basic education. And yet, we know the solution: sustainable, inclusive and equitable education, especially for girls and marginalised youth. Literacy is more than the ability to read and write. It is the key to human dignity, economic mobility and peace. Every book opened, every classroom supported, and every teacher trained becomes a building block of peace.

This year, our message is *Unite for Good*. "Unite" speaks to the strength we find in each other. When we unite our talents and resources — not only among our clubs but across partners, organisations, and communities — we expand our reach. And when we do so consistently over time, we create lasting change. Rotary service cannot be measured only in annual goals. Our work in education must extend beyond a single year. Literacy projects take time to take root, grow and bear fruit.

Now is the time to think boldly and creatively. New types of clubs can help us engage educators, students and advocates in new ways. Let us use this month to welcome new members with a passion for education and empower existing ones to lead service projects that reflect local needs. Whether you're building libraries, distributing textbooks or mentoring students, your actions matter.

Education is also peacebuilding. Every scholarship we provide, every early childhood programme we support, every adult literacy class we fund is an act of peace. And Rotary has been building peace in this way for more than a century.

Let us not forget that the fight for literacy is not only about access, it's about equity. It is about ensuring every learner, regardless of background, has the opportunity to reach their potential. And it is about standing together — across borders, languages and generations — to say that education is a right, not a privilege.

Let's *Unite for Good* by committing to literacy that lasts. Let's dream of a world where every child learns to read. And then, as people of action, let's work together to make that dream a reality.

Together, we can change lives, starting with the power of education. Together, we *Unite for Good*.

**Francesco Arezzo**  
President, Rotary International





# Satiating hunger... of humans and the planet

**W**e Indians have grown up on the stern mantra: Don't waste food, either take on your plate only what you can eat or finish all that you put there. So when we find huge amounts of food being thrown away, we are naturally horrified. Hence at the recent Asia-Pacific Regional Rotary Magazine editors' meet in the Gold Coast, I was horrified to learn how much food is wasted every year in Australia and the world. Hold your breath... here are the numbers. Every year 7.6 million tonnes of food, 70 per cent perfectly edible, costing the economy **(A) \$36.6 billion** a year, is wasted in Australia. The majority of the food wasted (2.5 million tonnes) comes from homes.

Even more shocking is the statistic that there is enough food produced in the world to feed everyone, but the tragedy is that one-third of all food produced — around 1.3 billion tonnes — is lost or wasted, costing the global economy around **\$940 billion** a year. As the cover story of this issue is about greening the world and saving our planet from the environmental degradation caused by many factors, consider this: Up to 10 per cent of global greenhouse gases comes from food that is produced, but not eaten.

These figures are given out by OzHarvest, an impressive Australian charity which "rescues" food that might soon be tossed off the shelves of supermarkets, grocery stores, local bakeries etc, and delivers it, either as foodgrains, fruits, vegetables etc, or cooked food, to the less privileged people through organisations working in the social sector. With a network of 2,400 donors, in 2024 it 'rescued' over 14,000 tonnes of food. Many Australian Rotarians partner with this charity in some of its events. The need for feeding the hungry even in a developed country like Australia can be gauged if you consider

that while OzHarvest services the needy through 1,500 charities already, 1,000 more are on the waiting list. Read more about it in this issue (Pg 24)

While these charities work for eliminating human hunger, for which there is such a big need, even in the developed world, there is another class of warriors working desperately, passionately and against the clock to satiate both the hunger and thirst of Planet Earth which is weeping copiously and begging human beings to stop ravaging it. Making a difference in this battle, however minuscule it might be, is the incoming DG of RID 3192 Ravishankar Dakoju and his fellow environmental warriors such as Neil Joseph (from RC Bangalore Orchards) and Gajanan Kandelgaonkar (RC Kudal). Beginning from Karnataka and their home district (3192) where the plan is to plant one crore trees, the movement titled *Dakoju Dhanyavad* has now spread to Maharashtra and Goa, and the school network of Ryan International, which has 165 schools across India, is now been involved in this massive greening venture. (Read about it on Pg 12)

Every drop counts as they say. As Jaishree's story (Pg 22) shows, in the 12 tribal villages in Bhabuk gram panchayat, 12km from Malda, West Bengal, there is a quiet green revolution underway. Step into any home, and you will most likely find a young jackfruit tree swaying gently in the breeze. RC Malda has undertaken this project to plant jackfruit trees and it will provide the beneficiaries some income when the trees yield fruit in a few years.

All it takes to make a dent in the evils of the world is a caring heart... and a pair of helping hands...

*Rasheeda Bhagat*  
**Rasheeda Bhagat**



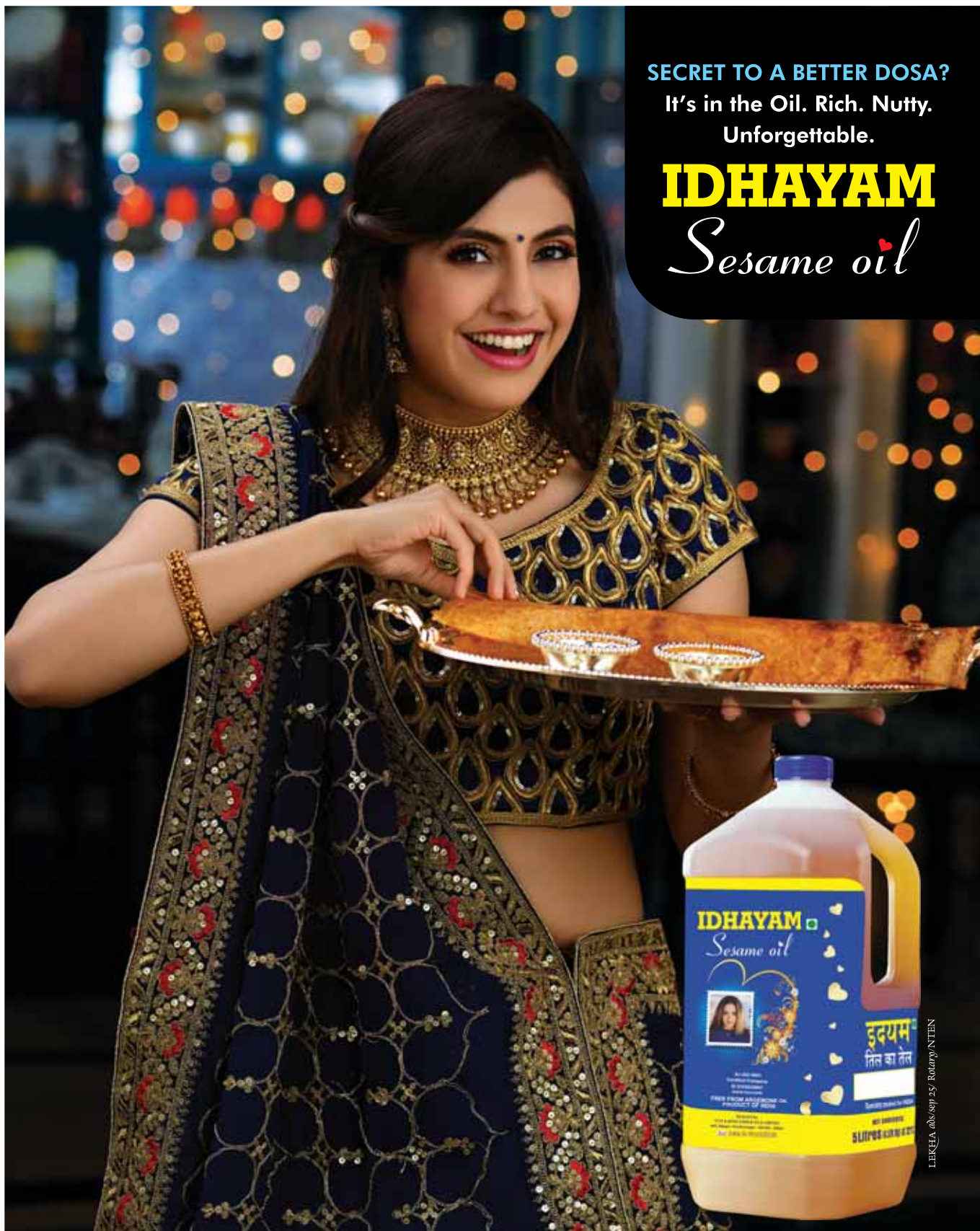
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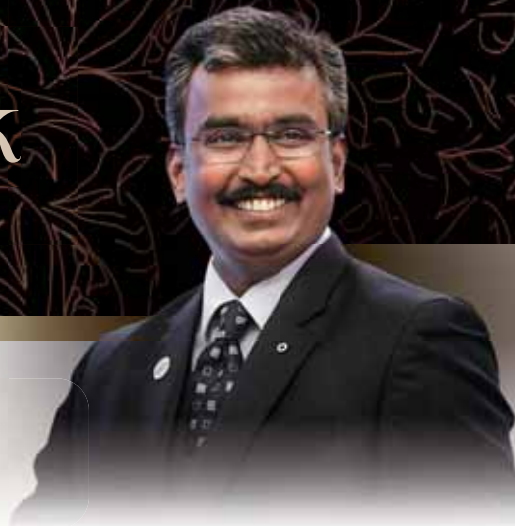


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# Director speak



## Let's say YES to 1:2:3

Friends, Rotary is, at its heart, a family of members. This is where everything begins. When our membership is strong, our projects, contributions and service to communities becomes stronger and more impactful. I often picture Rotary as a magnificent chariot, the wheels of which are our members. Strong wheels make the chariot run smoothly; but if the wheels are weak, the journey slows down. That is why membership must always remain our first priority.

In the third month of this Rotary year, let's embrace a simple but powerful idea: Say YES to 1:2:3. For every 1 Rotarian, let's engage 2 Rotaractors and 3 Interactors with our clubs. When we inspire young people today, they will see Rotary as their natural next step tomorrow. This is how we ensure sustainability, create continuity, and keep our movement full of energy and life.

Let's step back and look at the bigger picture. India today is the **second largest Rotary country** in the world. That is something to be proud of! But we can't stop here; we have to move forward. If each of our 4,800+ clubs simply brings in one new member every alternate month, that is six members in a year. Multiply that, and together we will welcome **28,800 new Rotarians this year alone**. This way, our four zones will cross a historic milestone — 2 lakh members by 2025–26 and, and 2.25 lakh by 2026–27. Such a powerful message to the Rotary world on the strength and unity of India's Rotarians!

This **RAG analysis** will tell us where we stand today and help leaders to plan for the future.

- Red zone: clubs with fewer than 25 members
- Amber zone: clubs with 25–50 members
- Green zone: clubs with 50+ members
- Super Green: clubs with 75+ members

I urge every club president, district governor, regional and zonal leader to pledge to hand over the leadership baton to your successor after scaling at least one zone. When you show positive growth and better numbers, that is a clear, measurable and lasting legacy you can be proud of.

Also, while focusing on recruiting new members, we must also work equally hard on retaining existing members. Every club and district is responsible for making Rotary meaningful to its members. When people feel connected, when they see their contributions creating real change, they stay. When our youth experience the joy of service through Rotaract and Interact, they see Rotary as their future. And when our clubs remain strong and vibrant, our impact on society multiplies many times over.

So friends, let's join hands and hearts to make this happen. Let's keep the Rotary wheel strong, steady and turning true.

Say YES to 1:2:3. Say YES to growth. Say YES to Rotary.

**M Muruganandam**  
RI Director, 2025–27



Message from  
TRF Trustee  
Chair



## Literacy is a human right

Education is the most powerful tool we have for changing the world, and during Basic Education and Literacy Month, I want to remind everyone why our work matters.

Education breaks the cycle of poverty, opens doors to opportunity, and empowers individuals to transform their communities. But education doesn't exist in a vacuum. We must also address peace, health, clean water, economic opportunity, maternal and child health, and the environment.

This is why Rotary has these areas of focus. Lasting change requires a comprehensive approach. When we collaborate across these areas through The

Rotary Foundation, we raise up communities sustainably and with dignity.

Today, I have asked Lynne Paradis from the Rotary Club of Red Deer, Alberta, to share her passion for literacy:

*"I believe that literacy is a human right. When I joined forces with the Rotary Club of San Ignacio, Belize, over a decade ago, we set out to improve reading instruction, but we had no idea how far this journey would take us.*

*Literacy Alive! has been supported by eight Rotary Foundation global grants since 2011. Using a straightforward approach based on phonics and science, we updated how teachers teach and focused on how students really learn. We collected data on reading skills improvement over six months.*

*After demonstrating that teachers had integrated new practices into daily instruction, the project snowballed. The Belize Ministry of Education took notice.*

*Today, over 1,300 teachers have been trained and more than 20,000 students have benefitted. We've achieved over 90 per cent success rates, with many students making more than a year's worth of improvement in just five months.*

*The programme is now compulsory in Belize primary schools. What moves me most is hearing teachers say how confident they are that they can change students' lives.*

*Our greatest success is working ourselves out of a job. When local educators take the lead, we know lasting change is underway."*

Lynne's story exemplifies the power of Foundation grants. Through partnerships spanning six Rotary clubs and three countries, *Literacy Alive!* reminds us how good Rotary is at creating systemic change.

When our members' passion meets Foundation support, we don't just improve individual lives, we change entire communities. By supporting the Foundation, you can put your passion to work this month and every month.

**Holger Knaack**  
TRF Trustee Chair

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Magazine

## Message from TRF Trustee



## Turning generosity into lasting change

The Rotary Foundation changes lives every day. From bringing the world to the brink of polio eradication, to giving communities clean water, educating children and empowering women, its reach is global and its results are lasting. It trains positive peace activators, fights disease, grows local economies and rebuilds lives after disasters. The Foundation turns our generosity into lasting change — creating hope, health and opportunity for millions.

TRF is a key partner in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative. Since 1985, Rotary has reduced polio cases by 99.9 per cent, vaccinating over three billion children and preventing millions from paralysis. TRF helps in **advancing peace and conflict resolution** by training peace fellows who go on to mediate conflicts, build community trust and promote human rights globally.

TRF's high efficiency (over 90 per cent of funds go directly to programmes) ensures donor contributions have maximum impact and inspires trust. Its global network amplifies its reach and effectiveness. In essence, the Foundation creates a ripple effect — through programmes in the Areas of Focus, while empowering local communities to take ownership of their progress.

It is a reflection of our belief and commitment to TRF that in the 2024–25 Rotary year Indian districts contributed over \$38.2 million to TRF. District 3141 led by DG Chetan Desai was No 1 in the world and three Indian districts were in top 10 worldwide. Thirteen districts crossed the \$1 million mark in total giving to TRF. That's truly remarkable. I salute the dedication and generosity of Rotarians and Rotary families of India for this magnificent achievement. Compliments to the 2024–25 district governors and their TRF teams, and compliments to the zonal leadership teams — RRFCs, ARRFCs, E/MGAs and EPNCs — for this outstanding achievement which enabled India to be the Number 2 contributor in the world. Thank you one and all.

But when we are at the top we have to work harder to remain there. I encourage the 2025–26 TRF teams to put in their best efforts as we aim for bigger, better and bolder projects and support to TRF. Let's *Unite for Good* as we lead the way.

**Bharat Pandya**  
TRF Trustee



# Rooting for a green and gorgeous planet

**Rasheeda Bhagat**

**I**t is his honesty and plain speaking which set apart Ravishankar Dakoju, DG-elect, RI district 3192, from many others in the Rotary world. After getting a number of alerts in my mailbox on projects such as *Dakoju Dhanyavad*, *Rotary Koti Nati*, *Narahari Dhanyavad*, all of them associated with planting of trees in different places and different states, and with one common factor — Dakoju's involvement, I reach out to him to clear my confusion.

From the other end I get a barrage — expected of course — of salvos on how our generation, through sheer greed and thoughtless indulgence, has caused an environmental disaster and messed up our planet. A good portion of his bumper donation of ₹100 crore to The Rotary Foundation, pledged in 2018, is going towards greening our planet.

The title *Koti Nati* translates to planting one crore saplings; so what kind of a transformation has this endeavour brought in the lives of individuals, I ask Dakoju. He says candidly, “You can't expect magic or life transformation







**RID 3192 DGE Ravishankar Dakoju with Neil Michael Joseph, member of RC Bangalore Orchards, and co-trustee of the Rotary Environment Foundation.**

through such a project in just two or three years. We have planted various kinds of trees... fruit trees, and a special kind of bamboo which is used for making *agarbattis* and which is now being imported from China. One tonne costs around ₹8 lakh. We want the tribal women to benefit through the massive ongoing 1,501-acre afforestation project at Challakere in Chitradurga district, about 195km from Bengaluru. Self-help groups will be formed, and livelihood activities such as beekeeping will be introduced. But for all this to happen the trees, including fruit trees, have to grow... animals have already come in... about 100 deer, as well as peacocks, rabbits, wild boar etc, but the impact on human life and its transformation will take a few more years.”

In the cyanide dumps of the Kolar Gold Fields near Bengaluru, Dakoju, along with the other passionate advocate of environmental protection Neil Michael Joseph, has already carried out a massive greening project, over the last few years. There is palpable benefit here through the improvement of health of the residents. Earlier the cyanide dust being blown across the township was causing havoc by triggering adverse health effects like kidney failure, lung and other types of cancer, acute asthma etc. But through an arduous and exhaustive process the Rotarians of RC Bangalore Orchards, headed by Dakoju (who has since shifted to RC Bangalore) and Joseph, did the Herculean task of planting across 100 acres, trees, bushes and grass to ensure that the moisture is retained by the earth, so the dust from the extremely dry dumps didn't blow across to the town. “It has now been documented that the incidence of lung cancer has come down and people's general health has improved,” says Joseph, who hails from KGF.

He adds that under this project started in 2018 — titled *Koti Nati* — where one crore saplings will be planted



Saplings being distributed by Rotary clubs as part of the *Dakoju Dhanyavad* programme.





across India, 48.2 lakh saplings have already been planted, along with disbursement of three lakh seed balls (the success rate of these is around 25 per cent). In KGF alone, 52,000 trees have been planted.

**L**et's now return to Challakere, where many changes are now visible at the 1,501-acre afforestation project. It will cost upward of ₹8.5 crore, of which ₹6.5 crore comes from the Paola Ravishankar Dakoju Foundation grants through TRF. This is now being hailed as one of Rotary's largest ecological interventions in India. Here around **100,000 trees** have already been planted over **720 acres**, or nearly half of the total project area. In what was totally a barren land and rain-deficient area, thanks to largescale planting of trees, **three lakes** in the 1,501-acre plot, which had been bone dry for 40 years, are now overflowing. Wild animals such as deer, wild boar, peacocks and rabbits have returned to this area thanks to the greenery already created. "That to my mind is some magic at least... don't you agree," asks Dakoju disarmingly.

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The ongoing 1,501-acre afforestation project at Challakere will cost upward of ₹8.5 crore, of which ₹6.5 crore comes from the Paola Ravishankar Dakoju Foundation grants of TRF.

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To understand this project, he takes us back to the era when the erstwhile Mysore Maharaja had gifted some 18,000 acres of land in Challakere to the local tribals to protect and rear a particular breed of local cows that had helped him in the guerilla-type fighting with the British. "But the tribals being

tribals, gradually chopped away all the trees and used the timber for firewood, so the land eventually became totally barren. Subsequently, the government gave away big chunks of land to ISRO, Indian Institute of Science etc. When only 1,501 acres of land was left, Justice Saldanha, a brilliant judge in the Karnataka High Court, asked the government: 'Who gave you the right to distribute the



Schoolchildren with saplings given to them by Belgaum Rotarians.





Maharaja's land like this? Put a halt to this distribution; if you don't stop, I'll give a judgement taking back all the land you've so generously given away.' He came as a true saviour of the environment," beams Dakoju.

This land was then given to the Karnataka Horticulture Department which gave the mandate for greening the land by planting trees to the local Dheena Bhagath Seva Trust, run by Dheena Bhagat Swamiji, to ensure sustainability and create livelihood for the tribals living in the area. "The Swamiji heard about our project to rejuvenate the Palar river and approached us to work in partnership to convert the barren land into a thriving ecosystem."

Subsequently an MoU was signed between the Seva Trust (which runs a vidyashram, teaches yoga and makes ayurvedic medicines for the local tribals from medicinal plants and

**DGE Dakoju and Joseph with RC Kudal members (from L) Ravindra Parab, Neeta Govekar, Makrand Naik, Gajanan Kandalgaonkar, president Rajiv Pawar, Sudhendru, AG Sachin Madane and Rupesh Teli after distributing saplings in a village.**



**Ryan International Schools students participating in the greening drive.**





herbs) and the Rotary Environment Foundation (REF) started in 2020 by Dakoju, Joseph (who is one of its trustees and secretary) and RI director K P Nagesh. RC Bangalore Orchards and Joseph's own organisation Happiness in Transit, which transports schoolchildren, are involved in this greening project.

About the one lakh trees already planted over 720 acres, Joseph says these are all native species, fruit trees such as guava, mango, gooseberries, sitaphal and traditional medicinal plants. Part of the project cost came from a GG of ₹1.41 crore that RC Bangalore Orchards did with Dakoju's TRF contribution, and another ₹1.3 crore from REF, which is a joint contribution from Dakoju and Joseph's enterprise, "which he has actually started to plough back the profits into causes related to environmental activities," says Dakoju.

## A prakriti purush



From L: DGE Dakoju; Sri Subudhendra Teertha Swamiji of Mantralayam; Neil Joseph; Dakoju's business partner Narahari; and Dheena Bhagat Swamiji of Challakere, Karnataka.

When I ask Swami Dheena Bhagat why he teamed up with DGE Ravishankar Dakoju for the Challakere land, he smiles and says, "I actually call him *prakriti purush* (nature's child); not everybody can do the kind of initiatives that he is undertaking... only once in a long while, such individuals are born... for a specific purpose."

The Swamiji, who has been working with the local tribals for a long time, teaching yoga, making and distributing ayurvedic medicines, says, "As this was barren land and there was no rain, thanks to the total absence of greenery, families with their children were migrating to

nearby cities and towns to work as labourers. But in the last two years we have seen good rainfall, thanks to the trees planted by the Rotarians; even last night, there was good rainfall, and all the three lakes, which had remained dry for over 40 years, are brimming with water."

"So much so the Swamiji's jeep was stuck in the moisture-laden land near one of those lakes and had to be pulled out with a lot of help," grins Dakoju. He adds that across the entire area, under this project, a bio-fence equivalent to 30km is being created by digging trenches that are 5-6ft deep so that animals will not get in, and planting of cacti.

Explaining the *dhanyavad* (thanks) part of the project, Dakoju, who has always been passionate about greening the areas we inhabit and creating sustainable ecosystems says, "In 2024, a simple yet sincere idea began to sprout in my head... planting trees

is not merely an environmental act, but a heartfelt expression of gratitude to mother earth for her countless gifts. As also to the community that nurtures each of us from the moment we are born."

This idea blossomed into *Dakoju Dhanyavad*. Working along with him in this greening mission are a bunch





of passionate Rotarians. The journey that began with the revival of the cyanide dumps in KGF, where poisoned, mining-ravaged land was brought back to life through sustained afforestation, grew into a thriving partnership that translated into the ambitious venture of *Rotary Koti Nati* (one crore saplings across India), in a large-scale effort to combat desertification and restore 8,000 rural livelihoods.

“It’s a movement that kept growing; last year the afforestation drive spread

to Goa and Maharashtra, and along the way Dakoju’s business partner Narahari joined too. So one component became *Narahari Dhanyavad* which is also a greening mission, mainly in the spiritual centre of Mantralayam, Kurnool, AP,” adds Joseph.

**I**n his quest to green as much of the world as he can, Dakoju has found

another fellow environment enthusiast in Gajanan Kandelgaonkar, past president of RC Kudal, who along with his club member Rajan Bobhate, has given roots to the *Dakoju Dhanyavad* movement in Goa and Maharashtra. In 2024, RCs Kudal and Sawantwadi (both in RID 3170) in Maharashtra planted 11,000 native saplings in remote tribal areas.

Soon after, the green movement reached Goa, where Rotarians of RCs Panjim and Margao under the





leadership of PDG Gaurish Dhond organised a huge community marathon titled *Rotary Rain Run*, engaging thousands of participants. At this event, 10,000 saplings were distributed to runners, encouraging them to take this green mission forward.

Says Kandelgaonkar, “Of the 11,000 saplings we distributed last year, most were fruit plants, with some spice saplings, and these were given to remote schools where all the students are from farming families.

“Nobody knows better than a farmer the value of a fruit tree, and the saplings distributed were of coconut, mango, guava, cashew and spices. This year, we are distributing around 10,000 saplings of fruits and spices directly to the small and marginal farmers in Sindhudurg. Each farmer is getting 3–5 saplings.”

The saplings are reached directly to the farmers with the help of dairy and self-help groups. Asked if women farmers were benefitting too, he



smiles and says, “Two days ago, we distributed saplings to 600 farmers and 300 of them were women.” They plant these saplings, each of which costs between ₹100 to ₹200, in their farms extending to an acre or less.

On how he got involved in the movement, he says, “Around five years ago I got introduced to DGE Dakoju, and was impressed by his passion for the environment. He himself comes here often for our events, and participates in the planting. The farmers are very happy because in 4–5 years they will get an income from these trees.”

A group of students from the Sant Rawool Maharaj College, Kudal,

has been involved in this movement. “We are planning a plantation drive in the wetlands of Sindhudurg. We will give them saplings which they will plant in wetland areas, tag and monitor the growth of these plants. The idea is to sensitise and involve the younger generation in saving our planet from largescale environmental degradation,” says Kandelgaonkar. The same group of youngsters are also involved in planting trees around temples. “Near some of these temples, the locals have cut down trees and sold the timber to raise money for the temples. We are identifying such places and will plant trees around them.”

RC Kudal, led by its president Rajiv Pawar, assistant governor Sachin Madane, and others, are involved in the sapling distribution project.

In rural Karnataka, 13,000 coconut saplings were given to needy women through two passionate environmentally conscious Rotarians — Akshai Mallapa, RID 3192 district agricultural committee director, and Shivkumar from RID 3191. Around the same time, around 1,000 saplings were given to students in Belgaum (RID 3170) under the leadership of IPDG Sharad Pai. In Maharashtra, another 6,000 saplings, of a total 150,000, have already been distributed.

**Participants of the Rotary Rain Run marathon taking the saplings provided by RCs Panjim and Margao, RID 3170.**







Members of the Inner Wheel Club of Kudal after distributing saplings to village women.

A major milestone of the movement was reached with Ryan International Schools coming on board. “They are present in 22 states with 165 schools, which cater to the middle segment; the annual fees are less than ₹1 lakh. It is a chain of schools which is focused on the environment and since I am in the business

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I actually call him *prakriti purush* (nature’s child); not everybody can do the kind of initiatives that he is undertaking... only once in a long while, such individuals are born... for a specific purpose.

**Swami Dheena Bhagat on DGE Ravishankar Dakoju**

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of transporting schoolchildren, I came into contact with them,” says Joseph.

The result is a partnership between the CEO Ryan Pinto and vice-president (Business and Operations) John Alex, and RCs Bangalore Orchards, Pune Laxmi Road and Pune Far East. The tree planting mission in the Ryan International Schools has begun with seven schools in Bengaluru and Pune, where 2,400 fruit-bearing trees have already been planted. In the next step, schools in Hyderabad, Mumbai, and more campuses in Bengaluru, will be taken up.

Says Ryan International chairman AF Pinto, “I have always envisioned a world where every child learns to care for the environment, which is why we started the ‘Each One, Plant One’ initiative in Ryan Schools. To celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2026, the Ryan group and Rotary will join hands to plant over 10 lakh saplings across all our schools in India. Our aim is to create responsible young global citizens.”

On July 1, 2026, to commemorate Dakoju’s installation as DG, and to celebrate Ryan School’s golden jubilee, a Guinness World Record will be attempted by planting 50,000 trees in a

single day across all 165 Ryan schools in India. “The event will be live-streamed, with thousands of students and Rotarians uniting in this monumental effort. The next goal is even more ambitious: one million saplings over the next year, with the dream that every one of Ryan’s 2.5 lakh students will participate. Isn’t this a beautiful way to thank Mother Nature — not just with words, but with roots,” asks Dakoju.

What about CSR partnership; after all many corporates in India are keen about the ecosystem, I ask him. “Of course, REF is keen to develop such a partnership for CSR funds. But we have to first create a credible record of substantial work already done on the ground. Without an impressive background or record, they will see us with suspicious eyes. So we want to show them what we have already done, and then forge a partnership.”

One MNC, which is “infamous for polluting groundwater has already approached us but we are wary of partnering with a questionable entity,” he adds.

Designed by N Krishnamurthy



# Jackfruit dreams in Malda

Jaishree

In the 12 tribal villages in Bhabuk gram panchayat, 12km from Malda, West Bengal, there is a quiet green revolution underway. Step into any home, and you will most likely find a young jackfruit tree swaying gently in the breeze.

Since 2018, the Rotary Club of Malda, RID 3240, has been distributing these saplings to households, schools and farmers as part of its *Project Green Earth*. The Rotarians are on a mission: to plant 10,000 jackfruit saplings across the district. “We have already distributed 8,000 saplings,” says the club’s past president Bhaskar Paul.

Why jackfruit? Pat comes Paul’s response: “It is our native plant, perfect for our warm and temperate climate. Nothing goes to waste — the wood from the tree is good for making furniture, the leaves feed cattle, the seeds are used to make pickle, and the fruit... it is delicious and nutritious. With increased awareness of its health benefits, there is a growing market for it. For villagers, this means sustainable income as well as food security.”

For Paul and the club’s IPP Subhra Kundu the project is personal. Both own farmland in one of the villages, and use their visits during the monsoon, the ideal planting season, to buy



**Bhaskar Paul (L), past president, RC Malda, distributing jackfruit saplings to villagers.**





**The club's IPP Subhra Kumar Kundu (centre) with tribal children who were given saplings.**

and distribute 100 saplings at a time. “Fellow club members join in. We hand over the saplings and guide the villagers on nurturing them. They are farmers, so they use natural fertilisers like cow dung,” says Paul. The first two years need regular watering, and by the fifth year, the trees start yielding fruit. Each sapling costs just ₹30, “a small investment for a tree that could feed families for decades.”

Rotarians work with children and adults in planting the saplings. The project's benefits reach far beyond food and income. “More green cover means richer biodiversity, healthier soil and cleaner air,” he smiles.

The club's ties with Bhabuk gram panchayat run deep. Over the years, it has organised adult literacy classes, medical camps and awareness workshops on health and hygiene, environmental care and water conservation. “We've built a playground in the Jhar-pukuria village and host regular football tournaments.” An RCC has been installed in the village to coordinate welfare activities extended by the club, he adds. ■



Regional magazine editors and Rotarians  
at the OzHarvest kitchen.







# Rescuing food to feed the needy in Australia

Rasheeda Bhagat

One of the most interesting and educative sessions at the Asia Pacific Editors Seminar hosted recently at the Gold Coast, Australia, by the *Rotary Down Under* team, was a cooking experience at one of the kitchens run by OzHarvest, a remarkable charity that reaches fresh, healthy and nourishing food to the country's needy people.

The charity began on a modest note in 2004 when Ronni Kahn, a social entrepreneur, noticed a lot of food being wasted at the events she organised. "So she set up OzHarvest to 'rescue' surplus food and reach it to those who needed it. She did not set out to create this big charity; she saw a problem and thought of a simple solution. She'd herself go around in a van collecting the leftover food from big events and delivering it to a charity," Marika Mammen, OzHarvest's engagement coordinator for Queensland, told *Rotary News* in an interview.

What began with one van in Sydney grew into a big charity that today has 400 paid staff, including 120





Regional magazine editors (from L) Meagan Martin (Australia), Kyoko Nozaki (Japan) and Thomas Fu-Ming Chu (Taiwan).

van drivers, 4,000 volunteers and 70 vans, operating in 20 locations across the country. Today, OzHarvest's iconic yellow 'food rescue vans' are involved in saving over 250 tonnes of good food every week from over 2,600 food donors and delivering it directly to over 1,500 charities that feed needy people in Australia.

Ronni's small venture quickly grew and has now become Australia's leading food rescue organisation. As OzHarvest grew, Ronni and a team of pro bono lawyers lobbied state governments to amend legislation allowing potential food donors to give their surplus food to charities without fear of liability. The Civil Liabilities

Amendment Act was passed in New South Wales in 2005 and other states followed.

In a nutshell, OzHarvest's core activity is to "rescue" food which will otherwise go waste, from supermarkets, grocery stores, events, bakeries and eateries, and deliver it either as ingredients — fruits and vegetables, food grains etc — or turn it into cooked meals through its *Cooking for a Cause* programme and reach it to needy communities or charities. In this massive endeavour to stop food waste, OzHarvest, "renowned for disrupting the food waste landscape in Australia," has an arrangement with large organisations and other food donors.

"We operate with very high food safety standards. When they go to the store, our drivers check every single item to make sure it's not expired and is edible. In many cases, it's surplus or extra food that some organisations have, and these include local bakeries which give us bread and cakes."

As opposed to the expiry date, the non-perishable 'best before' food can be picked up for safe usage and consumption for up to three months after that date. But not perishable products like milk. OzHarvest requests all donors to ensure that the food items are "kept safe until the collection. We cater for the most vulnerable in the community and follow strict food safety standards. Our drivers are trained to spot hazards and are instructed to refuse any items they find unsafe," says the website. The cherry on the cake... "By saving quality excess food, you are not only reducing your own waste and disposal costs, but greatly assisting people in need in your community!"

The service-oriented organisations in Australia which have got involved





with OzHarvest include some Rotary clubs, and till last month Terri Taylor, a member of RC Burleigh Heads in the Gold Coast, a professional chef who once ran a cooking school, was a passionate volunteer.

**C**ut across to May 2025, and a bunch of us, regional Rotary magazine editors from the Asia-Pacific region — Japan, Thailand, Taiwan, Australia and India — and the flagship Rotary magazine, senior leaders from the host magazine *Rotary Down Under* (RDU), including RDU chair PDG Kalma McLellan, its editorial chair PDG Liz Courtney and general manager Gay Kiddle, and a few passionate Rotarians, enthusiastically made our way to one of the OzHarvest kitchens run under its *Cooking for a Cause* programme.



Terri Taylor received us there and guided us through the next couple of hours as we picked extremely sharp cooking knives (always fascinated by sharp kitchen knives, and a sort of hoarder of this precious commodity, I later found a similar one in a store and carefully packed it in my suitcase to

bring it back home!), chopping boards and other kitchen implements. But not before she had first sent us packing to the washing area to thoroughly wash our hands with soap. No compromise on hygiene, we were told firmly.

She told us that we would be preparing an apple and rice pudding,



RC Burleigh Heads member and a professional chef Terri Taylor guiding the Rotary group through a cooking session.



muffins and a savoury packed with nourishing nutrients such as lentils, vegetables and cheese. Believe it or not, seven different types of cheese went into it! What stood out during the next two hours was the love and care that went into the entire preparation... the apples, greens, carrots etc had to be chopped in a certain way so that there was zero wastage. No short cuts were allowed... every little detail that goes into turning out the perfect dish was followed. From the kneading of the dough to the chopping, baking and packing... but not before the muffins and the apple pudding were generously sprinkled with nuts... the protocol prescribed in a fine-dining restaurant was followed. It gave a new meaning to the term dignity in giving... and receiving!

Later, when asked how beneficiaries are identified, because one had thought hunger or nutritious food deprivation wouldn't be a big issue in Australia, Marika says, "We don't directly deliver to individuals, but different charitable agencies or communities deliver to people in need." A community centre may package the food into hampers, and give it to families coming every week to receive those food hampers.

She clarifies that more than cooked food, which is delivered only through its *Cooking for a Cause* programme, "our primary task is to rescue fresh fruit and vegetables. We prioritise fresh produce and nutritious food which are

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We've heard stories about  
parents skipping meals so  
that their children can eat.  
Or children skipping school  
because they don't have  
anything to take for lunch.

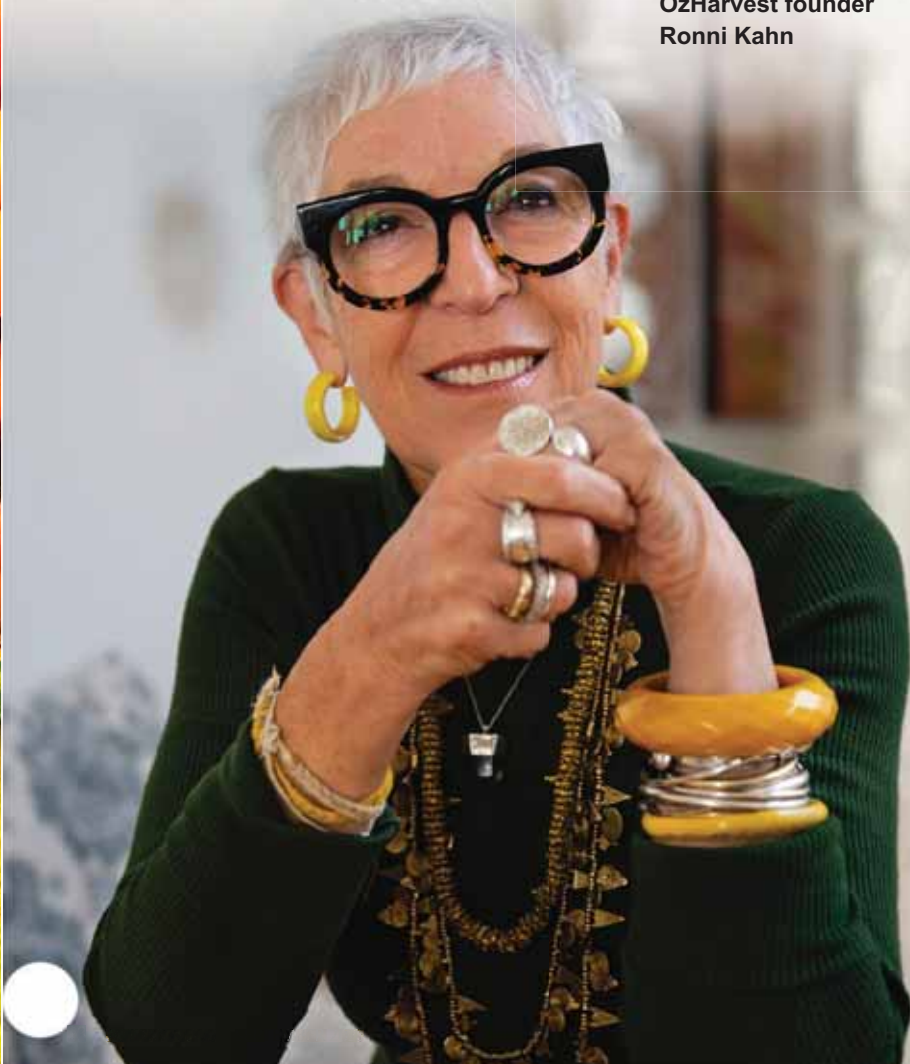
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given to charities that could turn them into meals or hampers for families."

What transformed OzHarvest into a giant Australian charity for rescued food is Ronni getting on board in 2005 a team of pro bono lawyers to lobby with the government to pass legislation that would allow food businesses to donate surplus food without the fear of liability. This helped organisations like the Australian retail chain Woolworths to become its main food rescue partner.

**OzHarvest founder  
Ronni Kahn**

In 2024, OzHarvest, which has a network of 2,400 donors, rescued over 14,000 tonnes of food. While it services 1,500 charities already, 1,000 more are on the waiting list. Such massive operations need big funding too, and clearly there has been out-of-the-box thinking by its founder. Regular fundraisers include the *CEOs' Cookoff* every October where senior leaders from corporates participate along with a celebrity chef in the *Cooking for a Cause* programme. They then serve those meals to the community, sitting down with them to enjoy that meal. It's a big event. There is also a *Giving Day* every June.





## Food wastage in the world

- There is enough food produced in the world to feed everyone.
- One third of all food produced — around 1.3 billion tonnes — is lost or wasted, costing the global economy close to \$940 billion a year.
- Up to 10 per cent of global greenhouse gases comes from food that is produced, but not eaten.
- If food waste was a country, it would be the third biggest emitter of greenhouse gases after the US and China.
- Eliminating global food waste would save 4.4 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> a year, the equivalent of taking one in four cars off the road.
- 1 in 9 people do not have enough food to eat, that means 793 million undernourished people.
- A quarter of the food currently lost or wasted could feed 870 million hungry people.
- Almost half of all fruit and vegetables produced are wasted (that's 3.7 trillion apples).
- Throwing away one burger wastes the same amount of water as a 90-minute shower!
- It takes 25 years for lettuce head to decompose in landfill.



## Food wastage in Australia

- Every year 7.6 million tonnes of food, 70 per cent perfectly edible, costing the economy (A) \$36.6 billion a year, is wasted in Australia.
- The majority of food waste in Australia comes from homes (2.5 million tonnes) costing each household \$2,000 – \$2,500 per year.
- Over 25 million hectares of land are wasted to grow food that is not eaten.
- Top five most wasted foods in Australia are vegetables, bread, fruit, bagged salad and leftovers.
- 3.4 million households in the country struggled to put food on the table; two million households experienced the most extreme form of food insecurity, regularly skipping meals or going entire days without eating.
- Demand for food growing; OzHarvest-supported charities found a 75 per cent increase in demand in the last six months; 30 per cent were seeking food relief for the first time.

Other innovations include a food truck which can be ordered at events, catering for private parties or office events with a promise of zero wastage. The tagline is tempting: “Every booking helps us feed communities in need.”

Apart from Terri Taylor and her club, other Rotarians across the country have an ongoing relationship with OzHarvest either through participation in events or donations. “We would of course love to get more Rotary members





involved because we've found that they don't want to just donate, but really want a hands-on experience," says Marika.

OzHarvest is also invested in the next generation, both in terms of food-wastage awareness and helping the nutritionally deprived children

get wholesome, healthy food. "One of our programmes involves going to community centres and teaching both adults and children healthy eating and affordable cooking skills because we realise that often you might donate food, but people coming from different backgrounds may not know what to do with that food,"

She cites the example of giving someone "a sweet potato or a butternut



OzHarvest founder Ronni and her team.



squash; but if you've never seen it before and you're receiving it, you won't know what to do with it. So the idea is to increase people's level of food literacy, teach them how to read the labels on the back of ingredients in the supermarket, how to decide which option is both healthier and affordable."

FEAST (Food Education and Sustainability Training) is a curriculum-aligned education

programme for primary and high schools, which explores the issue of food waste and its environmental impact, developing positive food habits and easy classroom cooking. As its name implies, it is designed to be fun, engaging and filled with good food! It also offers professional learning for teachers through an onsite training day at OzHarvest, or with an online training module. "Here we teach the children





## Replication

When I think aloud about Rotary in India replicating the food rescue programmes of OzHarvest, at however small a scale, its representative Marika Mammen says this programme has been replicated in the UK, where there's UKHarvest, there's a KiwiHarvest in New Zealand, VietHarvest in Vietnam, and an SAHarvest in South Africa. They all follow a similar food rescue model, but obviously modified for the local conditions and demand.

Already several Rotary clubs in India are placing refrigerators filled with food items which can be taken by anybody at any time of the day and night.

Food for thought, isn't it?

healthy eating, healthy cooking, how to cook with zero waste techniques and reduce food waste in the home. We also have a programme called *Nourish* where we teach vocational hospitality and give cookery training to young adults so they can get jobs."

She adds that the number of families facing food insecurity in Australia are increasing. "You might think how can a family with a house face food insecurity. But that is the reality of today and we've heard stories about

parents skipping meals so that their children can eat. Or children skipping school because they don't have anything to take for lunch. In such cases food becomes a luxury, not a necessity."

The troubling thought she leaves in my head is the need for people to get educated that "when you're throwing food away in the bin, it's not just that food that you're wasting. You are wasting all the resources that went into producing that food... the land that the food was grown on, the water that went into nourishing it, the resources used to transport, package and market that food. So the impact is a lot more significant than people realise."

On the love and care with which the food was prepared at the *Cooking for a Cause* session we attended, she says: "Oh yes, in our programmes, apart from the quality of the food we deliver, we always say: Think about the person who is receiving the meal and put your love and care into it, because that could be the only meal that he would have that day."

Pictures by Rhys Martin and  
OzHarvest website

Designed by N Krishnamurthy





## Larry Lunsford chosen 2027–28 RI President

**L**arry A Lunsford, a member of RC Kansas City-Plaza, Missouri, US, has been chosen by the Nominating Committee as RI President for 2027–28. He will officially become the president-nominee on September 15 if no other candidates challenge him.

Lunsford attended Truman State University in Kirksville, Missouri, on an academic scholarship, earning bachelor's and master's degrees in accounting. His first brush with Rotary was when he received a Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Scholarship to spend the 1981–82 academic year at the University of Newcastle in Australia.

A certified public accountant, he spent seven years working for Ernst & Young before joining a family-owned business, Bernstein-Rein Advertising, in 1990. He is currently executive vice president and chief financial officer for the Bernstein group of companies. He has held positions on the boards of the Kansas City Spirit Festival and the Variety Club and has served as director of a local bank and treasurer



RIPN Larry Lunsford

of the Epilepsy Foundation for the Heart of America. He has also served on Truman State University's alumni and foundation boards and received the University's Distinguished Service Award.

Lunsford joined RC Kansas City-Plaza in 1991. He served as RI director (2013–15) and trustee of The Rotary Foundation (2021–25, vice chair 2024–25).

He also has served as the chair of RI's Executive Committee (2014–15), Membership Growth Committee (2016–18), Nominating Committee for President of RI (2023–24), TRF's Executive Committee (2023–24), Finance Committee (2022–23 and 2024–25), and Participant Experience Committee (2023–24).

Lunsford has been awarded TRF's Distinguished Service Award, Citation for Meritorious Service, and the RI Service Above Self Award. He and his wife, Jill Lunsford, have two children and one grandchild. They are Major Donors, Bequest Society members, multiple Paul Harris Fellows, Benefactors of The Rotary Foundation, and Sustaining Members. ■

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## RI President-elect SangKoo Yun resigns



RIPE SangKoo Yun

**L**ast April, President-elect SangKoo Yun, had notified Rotary International of having been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, and his decision to step back from Rotary responsibilities so he could focus on his treatment.

Subsequently, in a letter to RI President Francesco

Arezzo on August 11, he has communicated his decision to resign from the role as President-elect following consultation with his doctors.

An extract of his letter shared by President Arezzo on *rotary.org* states: "My doctors have advised that it may not be possible for me to meet

the demanding travel and schedule required of our President. As much as I wish to serve in this role, I must honour that advice. It has been a tremendous honour and pleasure to be given the opportunity to lead our organisation. I will continue to serve however I can, and my love for Rotary and my commitment to our mission remains unshaken."

President Arezzo has stated on the website: "I want to thank SangKoo for his tremendous service, leadership and contributions to our organisation. Please join me in wishing him a swift recovery and good health in the future."

Yun was selected to be the 2026–27 RI President by the Nominating Committee for President in August 2024. The RI Board of Directors will meet by August-end to select a new 2026–27 Rotary president.

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# Travelling to make new friends

**Kiran Zehra**

A group of Rotarians from India recently travelled halfway across the world, not just to see new places, but to make new friends and understand Rotary better. From May 6 to 18, 2025, a team from RID 3040 visited Southern California as part of Rotary's Friendship Exchange (RFE) programme, a special initiative that allows

Rotarians to visit another country, stay with fellow Rotarians, and experience their culture and service firsthand. "We experienced what makes Rotary truly special — its internationality and the bonds of friendship that go beyond language and borders," says PDG Sanjeev Gupta, who headed the team.

Hosted by RID 5330, USA, the Indian team was "welcomed like family. We stayed in the homes of Rotarians, attended club meetings, visited local schools,

museums, and even went on nature walks, a hot-air balloon ride, and a Grand Canyon road trip, along the way, sharing Indian songs, classical dance and a few recipes," says Archana, spouse of PDG Gupta.

At every stop, from Palm Springs to Temecula, "we were greeted with warm hospitality, meaningful conversations, and a strong sense of shared purpose." More than ten clubs welcomed the team, and three new sister-club partnerships were established because of this exchange. The visiting team from RID 3040 committed to giving \$10,000 towards a global grant project focused on Huntington's Disease, a rare and progressive brain disorder. The host district in California is also expected to support the project by adding District Designated Funds (DDF).

During their visit to Rim of the World High School in San Bernardino County, California, the



The RFE Team.





team witnessed vocational training in action. From emergency medical response and CPR to welding, media production and automotive technology, the hands-on approach and state-of-the-art facilities sparked fresh ideas for developing similar skill-building models back in India. Later, at District 5330's annual conference in Temecula, the Indian team was officially introduced and warmly

welcomed. "The national anthems of both countries were played, and we actively participated in sessions focused on youth service and community impact. We came as Rotarians and left as a family," says Rajesh Modi (RC Indore United), team member.

"The Friendship Exchange is about people-to-people diplomacy, building bridges through trust, shared values and kindness. While the world

often sees international relations as something reserved for governments, Rotary shows that ordinary people can make extraordinary connections through service and sincerity," says PDG Gupta.

He has some friendly advice for Rotarians in India who are considering an RFE: "Stay reasonably fit, as many days include walking tours and outdoor activities. Travel light to

make it easier to move between hosts. While Indian food is often arranged, being open to trying local cuisine enriches the experience. It is essential to respect your hosts by speaking in English during group interactions and observing basic etiquette. Make the most of every moment by participating fully. Because you never know which experience will create lasting impact. Most importantly, go with an open heart; the more you give, the more meaningful the journey becomes."

Gupta hopes that more Rotary clubs across India will take the opportunity to host or participate in Friendship Exchanges. "It is one of the most meaningful ways to experience Rotary beyond the usual meetings and service projects. It adds joy, cultural exposure and a deeper connection to our work. At a time when the world feels more divided than ever, the RFE is a reminder that friendship remains one of the strongest tools we have, to build peace." ■



## Harnessing solar power at a Navi Mumbai hospital

Team Rotary News



From L: IPDG Dinesh Mehta, club IPP Sunil Shah and club president Dhananjay Sarkar with hospital authorities and Rotarians at the Mathadi Hospital.

The Rotary Club of New Bombay Seaside, RID 3142, with CSR grants from ATOS Global IT Solutions & Services, has equipped the Mathadi Hospital in Navi Mumbai with a 71kW rooftop solar power generation unit. "This new facility is projected to generate over 95,000 units of solar power annually, enabling the hospital to save around ₹12 lakh a year," said club president Sunil Shah. The substantial savings generated from this initiative will be reinvested directly into modernising and enhancing the facilities at the hospital.

Earlier, the club had provided various vital medical equipment to the hospital through two global grants worth \$31,000. Cross Timbers Rotary, Texas, RID 5790, and Rotary District 5750, Oklahoma, were the international partners.

The total cost of these projects was ₹1.1 crore. ■



# RC Thane Aces showcases artistic brilliance through a film festival

Rasheeda Bhagat

As the Rotary year ended, RC Thane Aces, RID 3142, led by its president Sunita Jain, thought a little out of the box and organised a remarkable project — a film festival featuring short films made by bright, young and talented artists who were struggling to find adequate viewership.

“We wanted to do a project which was a unique blend of art, culture and service, so we teamed up with the Prabhat Chitra Mandal and the YB Chavan Centre to host the Chitrabharati Short Film Festival 2025, in order to provide a platform for some well made films,” said club president Sunita.

The club spent over ₹1.4 lakh on this venture where 27 young

filmmakers got an opportunity to show their films to a discerning audience. Held over four days from May 29 to June 1, 2025, “this one-of-a-kind festival brought together 27 outstanding short films with engaging themes. A team from our club comprising our president, club member Sushma Bhatta, who has a lot of interest in and knowledge about films and Santosh Pathare — a renowned film critic and director, and secretary of Prabhat Chitra Mandal, shortlisted these films. Apart from providing a platform for young and less known filmmakers, films featuring new and fresh faces, and made with a young technical crew... mostly artists who were struggling to make a mark, were chosen to encourage

their work,” said club secretary David Pezarkar. Awards were handed out to the best films, actors and a token amount was given to the filmmakers.

The duration of the films was between 20 to 30 minutes and the objective was not fundraising, and friends and relatives of the club members were invited for the screening held at three different locations in Mumbai. The themes of the chosen films were diverse and dealt with various social issues, such as social taboos, especially for girls/women, personal relationships, loneliness among the elderly, and so on.

The best film award was given to *My father is afraid of water*, (*Papa Ko Pani Se Dar Lagta Hai*), a short film by Prateek Rajendra Srivastava, on



Team members of the award-winning films with Prabhat Chitra Mandal president Kiran V Shantaram (seated second from R), its secretary Santosh Pathare (seated third from R) and club president Sunita Jain (seated L).



the poignant theme of an elderly man suffering from Alzheimer's disease. It is a critically acclaimed film on the director's personal experience — taking care of his own father suffering from Alzheimer's during the last two years of his life. The film explores the challenges of caregiving, the father's fading memories, the bond between the son and the father, and the dilemma of caregiving while attending to his own work as a filmmaker. This film has been recognised at various film festivals.

It has been acclaimed for delving into the complexities of memory loss, the fragility of the human mind, and the emotional burden of caregiving. "The cinematography is praised for capturing the beauty of fleeting moments and the gradual erosion of memory," says an article in the *Northeast Film Journal*.

Another interesting movie that was featured at this film festival dealt with the interesting issue of a time, several decades ago, in an Indian village when girls were not allowed to go to a cinema hall. It was about the release of a new



A scene from 'My father is afraid of water'.



film in that village and how a boy helps her get into the theatre.

The films made by emerging filmmakers from across India were screened at various locations, with the finale and awards ceremony hosted on June 1. RID 3142 outgoing DG Dinesh Mehta, Kiran V Shantaram, President of Prabhat Chitra Mandal and celebrated actor Vikas Patil, participated. Six shortlisted films were screened on the concluding day and awards given

in acting, direction, cinematography, sound design and screenplay.

Pezarkar said the club members were happy that they did manage to create some buzz for these young and emerging directors and actors. But they did realise that the people invited to see these high-quality short films were among the more discerning and knowledgeable about good cinema. "This was the first such venture by our club and the next time we hope to have a bigger canvas and a more elaborate event to get the general public involved in seeing good films."

Club president Sunita thanked all those from within and outside the club who worked hard to make this initiative successful and memorable. "The club remains committed to curating more such meaningful and creative experiences in the coming years — expanding Rotary's reach into artistic and cultural expression, even while empowering youth, uplifting talent and fostering creativity," she said. ■





# From classrooms to paddy fields

Jaishree

**W**ho says learning only happens in classrooms? With rolled-up pants and sleeves, and eyes wide with curiosity, a group of government school students in Gendehalli village in Belur district, Karnataka, traded their school desks for a day in the

paddy fields, thanks to a unique initiative by the Rotary Club of Coffeeland Chikkamagaluru, RID 3182.

“We designed the programme to introduce children to the joys and challenges of farming, help them appreciate the hard work of farmers and foster a deeper connection with nature and food



School students learn to plant paddy saplings.





**Members of RC Coffeeland Chikkamagaluru trying their hand in paddy cultivation.**



sources,” said Sudha H D, the club’s Vocational Services director. She led a team of 36 students and 37 Rotarians and Anns to Aldur Pura, a lush, scenic hamlet, 15km from Chikkamagaluru for this immersive learning programme.

The farmers were happy to teach their enthusiastic guests the art of cultivation. The children and adults stepped barefoot into the slushy fields, thrilled to plant their first rice saplings under the open sky.

“I have watched and enjoyed such scenes only in movies, but when I had this first-hand experience I realised how difficult it is to work in the fields under the scorching sun, with my feet and hands soiled with slush. I truly appreciate our farmers; my friends and I have resolved not to waste food hereafter. We now understand the hard work that goes into the making of each grain of rice,” said Vani Gowda, a Class 7 student.

Club secretary M Anand briefed the team about the ancient roots of paddy cultivation in Asia, and its crucial role in India’s food security. He spoke about the challenges faced by farmers, from

climate change to wild animal intrusions. “Our aim was to build respect among the young minds for agriculture as a noble and vital vocation, and understand the value of food that comes to their table,” he says.

At noon, the guests were served authentic Malnad cuisine, specially prepared by Sudha and Ann Shreya Nagesh. The meal was served under a canopy of trees in the village. “We enjoyed the food and the ambience. It felt like we had time-travelled to a different era,” said Vani.

Club president Nagesh Kenjige and past assistant governor B K Gurumurthy extended full support to the initiative.

Sudha, a government school teacher, has plans to extend the programme further. Over the coming months, she hopes to introduce students to coffee and pepper cultivation, the region’s signature crops, and also offer them a behind-the-scenes look at the making of Channapatna toys and the working of a printing press. “Sometimes the best way to learn is not from a textbook, but from the land itself,” she smiled. ■



# Rotary's anti-dengue drive in Manipal

V Muthukumaran

**D**uring her two-day training at the Rotary Leadership Institute in June 2024, meant for incoming club presidents and district leaders, Suparna Shetty from RC Manipal Hills, RID 3182, got to know that Rotary Action Groups are funding service projects and community initiatives of clubs “if the focus areas are of mutual interests.” At that time, dengue outbreak was at its peak (June-July) in Manipal with rising cases of this disease among its 50,000 people, including migrant workers.

After she took charge as club president in July 2024, Suparna was approached by doctors from primary health centres “for help in the distribution of flyers and awareness material in the fight against dengue to sensitise the communities across Manipal.” This SOS from the doctors, “set me thinking... I googled and found that there is a Rotarians Against Malaria Global (RAMG), a virtual RAG network which is fighting vector-borne diseases in many parts of the world. I emailed Dr Jen Parer, secretary of RAMG, living in the US, to know if he is interested in partnering with our club in a joint fight against dengue,” recalls the club’s IPP.

Within three hours, Dr Parer replied to her email, and from then on it was a steady exchange of

correspondence between her and his RAMG team in the US. This finally led to the sanctioning of \$2,500 as a grant for the five-month anti-dengue campaign from Feb-June 2025 that touched over 15,000 lives in Manipal.

## Multifaceted campaign

Through a network of coalition with schools, colleges, PHCs, district health officials and municipal authorities, “we touched every nook and corner of Manipal. Our army of volunteers — 150 NSS boys and girls from MIT, Manipal, 300 ASHA workers, anganwadi teachers, Department of Community Medicine staff from the MAHE University, 32 health officials and 15 Rotarians from our club — went door-to-door across the nine wards of the urban primary health centre



**Above:** An anti-dengue walkathon by school and college students at the ITI Pragathi Nagar, Manipal.

**Right:** A monthly clean-up drive around the Manipal lake by Rotarians and the public.

**Below:** RC Manipal Hills’ IPP Suparna Shetty gives a pep talk to children on the need for a clean, hygienic environment to ward off crippling diseases.







(UPHC, Manipal) to distribute flyers and sensitise the vulnerable families,” explains Suparna.

On second Sundays, the volunteers cleaned public sewers, removed garbage and litter on the streets, and distributed flyers with dos and don'ts to ward off vector-borne diseases. “We planted 250 tulsi plants, 50 neem saplings and many lemongrass patches on the banks of Manipal lake to make nature our ally in our fight against dengue.”

BP apparatuses, glucometers and torches were distributed to

healthcare providers including ASHA workers, PHC staff and anganwadi teachers who visited remote areas to educate the communities. Eco-friendly signages were put up with cryptic messages on ways to tackle dengue. “Over 10,000 handbills in English and Kannada were distributed throughout our five-month campaign; and two rallies were flagged off by the Udupi district commissioner K Vidya Kumari. Around 300 volunteers took part in each walkathon carrying placards and banners against dengue,” says Suparna. Medicine kits worth ₹50,000 were distributed to families in slum colonies and vulnerable areas considered susceptible to malaria and dengue.

On World Peace and Understanding Day (Feb 23), a motor rally was kickstarted by SP Kumar Chandra with the participation of 100 Rotarians and RID 3182 officials. While Suparna and her team took to social media for a digital outreach, over 120 school students were also roped in on weekend clean-up drives in slum colonies and vulnerable places. “Through skits, mural paintings and litter clean-up, we drove home the message of healthy living.” RAMG caps, street banners and murals spread the anti-dengue message across Manipal streets and bylanes.

Suparna wants to give a “shout-out to Akaoma Onyemelukwe, a global development expert from Africa, for her critical role in getting us the RAMG grant for our anti-dengue campaign.” The new club president Suresh Rai has assured her that the “Sunday clean-up drive will be continued with the help of student volunteers this year too,” as it has to do with awareness creation in the vulnerable groups. ■





# ROTARY CLUB OF VIRUDHUNAGAR IDHAYAM DIST - 3212



Project Report 2024-2025

No. of Projects - 8

Amount Spent - Rs.41,94,800

## Dialysis Treatment

Since 2019, dialysis treatment has been provided to more than 200 beneficiaries. They have availed the service 5,718 times at Jana Clinic, Virudhunagar. We spent ₹. 8,10,000 for dialysis treatment to 200 beneficiaries, 1,722 times in the year 2024-25.

## Eye Donation

Since 2009, we have received 965 pairs of eyes as donation. In 2024-25, we spent ₹. 2,64,000 and received 97 pairs of eyes as donation and sent them to Agarwal Eye Hospital, Tirunelveli.

## Midday Meal Program

Since 2021, through this program, midday meals has been served to 70 to 80 poor elderly people in Virudhunagar. This noble work is carried out jointly by Rotary Club of Virudhunagar Idhayam and Mr. K.S. Thanarajan. In 2024-25, we spent ₹. 9,90,000 for midday meal Program.

## Cleaning of Public Toilet

Since 2020, everyday public toilets have been cleaned at 2 locations in Virudhunagar Main Bazaar. In 2024-25, we spent ₹. 2,37,082.

## Heart Care Program

In 2024-25, Heart surgery was done for a 3-year-old baby, success Rahim from Uganda at Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences & Research Centre through Dr. Balaji. We spent ₹. 2,75,000 for this.



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### **Rotary Karmaveerar Kamarajar Heart Care Bus**

In 2024-25, we conducted 2 heart care camps with 285 beneficiaries. 146 ECG tests, 87 ECHO tests done and 19 people were referred to Tirunelveli Kauvery Hospital for further treatment. We spent ₹. 30,250 for this project.

### **Appreciating Achievers in Sports**

We have been recognising school and college students who have achieved in sports in Virudhunagar. So far, 1,415 students have been honoured. In 2024-25, 131 student winners got cash prizes ranging from a minimum of ₹. 400 to a maximum of ₹. 10,000 from us. We spent ₹. 4,32,908 for this.

### **Providing Academic support funds**

Provided financial assistance to students excelling in studies in schools and colleges. In 2024-25, we provided educational scholarships worth ₹. 11,56,370 to 285 students.



# A new dawn for newborns in Satara

Rasheeda Bhagat

**T**he Rotary clubs in India, which are disheartened at the tardy progress their global grant applications sent to RI seem to be making, need to get some guidance from RI District 3132 PDG Swati Herkal, who is also the DRFC for her district from 2025–28.

In March 2025, she got a call from a distressed doctor at the Civil Hospital in Satara, the city in Maharashtra where she lives, that increasingly, more and more parents were being forced to take their prematurely born babies to hospitals in Pune, over two hours drive away, and even Mumbai, because the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at the Civil Hospital was stretched beyond capacity.

“From the conversation and her desperate tone, I could judge that a silent crisis was growing in this region. Fragile lives born too soon or too small were being referred to far-off cities, costing precious time and causing trauma to the parents. These premature babies were crying out for help from civil society,” says Swati, whose home club RC Wai has already completed 14 global grant projects.

She started immediately conceiving a project to help boost the survival of these babies in their own hometown. When she approached Dr Ujjvala Chidrawar, a member of RC Wellbeing International, UK, asking for suggestions about an international partner club with which RC Wai could do a global grant to reach critical survival equipment for the premature babies at this government hospital, “she said ‘we would like to be your partners. After all, ours is a cause-based club with the word ‘wellness’ in our name!’”

This UK doctor’s husband Dr Mukund Chidrawar, was Swati’s batch-mate governor, and previously her club — RC Wai — had partnered with him to do a global grant to get a van for cancer screening and awareness. By now an expert at writing global grant applications/proposals (“all the 14 proposals for the GGs our club has done were written by me,” she says), Swati quickly wrote the proposal for a global grant to be done in partnership with RI Districts 3132, 1210, 1220, 1240, 1080 and supported by The Rotary Foundation, for a project to strengthen the NICU at the Government Civil Hospital in Satara.

She says it wasn’t difficult to write that proposal as “the goal was clear: provide critical, modern and free-of-cost medical support to newborns, especially from low-income families and thus equip the NICU unit with ventilators, warmers, incubators, monitors, infusion pumps, and phototherapy units... all the critical equipment required to transform it into a state-of-the-art facility.”

The comforting thought was that no longer would families be forced to travel to Pune or Mumbai to save their precious babies — the help they needed would be just minutes away once the project was executed.

Throughout the planning phase, government officials were in constant follow-up with Swati, who is the project chair, eager to see the project materialised. But she firmly believed that for Rotary to help establish an NICU in a government hospital, certain non-negotiable conditions must be met: a clean, adequate and suitable space, qualified and







**A newborn being treated in a baby warmer at the newly-installed NICU.**

experienced neonatal staff, and assurance of day-to-day use and proper maintenance of the medical equipment.

Fortunately, the Satara Civil Hospital's dedicated team met all these requirements and this gave RC Wai the confidence to take the initiative forward. The global grant was processed and approved in less than a month. Swati, who as the DRFC, and even earlier, has helped her club write proper GG proposals, says "the trick is to write the proposal clearly, transparently, anticipate RI's queries and answer them even before they are raised!"

At the inaugural ceremony, where RID 3132 DG Sudhir Lature, PDG Dr Omprakash Motipawale, civil surgeon Dr Yuvraj Karpe, Swati, and other Rotarians and health officials were present, Zilla Parishad CEO Yashashni Nagrajan remarked, "Rotary doesn't just provide infrastructure; it changes lives. Their consistent follow-up and human connection with beneficiaries are what make the difference." A grateful Dr Karpe called this project "a true community gift — one that will save countless newborns." Added DG Lature, "Rotary can work miracles through TRF. This project is a milestone in our mission on improving maternal and child health."

While narrating the journey, an emotional Swati who had during the past few weeks witnessed the trauma of both the parents with premature babies and the civil hospital's NICU staff, said, "This NICU isn't just a medical unit — it's a gateway to life for newborns; serving in Rotary becomes more meaningful with such impactful moments."

Swati points out that many government hospitals across India lack facilities to save the lives of premature babies of low-income parents who go through the trauma of dealing with a great loss which could have been prevented. "At this hospital, there were only 10 warmers — actually, 35 are required — and in a dire emergency when the staff were faced with the tough choice of letting a baby die, they've even



resorted to putting two babies in a single warmer, which should not be done. But when saving a tender little life is concerned it's a tough choice to make. With the equipment we have given, 14 more premature babies can be accommodated in this unit."

Through this global grant, which amounted to \$54,253, Rotary has provided this hospital 10 more warmers, along with ventilators, which it did not have, and other critical equipment. A special feature that "warmed the heart was that in our club there is a group of female Rotarians and Anns, and they got together and contributed ₹61,000 towards this project. The sum might be small, but they were keen to help a cause that would save tiny lives," adds the DRFC.

All the equipment was purchased from India and the vendors have already given adequate training to the staff to use this equipment. "We have already negotiated with them to undertake the responsibility of maintaining the equipment for three years."

### A heart-touching moment

Swati recalls a poignant moment when just two days before the official

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A group of female Rotarians and Anns from our club got together and contributed

₹61,000 towards this project.

The sum might be small, but they were keen to help a cause that would save tiny lives.

**PDG Swati Herkal**

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**Mothers with their newborns at the NICU.**

inauguration, a critically ill baby was admitted to the hospital. A member of the paediatric team called her asking hesitantly: 'Are we allowed to use the new ventilator now as this can save the baby's life'. Without a moment's hesitation she told her: 'If this machine can save the baby's life, use it immediately!'

And that's exactly what happened — the baby became the first beneficiary of the equipment, symbolically inaugurating the NICU even before the ribbon was cut!

Talk about speed; the next day, when club members visited the NICU, all ten warmers were already in use, each cradling a tiny life. "Tears welled up in the eyes of those present — tears of compassion, satisfaction, and Rotary's living spirit. One of the babies there was so small it could fit in the palm of a hand. Its legs were no thicker than fingers, and it lay quietly as the machine gently helped it breathe," says the past governor.

A few days earlier, another newborn weighing just 800gm had been admitted. Now, its weight had risen to 950gm. "This transformation was made

possible by the relentless dedication of the paediatric doctors and nurses and the life-saving equipment Rotary had donated. That is why we chose this particular government hospital."

PDG Dr Motipawale said emotionally, "In all the government hospitals I've seen, I've rarely witnessed this level of cleanliness and commitment. The cooperation from the CEO and civil surgeon here is extraordinary."

Swati thanks club members Pramod Shinde, Dr Manohar Datar, Madan Pore, Dr Jitendra Pathak, Kunal Shah (club president) and Anupam Gandhi (secretary) who extended great support. International partner Dr Ujjvala Chidrawar and her husband, PDG Dr Mukund, expressed their happiness that they could play a role in executing a project that will give "many more newborns a second chance. Working repeatedly with RC Wai has always been a rewarding experience for us."

On request from the Zilla Parishad CEO Yashashni, RC Wai is executing another GG amounting to \$37,000 in partnership with RC Milford, US, to set up a human milk bank. ■





PRID Ashok Mahajan (L) with Maharashtra Deputy CM Eknath Shinde (R) addressing a press meet.



# RC Mulund battles cervical cancer

Team Rotary News



The Rotary Club of Mulund, RID 3141, has brought healing and cancer prevention awareness to hundreds of underprivileged women through a large-scale cervical cancer screening camp held at the Kores Hospital in Thane. The camp provided free screening, gynaecological consultation and ultrasound services which are normally unaffordable to these women.

“But more than just medical care, the camp offered dignity and respect to these women, reminding them that their health and well-being truly matter,” said past RI director Ashok Mahajan.

The camp was inaugurated by Maharashtra deputy CM Eknath Shinde. “For members of our club, this camp wasn’t just about diagnosing illness — it was about giving voice to silent struggles and reaching underprivileged women who often fall through the cracks of our healthcare system, and restoring faith in the power of community-led healthcare,” he added.

On this occasion, RC Mulund reiterated its resolve to carry forward this initiative, by organising similar camps in underserved areas of Mumbai and Thane, ensuring that no woman is left behind when it comes to early detection and proper care.

Taking this initiative forward to the next critical step of prevention, Mahajan said, the club will also launch free HPV vaccination drives for underprivileged girls, aged 9 to 14, to protect them from cervical cancer. “By protecting the next generation, Rotary aims to break the cycle of suffering before it begins. But none of this would have been possible without the generous financial support of Aditya Birla Capital, whose partnership made this life-changing initiative a reality. Their contribution has directly impacted hundreds of lives and will continue to do so in the years to come,” he added, thanking all the doctors, nurses and volunteers involved in this mission to battle cervical cancer. ■



# Maharashtra villages get Happy Schools

Jaishree

**F**ifteen zilla parishad schools nestled in the tribal belts of Shahapur and Murbad taluks in Maharashtra sport a spanking new look. With brightly painted walls, repaired infrastructure and basic amenities, these schools promise a more welcoming environment for learning.

This transformation is the result of a year-long project by the Rotary Club of Thane North, RID 3142. “At the start of the last Rotary year, we received two CSR grants of ₹52 lakh and ₹44 lakh from a pharmaceutical company, Milan Labs, with a request to focus on literacy. So we decided to channel these funds into

tribal schools that were in urgent need of support,” says the club’s IPP Medha Joshi.

Along with her team, she visited several schools across the region, identifying those most in need. The conditions they found were disheartening. “Some schools had broken compound walls, missing doors and windows, damaged floors and electrical fittings, and were overrun by wild shrubs. Snakes and other reptiles often slithered into classrooms,” she recalls.

Over the year, all identified schools were renovated, Clean, functioning toilets and handwash stations were built. New furniture was provided where needed, and old

one repaired. Libraries with books donated by members were set up in all the schools.

During the inauguration events, the club provided uniforms, footwear, stationery kits and lunch boxes to students. The schools were also equipped with dustbins and water purifiers. The club installed



A check dam and a solar-powered pump system installed by the club in Dunganipada village, Jawhar taluk.





**Left:** A dilapidated classroom. **Right:** RC Thane North's IPP Medha Joshi with an RYE student and a teacher at a renovated school.

science laboratories in three higher secondary schools for Classes 11 and 12 students. The Happy School project benefitted 50–60 students in each school.

“These renovations are not just cosmetic. They have rejuvenated

the learning environment and made students feel valued. Most of these children are first-generation learners from economically weak tribal families. These schools are their only hope for a better life,” she adds.

Medha was all praise for the teachers who work in these schools. “Each school has around 8–10 teachers, many of whom travel long distances, from Dombivli, Kalyan or Ambarnath, to teach in Shahapur or Murbad. Despite frequent delays in salary payment, they remain committed and rarely miss a day.”

The renovated Happy Schools saw good admissions during this academic year. The club, now in its 49<sup>th</sup> year, has been consistently working on literacy projects for the past 35 years, focussing especially on rural, tribal and special-needs schools. “We provide infrastructure and educational essentials to keep students engaged and help them stay in school. Our CSR partner Milan Labs is just as passionate about education as we are,” she adds.

This year club president Mamta Vanjani is aiming to add more Happy Schools with continued CSR support.

The club had also made a significant impact in water conservation. With a global grant of \$77,000, it constructed two check dams and installed a solar-powered pump system in Dunganipada, a village in Jawhar taluk. “We initially planned only the check dams, but our international partner in the US increased their contribution from \$62,000 to \$77,000; that helped us install the solar panel,” says Medha. The facilities now support irrigation and household water supply for the entire village.

However, the project wasn't without its hurdles. “Initially, while some villagers welcomed the idea, others feared losing their land. But once the first check dam was completed and they saw the benefits — plenty of water and green fields — the other group came around and even requested a dam for their side too. Today, both check dams are keeping 50 farming families happy,” she adds. ■





# A flight of dreams

Kiran Zehra



Gasps of awe filled the bus as seven students from Nagpur peeped out of the windows and watched the Worli Sea Link stretch out before them, with the vast ocean on either side. One of the students Shreya Gajbhiye wondered, “How is this bridge standing in the middle of the water?”

It was a very special day for her, Raj Gautam, Shriyansh Vaidya,

Kalyani Marbate, Shivani Bhardwaj, Mahir Shah and Vansh Nikhare, as they boarded a plane for the first time and spent a whirlwind day in Mumbai, thanks to *Sapno Ki Udaan* (Flight of Dreams), a project of the Rotary Club of Nagpur Green City, RID 3030.

The project began 18 months ago when the club adopted these seven students from Classes 10, 11, and 12, mentoring them through the year with

**Club president Chaitra Salankar, along with club members Padma Dethe and Manisha Choudhary, and the children at the Gateway of India.**





The children at the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel cake shop.

books, career counselling, medical checkup and personality development sessions. They were also invited to club meetings, giving them exposure to new environments, inspiring role models and a glimpse of how professionals work together to achieve goals. The club arranged all logistics for their participation.

The culmination of these efforts was a one-day trip to Mumbai, chosen over Delhi due to its proximity and its reputation as the 'City of Dreams.' "The club felt Mumbai matched the spirit of *Sapno Ki Udaan* — giving the children a chance to see a new world in just one day, flying out in the morning and returning home by night. We wanted the children to experience the excitement of flying and see a city that represents both ambition and opportunity," says club president Chaitra Salankar.

Preparations for the trip began weeks in advance. The club arranged flight tickets, meals and local transportation, while also planning an itinerary that would provide the youngsters with

a mix of learning and leisure, from historical landmarks to the seaside. Salankar even made a detailed recce of Mumbai earlier to time the stops, ensuring the children could experience as much as possible in a single day without feeling rushed.

On the morning of the trip (June 4), the children arrived at the Nagpur airport in matching maroon Rotary T-shirts. "I felt nervous at the security check," admits Shivani Bhardwaj. "But then I realised everyone was going through the same process, and that made me relax."

"When I held the boarding pass in my hand, I could not stop smiling... I had a ticket to fly," says Mahir Shah.

Shriyansh Vaidya pulled out his phone for a quick selfie with the Air India crew. "They were so kind to us, it felt like we were special guests," he says.

Landing in Mumbai, the children were struck by the sheer scale of the metro. From the airport bus "we were pointing excitedly at the tall glass buildings, the flyovers and bridges that seemed to run forever, and the

colourful billboards. Some billboards had video ads. I had never seen anything like that before. I didn't know even posters could move," says Vansh Nikhare.

"There were cars everywhere, yellow-black taxis, handcarts and also big luxury cars, I had only seen on TV. We even saw a Rolls-Royce stop next to a small tea stall. Two worlds side by side," says Kalyani Marbate.

"In Mumbai, we first took them across the Bandra-Worli Sea Link, and then to Marine Drive," says Salankar. At the Gateway of India, he had an impromptu idea to take the children into the Taj Mahal Palace hotel, just across the road. "It wasn't planned, but we went in. The children looked around in amazement at the chandeliers and shops." At the cake counter, they noticed a mango cake priced at ₹5,000 and tiny chocolates at ₹100. Buying the pastry wasn't in the budget but Salankar encouraged them by telling them that "one day, you should come here as guests and not just visitors like us!"



At Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus, “the children were amazed by the grand arches. Post lunch, we went to the Taraporewala Aquarium, where they watched colourful fish with shining eyes. Finally, we ended the day with ice creams at the Juhu Beach, with the children running barefoot on the sand and enjoying every moment.”

The project cost was about ₹1.5 lakh, sponsored by the club. This included the air tickets, local transportation, meals and entry tickets. Club members Padma Dethe and Manisha Choudhary along with the club president, accompanied the children to ensure their safety and comfort.

As the trip came to an end, “the children carried home not just photographs, but memories of seeing a whole new world. Yet, beneath all the excitement, their everyday reality was

waiting for them. Many parents could not even afford the airport entry ticket to bring their autorickshaw inside to receive their children. But the happy and beaming children simply picked

up their bags and walked out to meet their parents. For them, this is normal; but what really touched my heart was their acceptance and resilience,” adds Salankar. ■



Vansh Nikhare takes a selfie with an Air India cabin crew member.

## 2026 Convention

# The hype is real!

If you’ve never been to a Rotary International Convention, you might wonder if the global gathering lives up to the hype that it’s more fun than any conference you’ve attended. Your fellow members are here to assure you that the convention, June 13–17, in Taipei will prove the hype is real: You’ll find best-in-class opportunities to learn, travel, grow, and feel connected. Here are five ways the Rotary convention breaks the mold:

- **The main stage rocks.** This is especially true when famous bands perform. Daily big-group sessions are packed with performers, members with inspiring stories, and speakers with serious star power.
- **Learning workshops are fun.** Forget boring lectures — breakout sessions are led by your Rotary pals and experts committed to RI’s mission. They recharge your batteries and inspire your service.
- **New members feel the benefits.** Newbies, not just club officers or long-time members, say the programming is valuable and new friendships are guaranteed. We hear it all the time: You truly grasp Rotary’s international power when you experience a convention.



Entertainers of all kinds bring energy and excitement to the convention stage.

- **Families love the convention.** Relatives and travel companions are welcome under Rotary’s global tent. Everyone enjoys the big-stage extravaganza and House of Friendship activities.
- **You can unwind and stay on budget.** It’s easy to sneak in vacation excursions after convention hours with so many options close by in Taiwan. Register soon for limited-time savings.

After their first convention, many members are hooked. Like a Rotarian attending her fifth one, in Calgary, Canada, said: Each is more enjoyable than the last.

Learn more and register at [convention.rotary.org](https://convention.rotary.org).



**T**he Rotary Club of Coimbatore Meridian, RID 3206, in partnership with the Ramakrishna Hospital, Coimbatore, has launched *Project Blossom* to support patients battling bone sarcoma, a rare cancer that makes up less than one per cent of all cancers, and typically affects people in the age group 10–30. “Bone sarcomas usually arise in the long bones of the arms and legs, especially the thigh bone, shin and upper arm bones,” explained the club’s charter president R Thamilselvan.

In the 1950s amputation was often the only treatment option. Today medical advancements offer limb salvage surgery, where the affected part of the bone is removed and replaced with a custom-made titanium implant through an endoprosthesis procedure, said Dr P Guhan, director, Ramakrishna Institute of Oncology and Research. Chemotherapy further helps preserve the limb, and in growing children, an expandable prosthesis ensures the limb continues to lengthen normally. However, the cost remains a major barrier. The

# A Rotary initiative for bone cancer care

**Jaishree**

prosthetic implant costs around ₹2.5 lakh, and chemotherapy and radiation add another ₹2 lakh.

Due to financial constraints many patients from economically weak families forgo prosthesis after surgery, resigning themselves to permanent disability. “We want to help these young people live full lives,” said Thamilselvan. The club has earmarked ₹25 lakh this year to fund limb salvage surgeries for 10 patients, and has also applied for a global grant to help more people. The initiative is supported by Attitude Trust, an NGO where Thamilselvan is a trustee, and Cordon Bleu Properties. Dr Guhan, who has personally sponsored treatment for 20 patients, has agreed to waive hospital charges and doctors’ fees for patients referred by the club.

Even before the project was launched, the club had already funded treatment for two young patients. The club’s association with the Ramakrishna Hospital dates to 2021 when it helped establish a hospice and palliative care centre for terminally ill patients. “At Meridian, we believe there is life beyond cancer and for those at the end of life, our aim is to keep them pain-free and comfortable,” he said.

Thamilselvan invites other Rotary clubs to join hands with *Project Blossom*. “Clubs can contribute for the cause, help us with CSR grants. Rotarians can also refer patients needing limb salvage surgery, and we will take care of them at the Ramakrishna Hospital,” he said. ■

Launch of *Project Blossom* at the Ramakrishna Hospital, Coimbatore. From second right: RC Coimbatore Meridian charter president R Thamilselvan, president Radhakrishnan, R Sundar, managing trustee, SNR Sons Charitable Trust, Dr P Guhan, director, Ramakrishna Institute of Oncology and Research, and Bindhu, a beneficiary of the project.





# A chariot moves

**Rasheeda Bhagat**

**A**ccounts of how tardily various governments run programmes in education, healthcare etc abound. Hence it is like a breath of fresh air to read Subroto Bagchi's account of how he undertook the challenge of skilling Odisha in 2016 at the invitation of the then chief minister Naveen Patnaik.

Always a good storyteller, he packs his latest book *The day the chariot moved* with interesting anecdotes of how he set about skilling Odisha's young using the existing ITIs and other government and private training and vocational educational institutions.

In April 2016, after stepping down from Mindtree as executive chairman, and anticipating a life of retirement filled with reading, teaching, travelling, and spending time with his family, he got a call from Bhubaneswar. CM Patnaik was on the line with a simple request: "Come and help us with skill development for our youth." On offer was a post as chair of the Odisha Skills Development Authority, complete freedom and rank of

a cabinet minister, reporting directly to the CM.

Exhaustive reading and startling numbers on India's skills gap "took me beyond the bubble of the IT industry to a world of millions of young people in India who fell off the traditional educational system for whatever reason and could not get skilled in any vocation but desperately needed employment. These were the people who became welders, mechanics, plumbers, electricians, cab drivers, security guards, sales associates in malls, janitors at airports and bedside attendants in hospitals." He found there was a huge gap between demand and supply of trained hands; here was an opportunity to create these skilled hands, and make a difference.

**W**ife Susmita gave the green light saying take this chance to do something for your place of birth. Infosys cofounder Nandan Nilekani advised he should accept but with the condition of "assured and visible" access to the CM at all time. He had done the same when Manmohan Singh as Prime Minister invited him to set up the UIDAI. Also, Nilekani asked him not to create new infrastructure; "you'll be surprised how much infrastructure a government already has."

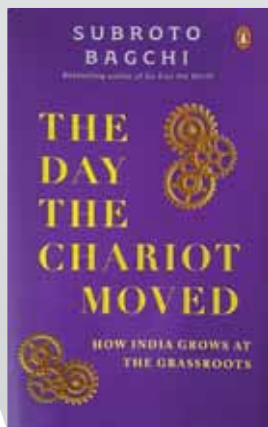
Bagchi took up Patnaik's offer, seeking only an annual salary of ₹1 against the normal ₹20 lakh for a minister. The transition from a four-decade corporate life to one in government began with an exhaustive 30-day, 3,000km tour across 30 districts. Odisha has a few hundred ITIs and polytechnics, he tells us, and

an equal number of short-term skill development centres in government and private sectors.

**T**he passages on his endeavour to "humanise the skill development narrative", his initial struggle in transition from decades in the private sector to a government setting and get a sense of his mission; what was already existing on the skill development roadmap of Odisha and what he needed to do to expand it exponentially, are both humorous and insightful. When during his first exhaustive drive through the ITI landscape of Odisha in blistering summer heat, the principals eagerly spelt out the acres of land on which the ITIs stood, the lathe machines they owned, and the vacant positions of "clerks and peons" that he should fill, he clearly spelt out his needs. The names of 10 past successful students, four of them girls, their socioeconomic and present status. Of these ten, he wanted six names of those who had made a mark outside Odisha, and two who had set up their own enterprises.

"Numbers have magic. They simplify things by cutting to the chase. You can bullshit me for hours with narratives, but numbers seldom lie. The job of a leader is to simplify things so that people can rise above the bullshit, the clutter and the maze. It makes it easier for them to comprehend the leader's strategic intent. Numbers are easy to remember, which is critical because people follow a leader only when they can remember what she wants and finally numbers create clarity on the next steps in any endeavour."

Having four names of girls is important, they can be showcased to nearby high schools in a bid to improve female enrolment. The examples of two micro-entrepreneurs can be used to multiply that number. If we "put people at the centre of everything... when we put



## The Day the Chariot Moved

Author : Subroto Bagchi  
 Publisher : Penguin Business  
 Price : ₹699



a name and a face to the work we do, suddenly everything becomes aspirational, uplifting and worthwhile, work finds purpose,” says the author.

An interesting anecdote in the book is about Muni Tigga, who had trained at the ITI Bargarh and was working as a loco pilot in the Indian Railways. When he wanted to talk to her, he “realised the power of the government. If the government wants, it can track down any individual under 10 minutes, even in a country of 1.4 billion people. It takes just 4–5 phone calls to the district administration and local police. Muni Tigga was on the phone with me in less than 10 minutes.”

“She had no clue who I was except that I was some big guy visiting her old ITI and was at quite a loss that her *Alma Mater* was suddenly getting in touch.” She told him in Hindi that she worked at the Main Bhubaneswar Station and her task was to drag (*kheen*) the Intercity Express from Khorda to Palasa and back.

Muni became his star among stars and an icon for the state. “She was the lens through which I began understanding the difference between skill development and human transformation. Six sisters, one brother, small piece of land, few cows and goats were part of her universe. As a girl she was not required to go to school, but she did. Whenever she had to take the animals to graze, she carried her books with her. She was ready to go to high school, but the village was not ready for a girl to do so and that too far away from the village. She needed to get up early in the morning, cycle down a dirt road, and by the time she came back, it was dark, the villages haunted her.”

But her mother encouraged her and she passed high school; the father said

she was on her own now. She ended up at an ITI where she dreamt of being a locomotive pilot. After training, she cracked the competitive entrance exam of the Indian Railways and got the job. “You could not imagine her hauling a locomotive engine and running an eight-hour shift up and down every day in a good weather and bad. To put things in perspective, the most abiding image of machismo in our society is a Bullet motorcycle engine which generates between 20 and 47HP.” In contrast Muni dealt with a loco with a 6,125HP engine whose top speed can hit 140km to 160km an hour. “Two years at the ITI had not only given money and employable skills, they had given her an identity that no one could ever take away. A girl skilled is power delivered to the universe.”

Anecdotes fill Bagchi’s narrative, making it an engaging and easy read. He hit the ground to find out all about the demand for sewing machine operators from Haryana to Tirupur; he was told women trained in stitching leather in Odisha were employed in shoe factories in Haryana. He visited one only to find them working as glorified rubber slipper makers, living in abominable conditions with no potable water.

He found that the textile industry in Tirupur is mainly powered by Odia workers, who work here to pay for the treatment of a sick parent, run their homes in Odisha, and to save for their own marriage. A harsh truth: “At the bottom of the pyramid, a girl cannot stay unmarried for a long time. It is neither acceptable nor safe.” A couple of years in Tirupur and she could save up to ₹1 lakh to pay for her wedding... “but only if the money survives her father’s drinking, mother’s sickness, brother’s demand for a new mobile

phone or two-wheeler, or investment in a scam chit fund promising to double her money.”

Bagchi also met Basanti Pradhan, a village girl and daughter of a goatherd and third in a family of seven daughters. From an entry-level sewing machine operator, she became a line supervisor. She gave him a lecture on how to go up the success chain, pausing briefly once to ask him if he understood what input and output were, as she explained the supply chain logistics to him!

Another inspiring story is of Sumati Nayak who he met at Westside in Bengaluru; the general manager of the store said one day she will take my job. Same story, small village, 10<sup>th</sup>-fail, training at one of the skilling centres selected by Trent. Initially she could speak only Odia and a little Hindi but was now fluent in both English and Kannada. Eventually she was transferred to a new store in Coimbatore. Her new name tag read: Department manager.

Wanting his position to be non-political and non-partisan, he met the leader of Opposition to brief him about his first exhaustive tour and findings. The sceptical man said this was “too little too late. What will you be able to do when the education system itself is broken? When a Class 5 kid



Subroto Bagchi



cannot write and Class 9 student can't do simple arithmetic meant for Class 5. What skill development can be done when these kids do not even go to school?"

After listening quietly to this lecture, Bagchi said, whether the kid knew or not how to read and write, "that kid is a reality. It does not matter whose fault it is. From now on, that kid is my kid."

There are several bitter pills to swallow in this book, which often tugs at your heartstrings. Spelling out the reasons for dismissing many underprivileged children who do not shine in schools as "not intelligent or smart," Bagchi says a crucial reason is

a poorly developed brain due to malnutrition in early childhood. Two clear indications of malnutrition are stunting and wasting — which

cause poor height and low weight. "Both severely impact brain development... and the child can't pay attention and follow instructions, remember things, build language proficiency through reading and writing, do math and develop logical thinking,

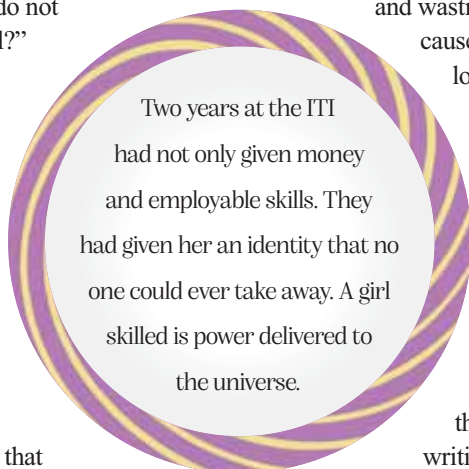
and finally as a teen, is not able to judge a situation and make the right decisions on what is good or harmful."

Such children don't do well in school, drop out, never to go back. According to the 2024 Global Hunger Index, 35.5 per cent of Indian children

are stunted and 18.7 per cent are wasted. Among 127 countries on this index we are all the way down at 105. Where do these children study? Government schools of course!

During his eight-year stint in government, Bagchi fought the social system which has scant respect for the skilled worker, translating into low self-esteem and closing doors for them further. Read the book for an understanding of unicorns — companies valued at \$1 billion and more — and nano unicorns; while the former are cutting jobs, the latter create more jobs.

Post the May 2024 elections and change in government when Bagchi left, he is happy that the new government "has taken forward many things we co-created." Such as the World Skill Centre; its nano unicorn programme was embraced and expanded. Also, the ITI as an institution continues to flourish, with 10 of the 100 best in India being in Odisha. ■



## Mobility and livelihood support from RC Chanakya

Team Rotary News



RI Director M Muruganandam and DG Namrata (to his right) after providing bicycles to students.

**R**I Director M Muruganandam distributed bicycles to 21 school students, and handcars to four women, including a differently-abled beneficiary, to help them generate regular income for a sustainable livelihood. These facilities were provided by the Rotary Club of Chanakya, RID 3250.

"We identified students who travel long distances to attend school and provided them with bicycles. Likewise, handcars were given to women so that they can put up stalls and earn a livelihood," said club president Abhishek Apurv.

DG Namrata, club secretary Rakhi Sharma, treasurer Aalok Swaroop and other club members, were present at the event. ■



## Team Rotary News

Every Sunday from 9.30-11.30am, the Rotary Service Centre at Bhavnagar, Gujarat, doubles up as a public health centre where children up to 15 years were given vaccination in a safe, structured and air-conditioned environment.

Twenty-six years ago, RC Bhavnagar, under its then president Manish Kothari, set up this centre to provide “accessible, reliable and safe vaccination to every child in the community,” recalls Kothari. Now, it has transformed into a paediatric healthcare clinic offering services to children in Bhavnagar and surrounding areas.

Apart from providing mandatory vaccines as per the Universal Immunisation Programme free of cost with supplies from the health department of the municipal corporation, “we also give additional vaccines for pneumococcal, typhoid, influenza, HPV etc at highly subsidised rates,” he explains. Every child is given a vaccine card under the guidance of a paediatric doctor.

The centre has a reliable cold chain facility, uses disposable syringes and needles, and follows SOPs (standard operating procedures) in line with global immunisation norms. “A team of 20 staff, Rotarians and Rotaractors work every Sunday to ensure a



A child being vaccinated at the Rotary Service Centre.

hassle-free experience for children and their parents,” said Kothari.

Every Sunday, the Rotary Centre vaccinates over 250 children who accompany their parents from remote villages and nearby towns. “We collect around Rs 2 lakh weekly as vaccination charges on a cost-to-cost basis from parents for additional services apart from mandatory vaccines which are free,” said Jiten Shah, secretary, Rotary Club Society of Bhavnagar.

Vaccination is a lifeline as it protects children from disease, disability and mortality. “Our Rotary Centre not only vaccinates children, but also educates parents about preventive care, thus strengthening the immunity of our communities,” said Kothari. Over the decades, the centre was recognised as a model initiative across the region, and “our project has inspired other clubs and NGOs to replicate similar programmes in their localities.” ■

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## Turning small clubs into big families

Introduced to Rotary in 2000 through her husband's aunt, Pragya Mehta became a Rotarian in 2009 and served as club president in 2018. What drew her to Rotary was members, who were "ready to include me and who participated with positivity and enthusiasm."

Her membership goal is "not defined by numbers." She aims to strengthen smaller clubs with only 10 members and help them grow to 25. She suggests dedicating a short segment in club meetings to appreciate a member's recent contribution, hobby, or personal achievement, and sending a friendly 'You were missed' message to absentees. In her membership seminar, she plans to include an hour of open interaction to understand members' needs and address their grievances.

Pragya is also advocating for more women in Rotary. "Until a woman becomes part of your club, you're overlooking half of its true potential." She is encouraging senior clubs to mentor Rotaract and Interact clubs.

Her TRF goal is to achieve the status of '100 per cent giving clubs'. As of now, 150 members have contributed ₹1,100 each to TRF, and the current DDF stands at \$9,000, "an indicator that more contributions are needed."

Major projects this year include thalassemia awareness drives, TB eradication initiatives, and *Anna Sadhana*, a campaign to prevent food wastage.



**Pragya Mehta**  
*Soft skills trainer*  
*RC Kota*  
*RID 3056*

# Meet your Governors

**Kiran Zehra**



**Sivasundaram P**  
*Textile manufacturer*  
*RC Komarapalayam*  
*RID 2982*

## Diabetes centre in Salem

He joined Rotary in 2002–03, introduced by PDG AK Natesan, and has stayed for its friendship, fellowship, networking, and service. As club president in 2012–13, he learned the value of permanent projects, and recalls building public toilets still in use today.

This year, the district's 23 assistant governors will each form a new club, aiming to establish 23 new clubs and induct over 500 new members. Recognition ranges from certificates for sponsoring one new member, to PHF honour for those bringing in 25 or more. On member retention, he says, "remind Rotarians what Rotary has given them... personal satisfaction, meaningful friendships, trusted business associates or experiences that have touched and transformed their lives."

The district has four all-women clubs and 200-plus women members.

Having gained fundraising expertise as District Foundation chair (2017–20), he applied it to execute a ₹70 lakh-CSR project with Raasi Sweets to set up a diabetes centre in Salem. Other initiatives include setting up a multi-utility centre in Sangagiri with free meals, vocational training and a dialysis unit; MoUs with six hospitals for medical camps and subsidised treatment. An artificial limb camp is planned for Oct–Nov 2025.

This year his district hopes to charter six new Rotaract clubs and six new Interact clubs.



## Partnering with Inner Wheel for growth

A former Rotaractor, Nigamkumar Chaudhri was introduced to Rotary through his family. This year, to boost membership, he plans to start 15 new clubs and achieve a net growth of 400 members. “Before enrolling, ask prospective members what they know about Rotary. Invite them to service projects, fellowship events, and club meetings so that they can understand the club closely. This will help in better membership retention,” he says.

He encourages sharing information on fellowship programmes, Rotary Youth Exchange, and family exchange opportunities to help members appreciate Rotary’s global reach.

Chaudhri is also focused on improving gender diversity, aiming to raise women’s membership in the district from 14 per cent to 20 per cent. To achieve this, clubs are partnering with Inner Wheel clubs to introduce their members to Rotary and promote the idea of dual membership.

The district’s target is increasing contribution from \$25,000 to \$400,000 for TRF under the *Each Rotarian a Donor Rotarian* initiative. The district has partnered with ONGC and Bank of India to fund cervical cancer vaccinations, vocational centres, artificial limb distribution and smart glasses for the visually-impaired.

Major projects for the year include large-scale cancer awareness and anti-drugs campaigns to reach one lakh students in a single day.

This DG is urging Rotary clubs to start three Interact clubs and two Rotaract clubs each. A one-day Interact conference is also planned to energise young members and give them a bigger picture of Rotary.



**Nigamkumar Chaudhri**  
*Architect*  
*RC Visnagar*  
*RID 3055*



**Chella K Raghavendran**  
*Chartered accountant*  
*RC Coimbatore Spectrum*  
*RID 3206*

## Waiving levies to welcome women

When DG Chella K Raghavendran joined the Rotary Club of Chennai Towers in May 2002, his biggest inspiration was his brother Chella K Srinivasan, “a Rotarian since 1986, who never missed a single club meeting” and his uncle, PDG CN Gangadaran, who was a well-known Rotary leader.

Leading one of the recently bifurcated districts, Raghavendran’s focus is on adding 20 new clubs, and around 650 new Rotarians this year. His advice

to club presidents is “give members a clear orientation, help them find their ‘Rotary Moment,’ and keep them engaged through events, fellowships and action groups.”

He switched to RC Coimbatore in 2004. As RID 3206 bridges Tamil Nadu and Kerala, to boost inclusivity, all communication is in English. To improve gender diversity (currently at eight per cent), the district will waive certain levies for women joining Rotary in 2025–26.

The district has set an ambitious TRF-giving target of \$1.5 million, with per capita goals of \$100 for the Annual Fund and \$30 for PolioPlus.

“The biggest challenge is mindset. TRF contributions are the best way to give back to the community.”

Service projects during his tenure include empowering girls, caring for the elderly and the differently-abled and preventing substance abuse among youth. Big goals include 50 dialysis machines, 50 smart classrooms, 500 kW solar installations in underserved areas, and one million free meals. ■

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Until a woman becomes  
part of your club, you’re  
overlooking half of its true  
potential.

**Pragya Mehta**

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# Delhi Rotaractors create a buzz

Jaishree

**R**otractors of the Rotaract Club of Delhi Midtown Maitreyi, affiliated to the Maitreyi College, a women's college in New Delhi, are passionate about supporting the survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse. It was chartered in 2023 by the Rotary Club of Delhi Midtown, RID 3011, and most of the service activities are focused on empowering women and young girls.

It all started with *Project Raha* in August 2024, when the club members took out a Peace Walk to pay homage to a 31-year-old



Rotaractors participating in a peace walk as part of *Project RAHA*.







trainee doctor of the RG Kar Medical College, Kolkata, who was brutally raped and murdered in the seminar room of the college. “It was a peacefully conducted walk where around 750 students from our college and other neighbouring colleges participated. We carried placards with slogans reiterating women’s safety and advocating justice for the rape victim,” says Mahi Azad, the club’s IPP and charter president.

The next phase of *Project Raha* included a series of self-defence workshops conducted by Nicky Dubey, an Israeli martial arts expert. Over three weeks, around 250 participants learnt various protection techniques and powerful strikes, equipping themselves with confidence and resilience to face real life challenges.

Other initiatives under the multi-phased, ongoing project included boundary education for slum children, making them aware of good and bad touch, and teaching them to identify indecent conversation and bad intentions from strangers, friends and family. “We would visit various localities in teams and conduct awareness sessions for children and young adults. Boys were also included in these conversations,” says Mahi.

The third phase included storytelling sessions which provided a safe platform for survivors to share stories, inspire others and build collective



strength. The event encouraged members to share with a four-member panel, some of the most difficult experiences they had faced. “The session became a space for vulnerability, courage and connection. RAHA reminded us that healing begins with being heard, and that even in our most painful moments, we are never alone. The strength shown by our speakers touched every soul in the room and brought our community closer, fostering empathy, support and mutual understanding. This was more than just a session; it was a reminder of the power of shared humanity,” she says.

**G**aining strength from the above project, the club put together *Project Prabal*, another three-phase initiative to address human trafficking through skill development, awareness and economic empowerment. As a first step, the Rotaractors organised a legal literacy workshop where well known lawyers shared information about legal rights, protective laws and helpline numbers with women and adolescents at the Salaam Baalak Trust. These important details were distributed as printed flyers among the participants to serve as ready reckoners. “Being armed with information is the first step towards building confidence,” she smiles.

The next step was arranging craft classes for survivors of human trafficking and sexual harassment. Around 25 women supported by the NGO Vihaan were taught to make bracelets, fashion accessories, phone charms, wind charms and other knick-knacks. “We provided the base material and helped them market their creations at events in our college and other campuses.” The revenue generated was given to them, promoting sustainable income and independence. “We are promoting their skills in our known circles so that they get continued business,” she says.

Phase 3 of *Project Prabal* comprised building creative skills in 30 children at an NGO in Janakpuri West. They were taught to paint and draw, or write stories, based on their interest. “Our aim was to instil self-worth and confidence in these children and we were thrilled to see their faces light up with joy as they explored their talent.”



The club has made an eight-episode video series called ‘Femora’ addressing key women-related issues such as sex trafficking, domestic violence, gender inequality and workplace discrimination. These videos have been uploaded on Youtube.

**B**ut *Project Jagruti* is close to Mahi’s heart; this was evident by the warmth and joy in her voice while she talks about it. The club has 136 Rotaractors, and “all of them are part of this project.” It has adopted a slum in the capital and focuses its welfare projects here. “We are teaching





Craft classes being conducted for survivors of human trafficking and sexual abuse.

various subjects to the school-going children here for two hours every day.” Mahi visits the locality on Wednesdays to teach them English, and other members take turns to visit every week and brush up the children’s lessons in whatever subjects they are good at. The response from the parents, who are mostly illiterate and are engaged in low paying blue-collar jobs, is amazing, she says. “Earlier the children were sent to private tuition classes that charged them ₹400–500 monthly. So when we told the parents that we’ll coach the children without any charges they were excited. And the children enjoy the classes with us. Their marks are also improving now,” smiles the Rotaractor.

Through *Projects Sanjeevani* and *Ayushman* the club conducted a series of health and medical camps throughout the year in the city, benefitting around 1,000 people. Blood donation camps helped enhance blood reserve in centres treating children with thalassaemia.

Having completed her graduation, Mahi has now moved to the Shriram College of Commerce



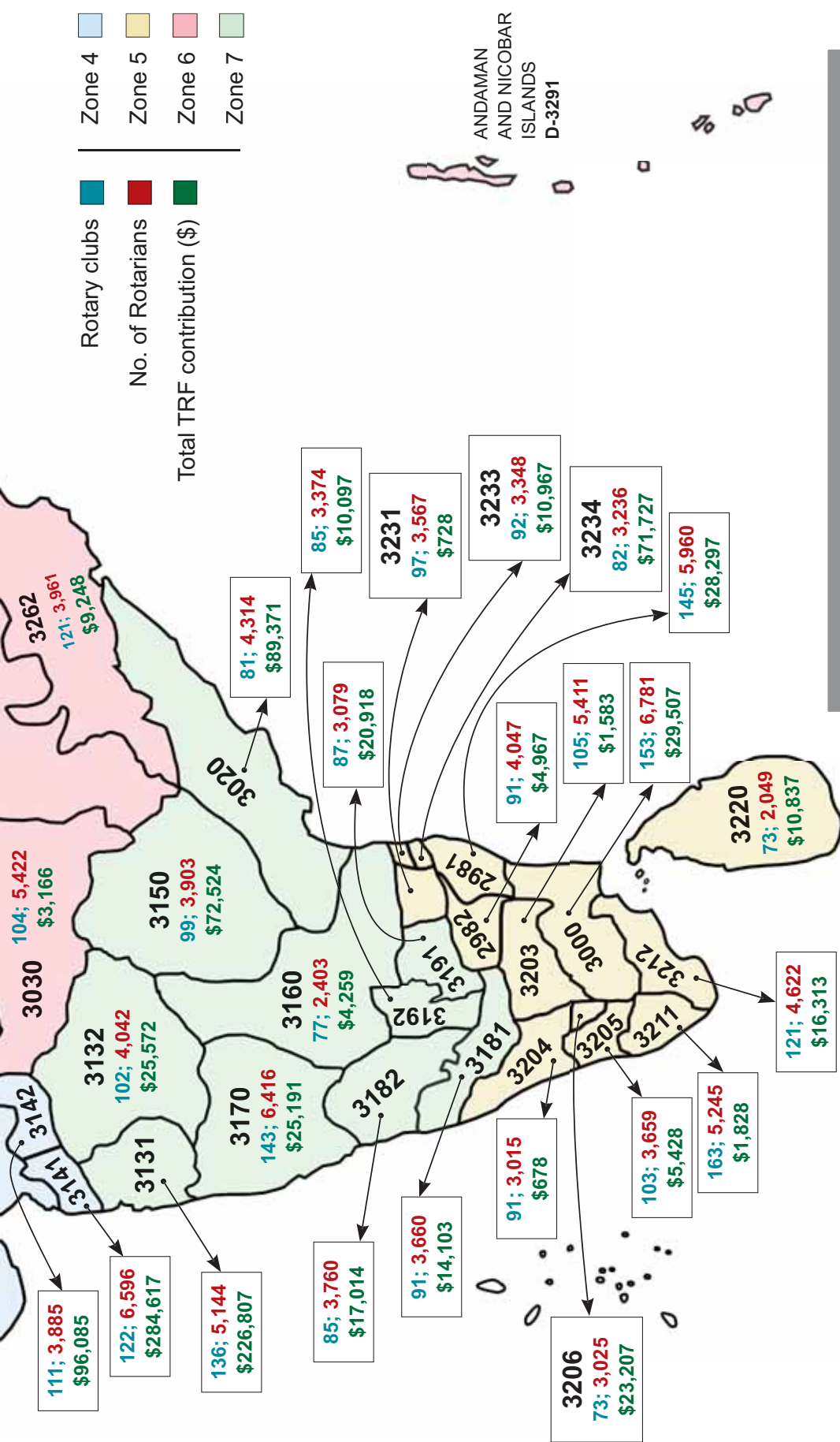
in the city for her postgraduate course. She, along with her 47 course mates, have joined the Rotaract Club of Delhi Genesis, a community-based club newly chartered by RC Delhi Genesis.

This new club has now kickstarted its welfare initiatives with cancer awareness programmes targeting women and young adults. At the beginning of this new Rotary year, the club organised special women’s camps to screen for breast and ovarian cancer. “With the help of medical experts, we taught the visitors self-examination techniques to detect cancer early and educated them on the importance of prompt medical consultation to nip the disease at the bud,” she says. ■









## Rotary worldwide

|                       |          |                  |             |
|-----------------------|----------|------------------|-------------|
| Rotary clubs          | : 36,464 | Rotary members   | : 1,150,586 |
| Rotaract clubs        | : 9,592  | Rotaract members | : 133,870   |
| Interact clubs        | : 17,520 | Interact members | : 403,098   |
| RCCs                  | : 14,122 |                  |             |
| As on August 22, 2025 |          |                  |             |

\*Membership figures as on August 1, 2025.  
\*TRF contribution figures as on July 31, 2025.





RID 2981

### RC Neyveli Lignite City

Two metal pushcarts worth ₹50,000 each were donated to underprivileged people. This will help them to sell vegetables in the day and groundnuts in the evening. The carts displayed Rotary Wheel and the club's name.



## Club matters



RID 3070

### RC Kapurthala Downtown

Food packets were distributed to children at the Arya Samaj Ashram. Club president Yogesh Talwar, secretary Gagandeep Mehra, past president Harminder Singh and club members who are teachers at the Ashram participated in the event.

RID 3131

### RC Pune Nanded City

Senior advocate Ujjwal Nikam, a Padma Shri awardee, addressed the Rotarians at the installation of new club president Kushal Karewar by AG Ujwal Kele.







RID **3142**

### **RC Kalyan City**

With the support of forest officials and police officers, the Rotarians planted 53 saplings near Revati village. Project chair Madan Shanklesha, president Nikhil Parmar, along with his team and Rotaractors, participated.

RID **2982**

### **RC Mettur Dam City**

In a phased manner, 10,000 saplings are being planted to strengthen the forest areas around Mettur dam in Salem which is nearing its centenary year. During the first phase, Rotarians planted trees at Sampalli village.



RID **3182**

### **RC Kadur**

School kits containing a school bag, notebooks, stationery items and colouring sets were distributed to over 500 students at 31 government schools. This initiative will reduce the financial burden of less privileged families.



RID **3170**

### **RC Honavar**

PDG Gaurish Dhond inaugurated a sewage treatment plant at the SDM College, Honavar. The plant, installed through CSR funds, can recycle 12,000 litre of wastewater a day, and the treated water will be used for non-potable purposes.





# Forced to flee for fear

A best-selling novel was caught up in a controversy regarding who has the right to tell whose story.

Let's start with a quote from the Italian writer Umberto Eco's *Five Moral Pieces*, a set of five essays originally published as *Cinque Scritti Morali* in 1997, and subsequently in English translation in 2001. In the last of the essays, titled 'Migration, Tolerance and Intolerance', he examines the difference between immigration and migration. To the former he ascribes control of the political, restrictive, encouraging, planning and accepting kind. But migration is different, he says. It's a natural phenomenon that cannot be controlled: "Migration occurs when an entire people, little by little, moves from one territory to another... There have been great migrations from East



Sandhya Rao

to West, in the course of which the peoples of the Caucasus changed the culture and biological heredity of the natives. There was European migration towards the American continent... What Europe is still trying to tackle as immigration is instead migration. The Third World is knocking at our doors, and it will come in even if we are not in agreement."

Written over 25 years ago, Eco's exposition regarding migration, tolerance and intolerance will resonate with our times. The centre piece of this column, however, is a work of fiction, unattractively titled *American Dirt*. Written by Jeanine Cummins, an American whose grandmother was Puerto Rican, it focuses on the crossing over into the US of peoples from South and Central America. The world is

aware of the political ramifications of this phenomenon, we are aware of the action taken by the US authorities to stop and to ferret out 'illegal aliens,' as they are called. But how much do we know of the whys and hows and how-longs of journeys undertaken, often over hundreds of miles, across days of danger, distress and despair? *American Dirt* attempts to tell one such story.

Lydia Perez runs a bookshop in her hometown of Acapulco in Mexico. The book starts off with 16 members of Lydia's family being shot dead by members of a powerful drug cartel at the 15<sup>th</sup> birthday party of her niece, Yénifer. These include her journalist husband, Sebastian, and her mother. Lydia knows the killings were at the behest of the head of the Los Jardineros cartel; in fact, she was fooled into believing Javier Fuentes, chief of the cartel, was her friend, a fellow book-lover. But now, she and her son, Luca, are in danger for their lives, after Sebastian's expose of the cartel.

Setting aside horror and grief, Lydia and Luca attempt to get out of Acapulco, out of Mexico, and move *el norte*, the north, towards and to the United States of America. The novel is an account — fictional, although based on years of research — of their journey, under cover, of many days and obstacles, including jumping onto and riding atop moving trains, crossing the desert, trusting strangers who could turn you in or shoot you down, losing all your money, and combating rattlesnakes and hunger, not to mention evading omnipresent drug and border patrols.

It's a compelling story told at a fast pace and in great detail, although at times it does seem overwritten. However, when you get used to the style, it hooks you in for the most part. And because you know that movement along the Mexico-US border is ongoing, it is all the more compelling.

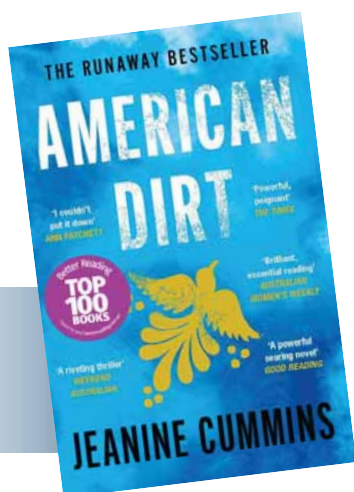
While the US is tracking down, what they call 'illegal aliens,' the South and Central Americans trying to cross over into the US, how much do we know of the whys, hows and how-longs of journeys undertaken, across days of danger, distress and despair?



Generally,  
the simplistic view is  
that if you don't find yourself in a  
particular situation, then it  
cannot be true. That is, if it isn't  
happening to me, it isn't  
happening to anybody.

As Lydia and Luca meet up with others escaping from further south than themselves, you get to know their stories as well, their reasons for leaving home. It's not because they want to leave, they have no choice. If they must live, they must leave.

We discussed this book at our last book club meet to mixed response. But for all of us, what was being described was unfamiliar, simply because we are in the privileged position of not being insecure at 'home' — at least, none of us, as of now. Generally, the simplistic view is that if you don't find yourself in a particular situation, then it cannot be true. That is, if it isn't happening to me, it isn't happening to anybody. This is where ST Coleridge's advice to suspend our disbelief willingly comes in handy. Only then can we understand, empathise, even if we have not experienced/ cannot experience it ourselves.



Then again, it's easy to get used to something, however horrible, however detrimental, over a period of time. Soledad and Rebeca, teenagers on the run from narcos who attacked their cloud-forest village in Honduras, teach Lydia and Luca how to get on and off trains. A few times of doing this and "they board easily, without even much forethought or communication."

"We're becoming professionals," says Soledad. But Lydia is troubled. After reflecting on their circumstance for a bit she says, "From now on, when we board, each time we board, I will remind you to be terrified. And you remind me, too: this is not normal." Soledad responds, "This is not normal." They, as we, cannot allow evil things, unjust things, bad things to be normalised or they — and we — will forget to be vigilant, to respond.

Why did *American Dirt* whip up controversy despite being a best-seller and despite receiving such good reviews initially? There's plenty of 'dirt' available online at the click of a button. However, one of the things worth mentioning that irked Latin American writers in particular was a 'white' woman telling 'their' story. Apparently at some point, in the course

of an interview, Jeanne Cummins had identified herself as 'white' and this became a sore point. In an interview published in *The Guardian* in May 2025, Lucy Knight writes that Jeanne Cummins wasn't prepared "for the string of bad reviews, one calling the book 'trauma porn'. Whether Cummins had the right to tell the story of Mexican migrants, being

neither Mexican nor a migrant herself, was called into question, and 141 writers signed a letter to Oprah Winfrey, asking her to remove it as a book club pick."

The letter noted, among other things: "In the informed opinions of many, many Mexican American and Latinx immigrant writers, *American Dirt* has not been imagined well nor responsibly, nor has it been effectively researched. The book is widely and strongly believed to be exploitative, oversimplified, and ill-informed, too often erring on the side of trauma fetishization and sensationalization of migration and of Mexican life and culture...."

I guess there's plenty to be said on all sides. Ross Sempke wrote on the Intellectual Freedom Blog in March 2020 that the novel is "determinedly apolitical". He wrote, "I believe that narratives can transcend politics, and I think that was exactly Cummins' intention. Why add an ephemeral political stance to the timeless narrative of immigrants?" As for the question of who may tell whose story, a debate that rages on, even in the world of children's literature, Sempke's simple answer is: "No one should hesitate to write something because of the potential for backlash. Telling meaningful stories involves risk." About the criticism that Cummins' work revealed shallowness of research, he says, "I don't know the details of Cummins' studies but five years is enough for a master's thesis... How is this not deep? The fact that the product of research doesn't reflect how you would have done things is not a fair critique of the book."

My recommendation? Read the book. Read about the book. Draw your own conclusions. But read.

*The columnist is a children's writer and senior journalist*





# The sustainable side of gated communities

Preeti Mehra

Community living can be an eco-friendly experience.

**G**ated colonies seem to be becoming the norm in urban India. In fact, there are so many who are leaving their independent houses to move to gated communities. Most say that it makes life easier as the living spaces offer a host of amenities and you don't have to run around if your electricity has tripped or

there is a water leak. You can just call the society help desk and the electrician or plumber will be at your doorstep. But such amenities also come with the shared responsibility of looking after the commons and ensuring that they are sustainable — areas such as the corridors, roads, parking spaces, joggers trail, gardens and the trees, to name a few.

The amenities on offer are no doubt great conveniences that make life easier, especially for working couples and aging citizens who need assistance. But one is also responsible towards others living in the same gated community. And those who do not respect the rules agreed upon will be doing their fellow residents a disservice. For





instance, if your resident welfare society asks you to segregate the garbage (which it should) you must do it and make the effort a collective success.

What is good to see is that increasingly gated communities are not stopping at just garbage collection to ensure a sustainable lifestyle. They are collectively involved in a host of green activities. I find actively composting the community's wet waste has become a joint activity that is becoming popular. Then, residents in many societies are pooling in their resources to set up rooftop solar panels. This helps them not only reduce their electricity bills in the long term, but also makes them partners in saving the country's fossil fuel energy and checking emissions.

Water harvesting is another area that is gaining focus. Water, as we know, is a precious commodity that must be preserved and not wasted. Several gated communities come with water harvesting and recycling systems that ensure better usage of water. It also underscores a collective responsibility to keep these systems functioning efficiently and a commitment to use this scarce natural resource without wasting it.

I have come across some interesting real estate advertisements of late, luring citizens with 'green' offerings. Of course, I hope these are not typical green washing exercises by builders desperately trying to prove their eco-friendly credentials. But some of the ideas they promise to execute are, no doubt, interesting.

One such builder offers residential high-rise flats that would have fruit trees in the common areas alongside the parks, with fruit plucking and sharing it among families as a joint activity in the colony. I don't know about other things, but if it means that the kids growing up in the community will climb these trees to pluck

fruit, and they will experience dirtying their hands in the soil while looking after the trees, I am all for it. It is a good way of keeping them away from screen time and close to some sort of natural environment.

Another real estate advertisement boasts of exclusive child-friendly and pet-friendly spaces in their housing project. It promises outdoor playing areas for children and a pet park for animal lovers. Dogs are always a bone of contention in most gated communities as pet lovers and those fearful of 'man's best friend' are at loggerheads on where these canines can be taken out for a walk. Given that, a pet park is a very sensible idea. It can provide a space where the pets can interact with each other, while their 'parents' can exchange notes on pet food, vets and what have you!

But beyond what the builder can do, you as a member of the community can contribute in your own way. We all know that charity begins at home. In this case it literally does. You can, for a start, see to it that lights, fans, TVs, ACs and other electronic goods are switched off when not in use. It is an unpleasant sight to see fans and lights on in an empty room. Remember energy is being wasted and that is so 'un-green' a thing to do.

Gated communities make great places to initiate the three sacred Rs of sustainable living — reduce, reuse and recycle. By living in a common space, you certainly 'reduce' your carbon footprint as you share the emissions you create collectively. When it comes to reuse, I have heard of some innovative activities that gated communities have started. One of them went in for a garden sale where whatever you want to discard is put up for others to buy at a discounted price. So, if I am looking for an oven, I can buy it off someone who is looking to get rid of it. Where children's stuff is concerned, this

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Residents in many societies are pooling in their resources to set up rooftop solar panels. This reduces their electricity bills, and also makes them partners in saving fossil fuel energy and checking emissions.

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works rather well. You can buy a used pram in good condition, a bicycle, a crib, a car seat, even well-maintained toys and books.

In fact, WhatsApp and the MyGate app serve as useful networks for such offerings as well. But, if a community feels closer than that, a garden exchange can also take place. I know of several communities where people would just put out the stuff they do not need anymore, and others would pick it up for free. The stuff is being reused.

Some gated communities also arrange recycling as a joint activity. They invite a recycling company, and everyone brings out what they want to get rid of. It could be clothes waiting to be discarded, those old laptops or mobiles sitting on your shelf or electronic items not in use. This is a great way of getting rid of e-waste. It also becomes convenient when such activities happen collectively, say on a weekend.

The suggestions for making gated communities sustainable are endless, but what really makes it happen is the will of a few individuals. And, of course, the passion for going green.

*The writer is a senior journalist who writes on environmental issues*



# Breaking free from back pain

Gita Mathai

**D**o you suffer from a backache? Whether it is occasional or chronic, you are not alone.

If you look around, you will see plenty of seniors walking around wearing a supporting lumbar corset. Twelve per cent of the adult population (both men and women) have backaches at any given time.

Backache may be an acute discomfort, a sudden incapacitating twinge or a long-standing chronic pain. Both can interfere with daily activities. The extent of the disability this can cause is enormous. The constant irritation interferes with efficiency and functioning. Studies have shown that those in the age group of around 65, who have suffered from chronic, persistent or recurrent backaches are financially worth less than their healthy counterparts. A study in Australia showed that chronic backpain forces individuals to retire early, affecting their long-term financial health.

We humans evolved from quadrupedal animals that walk on all fours. We became bipeds and started to stand upright. This means that the eight-kilo

weight of the human head has to be supported by the backbone. This is made up of a series of small vertebrae separated by cartilaginous discs that function as impact-absorbing washers. As age advances, constant weight bearing and overuse while twisting, standing and bending take their toll, and the back starts to hurt.

The pain is typically located between the lower rib margins and the crease of the buttocks. It may have occurred acutely while bending or awkwardly picking up a heavy object. It may appear with no





apparent precipitating cause. It may be aggravated by movement or be constant and dull. It can prevent restful sleep. This in turn leads to fatigue, inefficiency and irritability.

Nerves extending to the hip region and feet emerge from between the vertebral bones. A problem in the back (bones or discs) may show up as pain in one buttock or radiate down the back of one or both legs. This symptom is called sciatica. It is not a diagnosis in itself, but just a description of the pain. Sciatica may be accompanied by tingling and loss of sensation in the feet.

If you develop a backache, then try the following home measures for symptomatic relief.

- Apply a capsaicin containing ointment and then an ice pack for two minutes at a time every hour or so.
- Take NSAIDs (Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory drugs) like ibuprofen or naproxen. Paracetamol may also provide relief from pain.
- Rest initially, but not for more than two days consecutively, as it will weaken the paraspinal muscles supporting the spine. This will eventually aggravate the pain.
- Sleep on your side with a pillow between your knees, or on your back with a pillow under your knees.

A physician needs to be consulted immediately if the pain follows trauma, or causes bowel and bladder problems, if there is fever, or if there is weakness or loss of sensation in the legs. Any pain that lasts more

than two weeks also needs to be taken seriously and evaluated.

Unfortunately, not all back pain has a single cause. It is not a case of “one size fits all.” It can be due to a plethora of reasons. Even with identical symptoms, two people can have different diagnoses. Persistent pain needs to be investigated and evaluated. Blood tests, X-rays, CT and MRI scans may be required.

The results may show vitamin D deficiency or low calcium levels. The uric acid levels may be elevated. The bones may be weak, with osteopenia, osteoporosis, compression or wedge fractures of the vertebrae, slipped or damaged intervertebral discs, facet joint problems, changes in the disc endplates, lumbar canal stenosis or the ‘cauda equina syndrome.’ The problem may have its origin elsewhere and may be due to inflammatory disorders, cancer metastasis or some infection. Investigations and scans of the abdomen may show a silent aortic aneurysm or other intra-abdominal pathology.

The difficulty in diagnosis and treatment arises because many of the ‘disc changes’ and other radiologic and blood reports can be found also in many normal people who do not have a debilitating backache.

In a lucky few people, a correctable or treatable cause can be identified and specific therapy started. Even when a cause is identified and specific treatment given, relief may be elusive. Quite often, no specific cause can be identified, and the low back pain is then labelled *nonspecific*.

Treatment may be frustrating for both the patient and the physician. This may lead to doctor shopping, dissatisfaction and misery. Inability to function efficiently because of the pain and slow response to treatment can cause depression, and further aggravate the perception and response to the pain and its treatment.

Physicians may combine analgesics with muscle relaxants and antidepressants in an attempt to provide relief. Physiotherapy with guided exercises and strengthening often helps. Unhappy patients may try alternative medication and acupuncture. The list of treatment for *nonspecific* back pain is long. A lot of the treatment is anecdotal and unproven.

In severe longstanding cases, the physician may advise corticosteroid or nerve block injections to the spine. Surgery can be done for structural causes like a herniated disc with nerve compression, spinal stenosis, or spine instability.

Some lifestyle modifications do help:

- Attain ideal body weight. Extra weight around the stomach changes the posture and strains the spine. It is like a permanent state of pregnancy.
- Use ergonomically correct furniture for work and study.
- Prolonged sitting weakens the paraspinal muscles. Get up every hour and stretch or walk a few steps.
- Exercise aerobically (walking, jogging, swimming, cycling) for 30-40 minutes a day, at least six days a week. Do yoga or stretching and core strengthening regularly for 20 minutes as well.
- Do not smoke. Nicotine causes imbalances in bone metabolism, with reduced bone density.
- Alcohol consumption can interfere with calcium and vitamin D absorption, weakening bones.

Don’t wait for a backache to develop. Exercise regularly to prevent it. It is always better to lock the house before the thief enters.

*The writer is a paediatrician and author of Staying Healthy in Modern India.*





RID 3211

### RC Haripad Greater

Toys were given to children of an anganwadi in the presence of DG Tina Antony who appreciated the efforts of club members to encourage children in these government-run childcare centres.



## Club matters



RID 3231

### RC Tirupattur

Fertilisers were distributed to 25 farmers at Keezhoor village in Tirupattur district. In another initiative, educational items were distributed to 100 government school students at Kobai village, and sports equipment were given to 125 students at Sonia Academy, S Kodiur village.



RID 3234

### RC Anna Nagar Madras

Around 1,500 saplings were planted at the Akshaya Vidyalaya in Walajabad taluk, Kancheepuram, to mark World Environment Day (July 13). PDG Baskaran Gobala Krishnan from Malaysia and IFS officer Irulandy, a Rotarian, were guests of honour.







## RID 3240

### RC Katwa

A mass marriage was held to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary of Naresh Kumar Agarwalla and Pushpa, parents of club president Rupesh Kumar Agarwalla (2024–25). Around 50 essential items were donated to the newly-wed couples.

## RID 3212

### RC Ramnad

Two RO water purifier units (₹1.5 lakh) were installed at the Kendriya Vidyalaya School. The drinking water units were sponsored by DGE K Gandhi.



## RID 3250

### RC Bokaro Steel City

Eighty-four girls were administered second doses of HPV vaccine at a cervical cancer vaccination camp held at the Rotary Play Group School, with the support of Muskaan Hospital. Project chair Shiny Zachariah coordinated the proceedings.



## RID 3291

### RC Salt Lake Central

A Rotary ward for destitute women was inaugurated at the S C Sen Old Age Home at North 24 Parganas. The club part-funded the new campus at a cost of ₹16.5 lakh.

Compiled by V Muthukumaran



In a first-of-its-kind event at the Chennai zone, 50 Rotary clubs of RID 3234 came together to host Rotary Olympiad, a one-day track and field sports meet for school students, at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in the city.

Inaugurating the event, Lt Gen Karanbir Singh Brar, General Officer Commanding, Dakshin Bharat Area of the Indian Army, said, “India has the largest youth population in the world. Hence it is important to encourage all forms of physical activity among them and channelise their good health and energy for the country, which has a huge growth potential in technology, sports and other fields of progress.”

As the country’s future, “youngsters must be given the right opportunities, and sports events like this one can help identify individuals who can go on to win Olympic medals for the country.” Both the Indian Army and Rotary share common values of

selfless service, community development, peacebuilding and working for the nation’s progress. Complimenting Rotary clubs for organising the Olympiad for school students, he said, “sports is integral to our life and such physical activity will also ward off lifestyle diseases.”

DG Vinod Saraogi said the Rotary Olympiad was a celebration of “youthful energy, determination, discipline and the sporting spirit of city school students.” Rotary’s mission of *Service Above Self* was evident “as the sports meet will extend a platform for aspiring

children to groom their talent” and move on to the next big stage, he said.

In his address, Rotary Olympiad chairman Col (retd) Bhupinder Singh pointed out, “the track-and-field event is more than just a sports competition. It is a platform for teamwork, discipline and holistic development of schoolchildren. Every child who steps on the field is a champion, for it is not just about winning, but discovering courage, building friendship and embracing the true spirit of sportsmanship.”

### Aspiring IAS officer

With stars in her eyes, Dimple Tanwar (Class 11) from AM Jain School, Meenambakkam, a city suburb, was excited to participate in Rotary Olympiad. “My mind is always focused on extracurricular activities, and I love playing badminton, running (400, 800 metres) and long jump,” she said. On her life goals, she said, “before cracking the civil services exams to become an IAS officer, I want to win national medals in athletics.”

SDAT (Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu) helped in the organisation and around 250 Rotarians and 100 Rotaractors coordinated the event. Every student got a t-shirt, cap, energy drink, water bottle and biscuits. All participants were given certificates, while 100 medals were awarded to the winners. ■

# Rotary Olympiad grooms athletes

V Muthukumaran



RID 3234 DG Vinod Saraogi and Lt Gen Karanbir Singh Brar, General Commanding Officer, Dakshin Bharat Area of the Indian Army, addressing a press meet. Also seen is project chair Col (retd) Bhupinder Singh on the left.



## Cancer detection bus for women

RID 2981, through a global grant support, has launched a cancer detection bus worth ₹1.94 crore in Kumbakonam for early detection of cancer in women. The Manakula Vinayagar Medical College, Puducherry, will be the service partner for the cancer detection camps.



From R: PDGs S Balaji, Ramesh Babu, S Baskaran, DG J Leone, Thanjavur district collector B Priyanka Pankajam and PDG John Daniel (third from L) at the launch of the cancer detection van.

## Lifesaving care for tribal newborns

RC Mumbai Borivali East, RID 3141, in partnership with Momentive Performance Materials, donated a fully-equipped NICU ambulance to Patangshah Cottage Hospital in Jawahar, Palghar. Serving a predominantly tribal area with limited access to advanced neonatal care, the ambulance has already saved 10 newborns in just two months.



Club members at the NICU ambulance handing over ceremony.

## Rice distributed to farming families

RC Chennai Symphony, RID 3234, carried out a rice distribution drive at Kuppam village in Arcot, Thiruvallur district, providing 500kg rice to 100 economically disadvantaged farm families.



Club members along with beneficiaries.

## A stamp to celebrate The Magic of Rotary

RC Indore Navlakha, RID 3040, launched a special 'Last Day Cover Post' to commemorate last year's presidential theme, *The Magic of Rotary*. From 2025–26 Rotary year, the traditional annual 'presidential theme' is being replaced by a 'presidential message' to streamline branding and communication opportunities.



IPDG Anish Malik (R) with the commemorative stamp.



# Making a difference

## HPV camp at Moga, Punjab

Over 150 girls were inoculated at a cervical vaccination camp held at Dr Sham Sunder Nursing Home by RC Moga Stars, RID 3090. PDG Parveen Jindal, club president Pankaj Bansal and secretary Nalini Jindal were present.

The project cost of Rs 12 lakh was sponsored by RID 3011. While inaugurating the camp, Rtn Sameer Gupta from Delhi said he was ready to sponsor similar vaccination projects in the future. ■



PDG Parveen Jindal (L) at the vaccination camp.



DG Nitin Kumar Agarwal (R) and UP minister Kapil Dev Aggarwal (centre) at the inauguration of a computer lab at the Composite School, Bibipur.



## A computer lab at Muzaffarnagar school

A computer lab was set up at the Composite School, Bibipur, by RC Muzaffarnagar Sanskrati, RID 3100, in partnership with Shri Tirupati Infotech, owned by then club secretary Sanjeev Jindal. UP skill development minister Kapil Dev Aggarwal said these initiatives related to technical education in rural areas will improve the future of children and improve people's lives. DGE Nitin Kumar Agarwal appreciated the efforts of club president Prashant Jain and Jindal in completing the school lab project.

Project chair Sandeep Mittal, past president Gaurav Pathak and Sonia Jain played key roles in implementing the project. ■



## School toilet block renovated

A toilet block at the Indira Nagar School was renovated by RC Manipal, RID 3182, under *Project Dignity in Every Step*. The upgraded sanitation facility has now gender segregated toilet units, handwash stations with regular water supply, and user-friendly designs for easy access to all students.

This Rotary project will have a positive impact on girl students who had earlier faced sanitation challenges due to lack of proper toilet facilities. Following this initiative, the school authorities have observed an increase in student attendance and a much-improved learning environment. ■



PDG Jayagowri Hadigal (centre) with Rotarians and students in front of the renovated toilet block.



RC Solapur Pride president Suryakant Agawane (centre) with Rotarians and students at the health check-up camp.

## Medical camp at Solapur school

Around 550 students and 50 parents were examined at a healthcare camp conducted by RC Solapur Pride, RID 3131, at the Late Dajikaka Godbole School, Kamati Khurd, with the support of Yugandhar Multispeciality Hospital. Specialist consultations and screenings were done for kidney ailments, orthopaedic issues, spine problems, eye disorders, diabetes and hypertension. Club president Suryakant Agawane, an ex-army medical officer, gave a CPR demonstration to revive victims of cardiac arrest. A vision board was installed in the school for self-examination for students. ■







# Rotary water ATMs in Tirupur

V Muthukumaran

Free water ATMs are being set up across Tirupur, famous as the knitwear capital of India in Tamil Nadu, to provide clean, drinking water to the public at some of the thickly populated areas of this textile city.

RC Tirupur South, RID 3203, has set up the first ATM in July 2024 when its then president K Mohanasundaram, who conceived the project, took

office. “We installed the first ATM costing ₹4.5 lakh through member contributions. It is in front of Tirupur Rotary Hall. Later, we applied for a global grant in partnership with the Rotary E-Club of Greater Sydney, RID 9685, and will be installing 14 more water ATMs at prime localities in the city,” he says.

With a population of 12 lakh, including floating people, Tirupur faces

## A water ATM near Tirupur Rotary Hall.

acute water scarcity due to “depleting groundwater and rapid pollution of existing sources by industrial effluents. Those from low-income backgrounds struggle to access clean drinking water, and are thus exposed to various health problems which is an additional burden to them,” explains Mohanasundaram.

The club tied up with two vendors — Aqua Care Systems and King Aqua — to set up water ATMs which primarily consist of an RO filter unit and a water dispensing system. Each machine has a capacity to deliver 1,000 litres per hour, and the club has signed a five-year AMC with the vendors.

Every week, company officials inspect the ATMs to “check if the systems are working well, and if not, they replace the spare parts. Also, every month they change the filtration membranes if they are overworked,” says the club president. “Now that we got \$50,000 sanctioned as global grant, that includes \$33,000 given by our members, the remaining 14 ATMs are being set up at bus stands, government medical college and hospital, vegetable market, collectorate office, and three government schools,” he says. “We will complete the project by August-end.”

Expressing thanks to the Tirupur municipal corporation, he says, “all the ATM sites, water and electrical supply are being provided by the civic body which has been extremely helpful to us.” Ramachandran, 70, a staff at the Rotary Hall, says, “around 150 poor families depend entirely on the water ATM for their daily needs.” Palaniammal, a housemaid, adds: “We used to consume untreated and contaminated water and were susceptible to diseases. Now, we have purified water which is much safer for our health.”

*Project Rotary Pure Water* is being showcased with billboards across this textile hub lifting the public image of the club.

Green canopies were set up at two major junctions in Tirupur to shield commuters from summer heat and offer relief to motorists waiting for traffic signal.

## Weekly project president

Every week, a club member is selected as project president and he does at least a couple of projects or initiatives in a day with the help of others. “We also do a wellness project daily, and our annual slogan is *Nammaal mudiyum* (We can). I had submitted to the club’s board in May 2024, the 52 weeks schedule, and thanks to members’ cooperation, we have done 730 service projects worth ₹9.5 crore, touching around one million lives,” he says with a smile of satisfaction. ■



# RID 3212 clubs work to save biodiversity

Team Rotary News

**A**s part of RID 3212's district project, *Saving Biodiversity*, RCs Sivakasi Town and Rajapalayam Super Kings joined hands to distribute eco-friendly cloth bags to devotees visiting the Lord Sundara Mahalinga Swamy Temple on Sathuragiri Mahalinga Hills, located on the Western Ghats near Srivilliputhur, Tamil Nadu. Virudhunagar district collector Sukhaputhra and Megamalai Tiger Reserve deputy director Devaraj Palanisamy inaugurated the project.

Each year, thousands of pilgrims visit the hill temple on Aadi Amavasya day. But they litter the pristine forest area with single-use plastic and other waste, thus polluting the land

and endangering the lives of wild animals as they consume such non-biodegradable waste thrown casually by devotees. "While distributing cloth bags, Rotarians urged the devotees not to litter the hills, and also removed the plastic litter and other discarded stuff piled up on the path to the temple," said Balamurugan, news coordinator of RID 3212. The district collector made a plea for protecting the environment, especially the forests and scenic hills, from pollution through plastic and other hazardous waste.

RID 3212 clubs have taken up diverse projects across the focus areas of Rotary, as directed by their DG Dhinesh Babu. RC Rajapalayam Super Kings have planted saplings at the

Government Arts College with club president Karthikeyan and college principal Saravanan leading the green-ing mission.

An eye check-up camp was held at Keezhpathalam village by RC Kuzhithurai in partnership with Dr Agarwal Eye Hospital, thus benefiting hundreds of elders who do not have access to medical care. Wheelchairs were donated to the Government Hospitals by RCs Yarn City Nagercoil and Srivilliputtur Town to facilitate easy mobility of patients between wards and departments. To mark International Plastic Free Day (May 25), members of RC Ramnad distributed cloth bags to the public and created awareness on the need to avoid single-use plastic in their lives.

Members of RC Virudhunagar hosted an awareness event for students against drug abuse at the Kamarajar Engineering College. A school student from an underprivileged family was given financial assistance during the installation of new office-bearers at the RC Golden City Nagercoil. ■



Cloth bags being distributed at the hill temple.



An eye check-up camp in progress.



A tree planting drive at a college.





# Table setting: West vs East

**TCA Srinivasa Raghavan**



Last month I had the rare privilege of being an involuntary participant, albeit a passive one, in an animated discussion between some ladies on a matter of cosmic importance, namely, table setting. It happened like this. Three of my wife's college friends came for lunch, or rather, stayed on for it, after an impromptu morning visit for a cup of coffee. When the food had been ordered, and my wife had instructed me to lay the table, one of the visiting ladies idly asked if the glasses I had fetched from the kitchen should be placed to the right or left of the plate. I was at a total loss. The glasses are for water, I said, so they will have to be to the left. Why, she asked. I said Indians eat with the fingers of their right hands and that it would be very messy and inconvenient to have the glass on the right. But, she said, the conventional way is to have it on the right. We argued a bit and finally I said ok, I will leave the glasses on the lazy Susan and you can help yourselves when you want to drink some water. This didn't go down well because, as my wife told me later, it was very rude. For the life of me I couldn't see why but, as usual, opted for discretion instead of valour. I did, however, google the rules for table setting.

It turned out to be quite an intricate thing. I had no idea it was so complicated. This is what Google said: "Forks are placed on the left, knives and spoons on the right, with utensils arranged from the outside in based on the order of use. Glasses are positioned above the knives, and the napkin can be placed to the left of the fork or on the plate".

The instructions were very detailed. The bread plate, or what we call quarter plate I think, has to be on the upper left of the main plate. The butter knife is placed on top of it, nowhere else. Then the forks, aah, the forks. The big one with which you eat is placed closest to the main plate and the salad fork to its left. Then come the knives. The dinner knife has to be the closest to the dinner plate with, mind it, the blade facing inwards. To its right comes the salad knife, whatever it is. The spoons are next. The soup spoon is to the right of the knives.

All done? Not at all. The way the glassware is kept is also important. Water glasses go above the knives. Wine glasses go to the right of the water glass. A meal isn't a meal without napkins, real ones, not those paper abominations. These cloth napkins can be placed to the left of the forks but never to the right. If you are less fastidious, the napkin can be left on the dinner plate. But only lazy people do that.

The rules of western style formal dining are crystal clear. But the thought struck me: what about an Indian style formal meal, especially if everyone is to sit on the floor in the traditional style and is served on a thali? That also seemed straightforward enough. There is no such thing as table setting because there is no table. In the south there are no plates, either. Food is served on banana leaves which is entirely eco-friendly.

Then an utterly dismaying thought came: when abroad, how do our diplomats serve a traditional Indian dinner? Dal, roti, rice and raita with knives, forks and spoons? Do they ask the guests to sit in a line on the floor? I think they should. ■



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