

Rotary News

India

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Dhanyavada District Endowment Matching Initiative

To empower **Rotary Districts in Zones 4, 5, 6, and 7** to create lasting impact through endowments dedicated to **Environment** (primary objective) and **Primary Education** (alternate objective)

**PROTECTING
NATURE,
PRESERVING
FUTURE**



Matching Contributions by
AKS Ravishankar Dakoju
DGE - RI District 3192

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- **Dollar-to-Dollar Matching**
Up to USD 50,000 (₹ equivalent) per District.
- **Sustainable Endowment Creation**
Named or pooled, following TRF policy.
- **District Recognition**
Naming rights retained by the donor and associated with the District.
- **Governance & Stewardship**
Fully compliant with TRF norms, ensuring transparency and impact.
- **Impact Reporting**
Annual reporting to maintain accountability and visibility.

Oversight Committee

To ensure stewardship and smooth execution, the following committee will oversee the initiative:

- **Chair** - PDG Suresh Hari – RI District 3192
- **Vice-Chair** - Vijay Tadimalla – RI District 3191
- **AKS Ravishankar Dakoju** – RI District 3192
- **Rtn. Neil Michael Joseph** – RI District 3191

Email: dakojuendowmatch@gmail.com



Supported by: RI Director KP Nagesh • RI Director M Muruganandam • TRF Trustee Bharat Pandya

Inside



12

Getting wings through spoken English



22

PolioPlus honour for PRIP Saboo



32

Rotary sparks cosmic curiosity



52

Transforming lives in Manipur



54

Mumbai's municipal schools taste e-learning




58

Anganwadis become happy learning spaces



72

A lifeline for children with neurological disorders

Rotary 

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Praise for Dakoju, *Rotary News*

I couldn't sleep in the early hours of the morning, so I did what I usually do when rest eludes me — I turned to reading. The article *Rooting for a Green and Gorgeous Planet* in your September issue, and how beautifully it has been written, caught my attention.

You have captured not only the scale of Ravishankar's environmental project but also the heart and spirit behind it. The way you wove together facts, context and human emotion brought the story alive and gave it the depth it truly deserves. It is not easy to write about a project of such magnitude without it sounding either too technical or too overwhelming, but you struck the perfect balance.

What impressed me most was how clearly the article conveyed the larger vision — that this is not just about planting trees, but about restoring ecosystems, reviving communities, and creating a legacy for generations to come. In doing so, you have also shone a light on the values of Rotary at its very best: foresight, generosity, and service that transforms.

Please accept my compliments on an excellent piece of writing. It does justice both to the cause and to the remarkable individual behind it.

Over the years, I have seen countless service projects, but what Ravishankar (Dakoju) has undertaken stands apart for its sheer scale and foresight. To dream of planting a crore saplings, to transform barren and



degraded land into fertile green spaces, and to restore lakes and bring back wildlife — these are not mere acts of service, they are acts of legacy. They will endure long after us, benefitting generations yet unborn.

What moves me most is the spirit with which this remarkable Rotarian gives — never for recognition or applause, but because he believes, deeply and completely, in leaving the world better than he found it. That is rare. That is extraordinary. He

is truly an environmentalist, a guardian of nature, an eco-champion whose work speaks louder than any words. His stewardship towards our planet is not only admirable, it is transformational.

Past RI President KR Ravindran

You know that I always enjoy reading *Rotary News* India, but allow me to especially congratulate you on the September issue. I was delighted to read that you and your fellow editors from the Asia-Pacific were able to experience OzHarvest when you were at a seminar, because that is indeed a vital and much celebrated charity down here. And as a life-long environmentalist, it was wonderful to read of the work that DGE Ravishankar Dakoju, RID 3191, is doing to make your part of the world greener and more sustainable. He and Paola are an inspiring couple and are certainly *Making a Difference*.

Past RI President Ian Riseley

Good interview with Prez Arezzo

It was an exceptionally good write-up on RI President Francesco Arezzo by Rasheeda Bhagat in the October issue. And it has given some food for thought. He appreciates the good work being done in India by Rotary in the spheres of education, medical facilities etc, and says such service done by the Rotarians here is commendable.

However, it is high time Rotary thinks out-of-the-box and works at the root cause which is the rising population in India. We have to do justice to our younger generation; how long are we going to meet basic requirements like education and health of our increasing numbers?

Strong awareness programmes for restricting our population growth should be the clarion call of Rotary now. Family planning should be the

key initiative which Rotary should undertake after its successful polio eradication campaign. Only then can our efforts bear fruit.

Radheshyam Modi
RC Akola — D 3030

The cover story on President Arezzo is exciting. Asked what musical instrument he plays, he says jokingly that he plays just the bell of the house! On Rotaractors, he mentions that we

LETTERS

can have more Rotaractors become Rotarians if we admire and understand each other and work together. We must ensure that they work with us in every project and should be involved much more than is happening today. I was happy to note that our president is both cerebral and witty and yet so easy to talk to as he wears his power lightly.

*K MK Murthy
RC Secunderabad — D 3150*

The photo of President Arezzo and his wife on the cover page, and the cover story with his family pictures were superb. Nowadays, the overall standard of *Rotary News* has improved a lot including the photos and the paper quality. Congrats to the entire team of Rotary New Trust.

RI President's message on "what community-led development looks like" was excellent. TRF trustee chair Holger Knaack has rightly said that in Rotary, "the friendship we make can create opportunities that transform lives for generations." Arezzo has pointed out that the quantum of service by Rotary in India is highest in the world.

Muthukumaran's article *End Polio show wows Arezzo* has come at the right time. Congrats to RCs Pune Hill Side and Pune Yuva for doing a clutch of community service projects in education, health and sanitation, and water conservation including providing solar energy to 42 schools and 300 poor households.

*Daniel Chittilappilly
RC Kaloor — D 3205*

RC Srikakulam, RID 3020, has transformed a compost yard of 1.3 acres into a well-managed park for the public and for the club to hold its weekly meetings in a natural environmental setting. This is a remarkable step to convert a compost into a usable park with all required features. It is indeed an exemplary step to boost Rotary's public image.

*Niranjan Kar
RC Bhubaneswar — D 3262*

A success formula

RID M Muruganandam in his Sept message has rightly urged each club to bring in six new members in a year. This way we can get additional members and cross the two lakh member mark by 2025–26 across all the four zones.

He has given a good formula to all club leaders which is the need-of-the-hour. Every club must hold an orientation programme for all new members by August every year, and assign a leadership role to each one in the new projects of their clubs. Once we follow this, we can also ensure their retention.

Each member can bring in a new member which will boost our membership. Vibrant club leaders will do wonders to Rotary. If we adopt such norms, the day is not far when we will meet great success, thanks to the innovative formula of our RI director.

*S Mohan
RC Madurai West — D 3000*

Thanks for the article 'Peace: not the silence of guns, but awakening of conscience' (Aug issue) by Adhik Kadam which has a clear message for all of us. We cannot be silent observers. He has also given valuable guidance for our role in the Kashmir Valley hit by fear and uncertainty. His work through orphanage care, mobile medical services and educational initiatives in collaboration with Rotary offers a healing touch and has kindled the awakening of the human spirit.

*Arun Deshpande
RC Pune Pristine — D 3131*

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On the cover: A participant of *Project Punch*, an initiative of RID 3212 to build English-speaking confidence among students.

Picture: Rasheeda Bhagat

Let us give with gratitude



This November, as we celebrate The Rotary Foundation, I invite you to consider not only what we give but why we give. The Foundation is more than a fund for projects. It is the beating heart of our promise that service, rooted in trust and friendship, can create lasting change.

Our Action Plan calls us to increase our impact, and the Foundation is how we make this vision real. Since 1988, Rotary and our partners have immunised nearly three billion children against polio. We have committed more than \$2.6 billion to this cause, and last year alone we directed \$146 million toward the final push for eradication. These numbers are significant, but the true impact is not in statistics — it is in the lives of children who will never again fear polio. It is in the hope restored to families and the peace built in communities once defined by disease.

But polio is only one story among many. Each year, Rotary Peace Centers train new generations of leaders who will transform conflict into dialogue and division into understanding. In 2023–24, nearly 100 new fellows began their studies, continuing a legacy of more than 1,800 peacebuilders from over 140 countries. When we invest in them, we are planting seeds of peace that will bear fruit for decades to come.

The Foundation also touches lives through district and global grants, supporting projects large and small. A clean water well for a rural community, scholarships for young professionals, medical care in the wake of disaster — these are not temporary gestures, but steps toward dignity, resilience and opportunity. This is how Rotary service becomes lasting impact. And when natural disasters strike, our Foundation allows Rotary to act quickly with disaster response grants.

Our Foundation is not about what we can do alone but what we can do together. Each contribution, no matter its size, joins with others to create a collective act of faith in humanity and in the future.

The last mile of any great journey is always the hardest. We see this in our final steps toward ending polio, in our work for peace, and in every project that seeks to lift people out of despair. Yet every time we give, we declare that our work will continue regardless of the challenge.

This November, let us give with gratitude, with joy, and with hope. Through our Foundation, we *Unite for Good*, and in doing so, we leave behind not only projects but a legacy of peace, trust and *Service Above Self*.

Francesco Arezzo

President, Rotary International



Making dreams come true...

Whenever I see bright-eyed, cheerful young girls wearing colourful ribbons in their neatly tied up hair in villages and small towns, it gives me a high and brings a smile to my face. And if those girls are wearing uniforms and riding bicycles to school, the sight brings a level of joy that I can't translate into words. It sketches a future vision of an India which is vibrant, prosperous, equitable, and where one half of its population is getting an opportunity at education. It may not be in the best of schools, but any chance to get away from the drudgery of household chores at a tender age, just because you're a girl, and sit in a classroom, has to be celebrated.

As ISRO (Indian Space Research Organisation) chief V Narayanan reiterated at the recent Lead25 Conclave in Chennai, our education system, even in villages and local languages, is not bad. He himself had studied in a Tamil medium school in a small place in Tamil Nadu, and come this far... to lead a world-class space research organisation as ISRO. Sridhar Vembu of Zoho fame, currently being celebrated in the social media for developing the *Arattai* app, which hopes to become a made-in-India alternative to global messaging apps like WhatsApp, never went to a fancy school. He told me in an interview in 2013 that he was the son of a stenographer, studied in Tamil medium, and was the first from his school to get into IIT Madras.

Returning to schoolgirls, I came away with my batteries recharged from a trip to a school in the small town of Authoor, near Tuticorin (Thoothukudi) in Tamil Nadu, where a session of the popular *Project Punch*, initiated by PDG

V R Muthu, RID 3212, was taking place. Here both boys and girls are trained in spoken English; I attended a valedictory session and interacted with girls who had attended the three-day course. As they came forward to speak in English, what grabbed my attention was their self-confidence; they might be rattling away something they had learnt by-heart, the grammar and the tense might not have been perfect, but they were able to hold a simple conversation in English. Those of us privileged enough to get educated in the best missionary schools and colleges in India, or other plush private educational institutions affordable only to the elite, can barely understand the aspirations of parents that their children should be able to speak in English. As PDG Muthu points out in the cover story (Pg 12) schoolchildren even in the smaller towns of Tamil Nadu know English, and can write in it, "but their skills in spoken English are either poor or non-existent". As parents consider it a matter of prestige that their children be able to converse in English, he launched this project. His company Idhayam Oils sponsors the sessions conducted by professional trainers and the transformation this training brings in the children's English-speaking capability is striking.

The project covers both boys and girls, and is making waves across Tamil Nadu, and requests have come in for replication in other states too. Such Rotary service projects that give flight to the dreams of the young need to be celebrated... and we have done just that in this issue!


Rasheeda Bhagat

PRID Venkatesh named TRF Trustee for 2026–2030

PRID AS Venkatesh will serve as a trustee of The Rotary Foundation for the term 2026–30. TRF trustees are chosen by the president-elect and elected by the Board in the year before they are to take office.

Venkatesh will begin his four-year term on July 1, 2026. He held office as RI director during 2021–23, and as RI

treasurer in 2022–23. He made history as the first Indian to serve as moderator at the 2025 Rotary International Assembly in Orlando, Florida.

Venkatesh, a member of RC Chennai Mambalam, RID 3234, served as district governor of the then RID 3230 in 2007–08. His wife Vinita is a member of RC Chennai Anchorage. ■



PRID AS Venkatesh

2026 Convention

A first-timer's guide

When you arrive in Taipei for your first Rotary International Convention, you might feel momentarily overwhelmed — in a good way — among thousands of members from all corners of the world.

“Entering the convention, we’re all bright-eyed. We’re all looking around like, Whoa, there are so many people,” said Charvi Shah, of the Rotaract Club of the University of Calgary, at her first convention, in her Canadian hometown this year. She was excited to learn from younger members leading breakout sessions and to greet in person the global Rotaractors she networked with over the years — a group met up at a Calgary arcade one night.

People often head first to the House of Friendship to explore festive displays and interactives. It’s the convention’s Main Street, and a friend is waiting on every corner. Learn about clubs’ projects, partner organisations’ offerings, helpful tools from Rotary staff, and many options to pursue your passion.



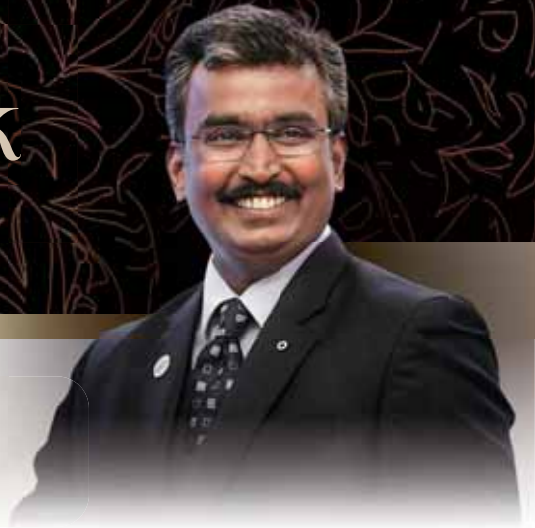
Learn more and register at convention.rotary.org.

The event that many members say gave them their first sense of their place in Rotary’s gigantic family is the opening ceremony and its flag ceremony tradition when each Rotary country has its moment onstage. Cheer your loudest!

To learn what the convention is like, ask a member who’s been. Many first-timers say they didn’t want to miss out after friends’ enthusiastic descriptions from Singapore, Melbourne, Houston, and on and on from their years of conventions.

In Calgary at his first convention, Anthony Agama, of the Rotary Club of Ngora in Uganda, registered right away for the next one, June 13–17 in Taipei. “You get to be part of a congregation of like-minded people who treasure change in their communities,” he says. “The Rotary Convention is a must-attend for everyone to celebrate love — love for humanity, love for progress, love for service.” ■

Director speak



Say 'Yes' to TRF... Keep giving!

Ever since I joined Rotary, I've been continuously inspired — watching hope, dignity and peace reach those who need it most. Rotary is a system-driven organisation that has grown stronger and taller over the last century, spanning over 200 countries.

Being born in Tamil Nadu, I grew up with Avvaiyar's timeless words — *Aram Seya Virumbu*, "Desire to do good deeds." This echoes with TRF's motto *Doing Good in the World*. Our Foundation's goodwill, exemplary stewardship and high ranking among global charities have made us one of the world's most trusted organisations. I'm reminded time and again to give, and keep giving consistently, to our Foundation.

The Rotary Foundation offers donors a range of contribution options: you can choose to give through Annual Fund, Endowments, the End Polio initiative, or CSR funding — each designed to empower Rotarians and communities uniquely.

Think of the Annual Fund as a collective pool. Every gift, large or small, is invested for three years. Your investment then returns to your district as grant money, directly supporting vital projects in your community.

Endowment Fund giving is all about building Rotary's future. When you contribute or leave a bequest, that money is invested forever. The earnings help support Rotary projects and programmes for generations to come, guaranteeing that as Rotarians, our legacy of service will never fade away.

CSR funds are the buzzword in India, offering enormous potential for scaling up Rotary's reach. Embracing CSR partnerships will help us touch countless lives, cross new frontiers, and push the boundaries of what Rotary can achieve.

Just as the proverb says, "You may know by a handful, the whole," Rotary's End Polio initiative, launched in 1979, reflects

the organisation's phenomenal work and now stands on the edge of historic success.

Each of these giving modes helps Rotary fulfil its promise of advancing world understanding, goodwill, and peace by improving health, education, and alleviating poverty.

I have vivid memories of my time as a volunteer during a National Polio Immunisation Day. I crossed a canal in Tondamanpatti, a hamlet near Trichy, to bring vaccines to 150 children. That day, I felt the true power of Rotary in every drop of help delivered.

That experience inspired me to open my TRF account with a modest \$100 contribution. As a young Rotaractor, my commitment grew, and I eventually became a Major Donor. Today, having moved to the Arch Klumph Society Members' second circle, TRF, being the lifeline of Rotary, has become an integral part of my philosophy: to keep giving consistently so we can continue creating lasting change through our service.

The End Polio initiative is a cause very close to my heart. As a consistent contributor to the Polio Fund, I share with fellow donors the vision of a polio-free world — achieved not only through our contributions but also through steadfast advocacy and sustained awareness efforts.

"Doing Good in the World" isn't just our motto; it's a timeless invitation. Let's practise it with all our heart and inspire those who come after us to keep giving to The Rotary Foundation. Now, it's your turn to begin.

Together, let's keep giving and say 'Yes' to TRF!

M Muruganandam

RI Director, 2025–27

Message from TRF Trustee Chair



Undeniable impact

Many of you will remember the theme I chose as RI president in 2020–21: *Rotary Opens Opportunities*. I remain passionate about these opportunities and I know you do too.

As we celebrate Rotary Foundation Month, let's reflect on the many ways the Foundation makes the world better. Rotary is extraordinary, and the Foundation amplifies that impact.

I encourage all of you — in Rotary and Rotaract clubs — to discover this for yourselves. Go beyond the local level and engage with The Rotary Foundation globally. You can partner with clubs to boost literacy in Guatemala or fight malaria

in Zambia. You can make a difference with clean water initiatives reaching millions or maternal health programs saving lives across continents.

It doesn't stop there. Through major impact projects like Programs of Scale, we're pursuing bold initiatives that push Rotary's potential to create lasting change further. Greater impact and greater visibility: this is our path forward.

Many of you have asked about the status of Rotary's biggest impact project in history — our long-term commitment to polio eradication. Recently, RI President Francesco Arezzo, International PolioPlus Committee Chair Michael McGovern, and I met with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and the army leadership of Pakistan. Everyone is fully committed to eradicating polio once and for all. We were absolutely convinced by the work of Pakistan's emergency operations centres, where experts plan and coordinate vaccination.

While some governments scale back support for polio eradication, Rotary remains committed to its pledge to raise \$50 million again this year. This meeting reaffirmed our unwavering commitment to finishing this historic mission.

What excites me most is seeing how each of us can make a real difference through our Foundation. I urge everyone — especially newcomers to Rotary — to explore these opportunities. Find your passion among our areas of focus and discover projects to support, especially through global grants.

We members fund, sustain and deliver these projects. That's why the Foundation consistently earns top ratings from Charity Navigator. If you don't want to lead a project, you can still be part of the Foundation through annual support.

Our fundraising goal for 2025–26 is an ambitious \$500 million. Your gift this month will create countless opportunities.

We have incredible opportunities before us, and the impact we achieve together through The Rotary Foundation is exponential. The proof is undeniable.

Holger Knaack
TRF Trustee Chair

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Magazine

Message from TRF Trustee



Give to TRF this festival season

In an uncertain world, The Rotary Foundation stands as a beacon of hope. Hope for mitigating suffering, healing wounds and hope for peace and goodwill *in our world*.

November is TRF month; a time for learning and dedication to the Foundation and its many worthwhile programmes. A time to focus our attention on the pillar which gives real internationality to Rotary — TRF.

From a tiny beginning in the mind and heart of Arch Klumph as an Endowment Fund “for doing good in the world”; today it has evolved into one of

the foremost agencies of humanitarian service — a Foundation which is respected, transparent, increasingly nimble and one of the best managed foundations in the world, which has been given the highest Four Star Rating by Charity Navigator on multiple parameters ranging from efficiency to transparency for 16 years in a row.

Through the various programmes and projects, TRF is truly improving lives and transforming communities. The impact of global grants happens across the world and district grants allow us to meet local needs. And we are closer than ever to a Polio-free world. All this depends on our support to TRF. It is important that we support all 3 funds.

Our support to the Annual Fund today helps us to do global grants tomorrow; Endowment fund support ensures a bright future for TRF. And it is important to support our End Polio Now Fund. Join the PolioPlus Society in your district and engage all members in this historic moment when we are so close to ending polio forever. And remember, the Gates Foundation continues to amplify Rotary’s donations to polio eradication with a 2-to-1 match for every dollar.

The University of Notre Dame’s Science of Generosity Project defines generosity as “the virtue of giving good things to others freely and abundantly.” When we think deeply about this definition, three parts stand out clearly. Generosity is giving good things, freely and abundantly. That’s what we do when we give to TRF. We give good things — our time, talent and our treasure to fund the various programmes of TRF that change lives close to our homes and across the world.

As we celebrate Diwali, the Festival of Lights and look forward to Christmas, the Festival of Joy, let us continue investing in TRF to keep doing good in the world.

Bharat Pandya
TRF Trustee

Getting wings through spoken English

Rasheeda Bhagat

It is with a lot of confidence that Koshika Mariappan, a Class 11 student of S Shunmugasundara Nadar Matriculation Higher Secondary School, Authoor, near Thoothukudi (Tuticorin) in Tamil Nadu, holds a conversation with me in simple English. One would expect her to have basic skills in spoken English, considering she is studying in English medium. But the problem, points out PDG VR Muthu, RI District 3212, is that “while students, even in the smaller towns of Tamil Nadu know and understand English, they cannot speak in English, because they always communicate in Tamil with friends and family. All of them can write beautifully in English, but their skills in spoken English are either poor or non-existent.”

But the aspiration of almost all parents in these smaller towns, and even villages, is that their children should be able to speak English, as English-speaking capability is a matter of prestige in most places. So when he was elected as governor, he felt that among the community welfare projects undertaken during his tenure, there should be one programme to fulfill this aspiration of parents on spoken English skills.





To do this he launched *Project Punch*, a three-day programme which was initially meant for the students training to be teachers in B Ed colleges in his district. “I thought that if the teachers could speak good English, they would impart this skill to their students in a much more effective way,” he says, as we drive from the Tuticorin airport to the school in Authoor, where I want to see for myself how confidently the schoolgirls, who were finishing the third day of the 109th session of *Project Punch*, could hold a short conversation in simple English.

There was such enthusiasm and demand for this programme, that the first session was held for B Ed students in Dec 2021, a good six months before he took over as DG in July 2022. It picked up momentum and on popular demand it was continued beyond his year as governor. By Sep 15, 2025, *Project Punch* had held **130 training programmes** benefitting **14,400 participants** across **91 institutions**, with support from 36 Rotary clubs. Within RID 3212 alone, 75 training sessions have helped over 7,500 youngsters shed their fear of speaking in English and



Students trained under *Project Punch* deliver speeches in English; some of them win prizes.

Bottom right: PDG V R Muthu with students in a classroom.





gain confidence as they try their hand at spoken English. The project has gone beyond RID 3212, to the rest of Tamil Nadu, reaching 6,400 beneficiaries, and two sessions have been held outside Tamil Nadu. I was witness to a conversation where a Rotarian in Odisha wanted to take the project to his State.

Apart from B Ed colleges, *Project Punch* has been held in higher secondary schools, arts and science, and nursing colleges, and has been held also for qualified nurses and hoteliers.

While it is sponsored by PDG Muthu's company Idhayam Edible Oils, and is supported by RC Virudhunagar (RID 3212), Muthu's home club, it is dedicated to the memory of Prof Panchanathan from Tiruchi, who was

regarded as a 'maha guru' by several Rotarians. The training sessions are conducted by Beehive Communication Club, a training organisation which specialises in communicative English, public speaking and storytelling, and was founded by A Shyamraj, a member of RC Virudhunagar, an educator and communications expert.

After completing this course, the best students are given an invaluable learning opportunity beyond the classroom, when factory visits to Idhayam Oils, India's largest manufacturer of sesame oil, are organised for them. Here they get to see how edible oil is produced and interact with PDG Muthu, who shares with them his views on Rotary, business and success. Till now, 34 such factory visits have been conducted for 1,367 students.

Returning to Koshika, who steps forth with a smile to hold a conversation with me, when we visit her classroom, she enunciates clearly that her "father works in a private company as an admin manager and my mother is a housewife."

RID 3212 DG
J Dhinesh Babu, PDG

Why Idhayam Oil supports *Project Punch*!

PDG V R Muthu's passion for *Project Punch* is evident as he explains the diverse places where he has sponsored this project, beyond schools and colleges. He says that Beehive Communication Club caters to various corporates, schools and colleges "where trained teachers are sent for a fee. I approached Shyamraj and proposed a three-day programme for B Ed colleges, because if the graduating teachers cannot speak proper English, what are they going to reach the students?"

He began with his own city and his club at Virudhunagar, "but when I became DG, my geography extended to all the seven revenue districts of RID 3212... and the programme expanded there. That is the power and magic of Rotary," says Muthu.

He adds, "After I finished my governorship, I simply couldn't bring myself to stop this programme which was giving so much happiness and confidence to young boys and girls to speak in English, which is the aspiration of so many young Indians today."

He says the transformation that *Project Punch* brings about in three days is "simply unbelievable. On the first day, most of them are not able to talk any English; they are not even able to come to the dais as they have stage fright. But in three days, at the end of



the training sessions, you can see them confidently speaking in English. They might make grammatical errors, but they speak in English, and that is the objective of the programme."

On the fees charged per student, he says: "Zero. To some extent, some funding is supported by the Rotary clubs associated with the programme. But the main sponsor is my company. This is a public image building exercise for our brand... our *til* and *moong-phalli* oils! Our hoardings are displayed at the venue where these programmes are held."

With a mischievous smile, Muthu relates the story of his wife wryly asking him the logic behind his sponsoring a *Project Punch* session for the nursing staff at the Rela Hospital (Rela Institute of Liver Disease & Transplantation) in Chennai, a renowned centre for liver transplants. "The place looks like a palace and gets patients

from all over South Asia and has hundreds of nurses, many of whom can't speak English or Hindi, which is required. So they requested us to do a training session; we did two, and they have asked us for more sessions."

When he proudly related this to his wife, she asked a direct question: 'Who is spending the money?' "When she said why should you spend for such a big and popular hospital, I told her don't you think it's a matter of pride and privilege that we can support among the richest people in Tamil Nadu through our spoken English programme?"

Similarly, Chef Venkatesh Bhat, the culinary expert and entrepreneur, well known for his TV cookery shows and viral YouTube channel, *Venkatesh Bhat's Idhayam Thotta Samayal*, requested Muthu for his support to train his staff in spoken English, "and we conducted one

session at his Accord Metropolitan Hotel in Chennai free of cost."

For Muthu, this project has created some unforgettable moments. He recalls how Radhakrishnan, a member of RC Spic Nagar, who was involved in organising more than 25 of these training sessions, was reunited with a student who had once helped him during an accident — "an unexpected and moving encounter that touched everyone present. Also at the Mohamed Sathak Hamid College of Arts and Science, Ramanathapuram, the principal was moved to tears after witnessing her students' impressive performances, admitting that she discovered their hidden potential only through *Project Punch*," he adds.

The feedback from the institutions where this programme was held is touching, adds Muthu. S Prakash, principal of the Thiagarajar College of Preceptors, Madurai, wrote to say "this was an enriching and transformative experience for our student teachers. The well-structured sessions, engaging activities, and expert guidance helped them to enhance their communication skills and confidence in spoken English. Four other college principals from Tuticorin, Sivakasi, and Ramanathapuram wrote to say their job placements had gone up by 200 per cent, thanks to this special training."



Students hold a group discussion in English on what movie to watch.

Muthu, Shyamraj and I go around a few classrooms in this school on the final day. So did the course help her, I ask. "Oh yes," Koshika says enthusiastically, adding, "I had great fear to talk in front of a crowd but now I feel very confident to speak in front of people... I feel very happy that this 3-days training programme is very helpful to me to speak freely in English and communicate with others in English."

The conversation continues; there might be a slight mixing up of the tenses — Wren and Martin

The aspiration of parents in smaller towns, and even villages, is that their children should be able to speak English, as English-speaking capability is a matter of prestige in most places.

(whose book on English Grammar and Composition I used to abhor in high school, and that too from the privileged background of a reputed Convent school in Madras) might have frowned, but in a little town beyond Tuticorin, Koshika's ability to speak English so easily and effortlessly will surely be the envy of many a girls and their parents!

After completing Class 12, what are her plans? "I want to complete MBBS and then do surgery," is her chirpy response.

Why surgery? "Because I am interested in studying different parts of the body and cure the diseases that poor people suffer from. I need to serve poor people with Ayurveda and Siddha medicines." In conclusion, she adds with a flourish: "I can speak properly and I think I am speaking very well. I don't fear speaking in front of others."

Her classmate Muthu Abhinaya has only one sentence to offer when asked why she wants to learn English. "Because I want to speak in English." Sangeetha Udayakumar, whose father works as a hotel

manager in Abu Dhabi, next steps up to say confidently, “I have learnt how to speak to people without any fear. And how to keep eye contact with everyone and stand in the right position while speaking to people.” Her future plans? “I want to become a psychiatrist.”

We go to other classes and bright-eyed, cheerful and confident girls step forward to speak to me in English. Varalakshmi found the classes “very useful. Before this, I could not speak in English.” She needs a translation in Tamil when asked about her future dream. The answer is short, but confident: “Collector”.

Another girl, Muthusree, wants to “become a veterinary doctor, because I love animals.”

I invite four girls for a group discussion in English on the

A college principal was moved to tears after witnessing her students' impressive performances, admitting that she discovered their hidden potential only through Project Punch.

movie they want to watch that evening. While two girls vote for a Tamil movie, the other two prefer an English film, fetching the comment: “It is easy to follow the dialogue and plot in Tamil movies; English movies take more time and effort to understand”. But one girl in the other group makes this point: “It’s better to watch English films and get used to their dialogues,

because when you ever take international flights, you will have to communicate with the flight crew.” Touché.

So who is their favourite hero in Tamil films? No prizes for guessing... it is Vijay. In English, it is Johnson. I have no clue which Johnson, so we leave it at that. Somebody whispers, he is associated with rock music. Their favourite genres are, interestingly, horror and humour!

I next ask a question I love asking while talking to adolescent girls; their views on marriage and dowry! At first there is hesitation, but then a couple of girls come forward to say explicitly that they will not bow down to pressure from their parents for early marriage. “I will first finish my studies, get a job and take care of my parents.” There are nods and a chorus of

Project chair and communications expert A Shyamraj (L), DG J Dhinesh Babu (seated front row), PDG Muthu (seated, last row) and RC SPIC Nagar president T Ponnuchami with students.



voices saying they want to support their parents after completing their education and think of marriage only after that. What remains unspoken but is definitely in the air is the great Indian yearning for sons, and the determination of daughters to change the paradigm! There is a vehement ‘nay’ to dowry!

Shyamraj explains that over three days the students had undergone six structured steps integrated into the training programme to slowly gain courage and confidence to speak in English. PDG Muthu adds that the programme has been designed in such a way that the participants get “the fundamentals to start their journey



Six steps of *Project Punch*

- **Day 1** Orientation on skill building. Participants are divided into three batches and introduced to functional English, effective communication and impactful presentations.
- **Day 2** Speech session in the Toastmasters style, with every participant receiving peer and master evaluation, followed by immediate awards and recognition. The afternoon session provides advanced English lessons and personalised improvement tips.
- **Day 3** Another round of speeches, encouraging participants to outperform their previous attempts by applying their learning. In the final session, the best performers from each batch compete in a contest and finally 45 awards are given and all participants are urged to continue honing their skills.
- **Follow-up:** Close coordination is maintained with every institution, and students are given further opportunities by being invited to conferences and job fairs, to ensure their growth. Educational videos on communicative English are regularly shared to sustain learning momentum. Several institutions have reported a significant increase in student placements after participating in the programme.

in English speaking and the top performers receive special attention and booster sessions for further improvement”.

Every *Project Punch* session begins with an introductory talk by Shyamraj, project chair, who introduces the six steps integral to making a speech. These are interest,

search, practice, implementation, failure and success. The students are split in three batches. A crucial aspect of this project is the “Toastmasters’ skeleton in speaking, which is considered the world’s best to practise public speaking in English. The participants are exposed to that exercise and are involved in peer learning and evaluation. Those hesitating to speak initially, advance to the level of evaluating others’ speeches by the end of the programme.”

As I hear some of the students deliver their speeches at the valedictory session, organised by RCs SPIC Nagar and Virudhunagar, some with ease and confidence and one or two stumbling a little but soon picking up, I marvel at the

By Sep 15, 2025, *Project Punch* had held **130 training programmes** benefitting **14,400 participants** across **91 institutions**, with support from **36 Rotary clubs**.



RC Virudhunagar president M Pethanachi, DG Dhinesh Babu and PDG Muthu with students in a classroom.

transformation a mere three-day course can bring about. But behind this confidence and success is the carefully designed and crafted programme by expert trainers, led by Esthel, who guides, corrects and

applauds the girls, giving a brief evaluation of what they did well, where they faltered and how they can improve. She urges them to continue speaking in English moving forward.

Both girls and boys have been beneficiaries of *Project Punch*; I ask Shyamraj, who does better. With a smile he says, “The answer is very easy and you know it — girls of course. And the reason is that the girls take everything taught to them very seriously, take in the lessons and implement the trainers’ instructions. However, the boys grasp the whole thing in their heads, and when the situation arises, they apply it, not necessarily at the platform that is given to them here.”

Is he saying they are lazy, cocky or overconfident, I prod him. “A little of all, depending on the person, so for the boys we change our approach a little and make it a group activity.”

Pictures by Rasheeda Bhagat and from Project Punch Library

Designed by N Krishnamurthy



Shyamraj, member of RC Virudhunagar, imparting English-speaking skills to students.



RI Director M Muruganandam with (from L) RI General Secretary John Hewko, RI President Francesco Arezzo and Chuck Corrigan, Chair of the Paul & Jean Harris Home Foundation.

MMM contributes \$250,000 for renovating Paul & Jean Harris home

Team Rotary News



RI President Elect Olayinka Babalola, RID Muruganandam and President Arezzo.



President Arezzo fixes a pin on RID Muruganandam's coat lapel.

At a special dinner hosted in Evanston by Rotary International and the Paul and Jean Harris Home Foundation on Oct 13, RI Director M Muruganandam was recognised for his contribution of \$ 250,000 towards the renovation of the home of Rotary's founder Paul Harris and his spouse Jean in Chicago. For over a hundred years now, this home is revered as a landmark that symbolises Rotary's roots and enduring values.

The Paul & Jean Harris Legacy Society honours "the generosity and service of members who seek to preserve the iconic home and legacy of Rotary's founder and his wife. At the meeting attended by RI President Francesco Azzero, President Elect Olayinka Babalola, RI General Secretary John Hewko and several RI Board members, Muruganandam was honoured as the first member of the Paul & Jean Harris Legacy Society, who has contributed \$250,000 for the renovation of the Paul Harris home. This Legacy Society is an exclusive circle limited to 23 contributors people who will contribute this amount for this mission. ■

PolioPlus honour for PRIP Saboo

Rasheeda Bhagat

At a glittering event in Chandigarh, The Rotary Foundation trustee chair Holger Knaack conferred Rotary's International PolioPlus Service Award to Past RI President Rajendra Saboo, who is widely accepted as a pioneer in India's journey to become polio-free.

The citation said the award was being given to Saboo in "recognition of his significant active personal service towards the goal of polio eradication... and the pioneering role you have played in Rotary's polio eradication efforts. Your remarkable vision, leadership, and steadfast commitment have contributed greatly to the significant progress we have made toward achieving a Polio-free world. Your personal service on behalf of children worldwide will be treasured always."

Saboo has been one of the longest-serving members of Rotary's International PolioPlus Committee, providing guidance and inspiring generations of Rotarians to believe that service, when rooted in conviction, can truly change the course of history. Tirelessly, he bridged the gap between governments, medical institutions, volunteers, and Rotarians — ensuring

that every child had the chance to live free from the shadow of polio. He was equally influential in the fight against polio even outside India.

Conveying his gratitude to Saboo on behalf of TRF and the entire Rotary world, Knaack presented the citation and a crystal to the veteran Indian Rotary leader and said right from the inception of Rotary's efforts to eradicate polio from the world in the early 1980s when he was a director on the RI Board (1981–83), the past president was "actively involved in this task. He was instrumental in the initiation of the National Immunisation Day for nationwide polio immunisation of children below 5. He had also worked relentlessly in the transportation of the polio vaccine from overseas and for the maintenance of the crucial cold chain for the vaccine through Rotary volunteers and government health officials and public health workers."

The trustee chair said that Saboo had not confined himself merely to India, and had also reached out to several African countries, where he led medical missions in which Indian surgeons performed various types of operations, including orthopaedic correctional surgery on polio victims.

He added that unfortunately, as RI President he could not visit



Right: Susanne, Trustee Chair Knaack, PRID Ashok Mahajan and Trustee Pandya with Rajashree Birla, Chairperson of the Aditya Birla Centre for Community Initiatives and Rural Development, in Mumbai.

TRF Trustee Chair Holger Knaack presenting the PolioPlus Service Award to PRIP Rajendra Saboo in Chandigarh. From L: Susanne Knaack, Usha Saboo, TRF Trustee Bharat Pandya and RID 3080 DG Ravi Prakash are also present.



Chandigarh or India due to the Covid pandemic, but from the various interactions he had with Saboo at different RI Conventions and other events, he had always held the Indian Rotary leader in great esteem; “he has been a role model for so many people.”

TRF trustee Bharat Pandya recalled Saboo’s leadership in the polio vaccination drive, the co-ordination and cooperation between Rotarians and the government in India and the hard work put in by all of them which had resulted in India becoming polio free much earlier than the world had expected.

RI District 3080 DG Ravi Parakash said Saboo and his wife Usha’s contribution to the Rotary world has been immense not only in spearheading the movement to eradicate polio from India and the world, but also in establishing Peace Centres in the world and taking medical missions to

Clockwise from right: Trustee Chair Knaack and Susanne, and Trustee Pandya being given a warm welcome in Tirupur, Tamil Nadu; **From L:** RI Director M Muruganandam, Trustee Pandya, Susanne, Trustee Chair Knaack, PRIP KR Ravindran, Vanathy, Amudhapriya and DG B Dhanasekar, PDGs A Karthikeyan, VR Muthu and K Vallabhdas, and DGE Ravishankar Dakoju in Tirupur; PRIP Saboo, Usha, Susanne and Trustee Chair Knaack; Trustee Chair Knaack and Susanne with PRIP Saboo, DG Ravi Prakash, PDGs Manmohan Singh and Praveen Goyal, and members of RC Chandigarh.



Africa and within India. RRFC N Subramanian, Susanne Knaack and Usha Saboo attended the event where AKS members and major donors were recognised by the Trustee Chair.

While visiting Mumbai, trustee chair Holger Knaack and his wife Susanne, accompanied by TRF trustee Bharat Pandya and PRID Ashok Mahajan, called upon Chairperson of the Aditya Birla Centre for Community Initiatives and Rural Development Rajashree Birla at her office.

During the meeting, Knaack conveyed heartfelt gratitude to her on behalf of The Rotary Foundation and shared updates about the newly established Rotary Peace Center in Pune.

On her part, Rajashree expressed her concern on the challenges in polio eradication efforts in Pakistan, to which the trustee chair responded with cautious optimism about improvements on the ground.

Mahajan, who facilitated the meeting, said it lasted about 90



minutes, and discussion included wide-ranging topics of global developments, including the current situation in the US and other general matters of mutual interest.

At a mega TRF/CSR multi district conclave hosted in Tirupur by RC Tirupur, RI district 3203, trustee chair Knaack thanked and

recognised TRF donors ranging from Arch Klumph Society members, Endowment donors, Major Donors to Annual Fund Challenge achievers. He said every dollar donated to TRF was important as it played a “vital role in advancing Rotary’s mission of service”.

Amidst applause, he praised RID 3203 DG Dhanasekar’s exceptional leadership, which had led to this Rotary district being the only district in Zone 5 to achieve the



TRF Challenge. Special recognition was given to RC Pollachi for the members' individual contribution of \$25 to TRF, earning them the Early Achiever Award in the Annual Fund Challenge.

AKS members NSV Arumugam and Gnanasekaran presented the endowment cheque to the Trustee Chair.

Knaack appreciated the involvement and participation of the Rotaractors in the district's service

and other activities. This seamless cooperation between Rotary and Rotaract was a powerful example of how teamwork amplifies impact. He applauded the human formation of the peace symbol by the Rotarians and Rotaractors of RID 3203, which represented TRF's enduring commitment to world peace.

RI director M Muruganandan and TRF trustee Bharat Pandya addressed the meeting and congratulated the Rotarians in the

district for their commitment to The Rotary Foundation and what it stands for. Past RI President KR Ravindran and Vanathy and Susanne Knaack participated in the meet, which was also attended by AKS members A Karthikeyan EMGA - Zone 5, VR Muthu EPNC - Zone 5, PDG J Sridhar, ARRFC, Ravishankar Dakoju, DGE, RID 3192 and RID 2982 DG MD Sivasundaram. The host club was RC Tirupur. ■

A record-breaking Rotary club chartered in Tiruchirapalli

Jaishree



RI Director M Muruganandam presents the gavel to the charter president R Vijayalayan. DG J Karthik (L) and club secretary A Karthikeyan (R) are also present.

Can you imagine a Rotary club being born with 415 members on the day of its charter? That's exactly what happened this July in Tiruchirapalli, when the Rotary Club of Tiruchirapalli Success, RID 3000, made history with an unprecedented start. The club's impressive roster includes a cross-section of society — 105 women Rotarians, 25 doctors, 70 engineers, 40 government school teachers and 35 government employees.

Talking about how the feat was achieved, DG J Karthik traces the story to Vijayalayan, a past

president of RC Tiruchirapalli Phoenix. "He was inspired when RC Chennai Icons (RID 3233) was chartered with 225 members and decided to break that record by starting a new club with even more." He urged each of his 10 Rotarian friends to identify 30 prospective members, and circulated short videos showcasing Rotary's impact in communities. The response was overwhelming. "Soon, several people wanted to be part of Rotary. The rest, as they say, is history," smiles Karthik.

In July, the new club was officially chartered with 415

members, with Vijayalayan as the charter president. He, along with 15 members from his former club, stepped out to launch the new club. "We are also chartering a Rotaract club next week with 555 members. It is called the Rotaract Club of Vikas College of Arts and Science," says Vijayalayan.

RC Tiruchirapalli Success hit the ground running. Every Monday, the club conducts mock examinations for civil service and bank job aspirants. "We also organise coaching sessions for students aiming for IAS, IFS, railways and banking jobs. These

weekly tests help remove exam fear and improve their writing speed,” he explains.

The club has also adopted the Narikurava community living in Devarayaneri near Trichy. Traditionally bead sellers, the community has struggled with poverty and lack of education. “We provide them monthly groceries and nutritional supplements, and motivate parents to send their children to school by assuring support for their educational needs,” he says. Thanks to this initiative, 15 Narikurava children now attend school, proudly wearing new uniforms and shoes provided by the club. The Rotarians are also sponsoring college education for six girls and a boy from the village.

To sustain the interest of the large membership base, the president is organising orientation seminars led by past district



Girls from the Narikurava tribe enrolled in a college by the club.

governors. “We identify our members’ interests and align them with club activities. Doctors lead medical camps, teachers assist in education projects, and women Rotarians take the lead in community welfare programmes. Everyone feels involved and valued,” says Vijayalayan.

At the club’s installation on July 20, RI director M Muruganandam lauded the district leadership and charter members for their trendsetting effort. He urged them to actively participate in service projects and to use Rotary as a platform for personal growth and leadership development. ■

Rotary revives the Langdi game

Team Rotary News

Rajasthan deputy CM Diya Kumari flagged off the traditional Indian game, Langdi in Jodhpur which saw a participation of 680 youngsters, thus entering the Asia Book of Records and India Book of Records.

RC Jodhpur Sanskar, RID 3053, led by its president Vibha Bhoot, organised this heritage game, at the Railway Stadium and it was attended by DG Nisha

Shekhawat, sports minister K K Vishnoi, AG Kalpana Chouhan and other district leaders. “The Langdi Express was not just a sporting event; it is a celebration of our tradition, teamwork and community spirit,” said Vibha.

Further, by reviving this ancient sport, “our club has given a strong message about the importance of preserving our cultural heritage and inspiring future generations to embrace traditional forms of play. We want to inspire children to move back to outdoor and active, screen-free play.”



Rajasthan deputy CM Diya Kumari and RID 3053 DG Nisha Shekhawat present certificate from Asia Book of Records to Vibha Bhoot, president, RC Jodhpur Sanskar. PDG Priyesh Bhandari is also seen.

Praising the club, DG Nisha said Langdi (also known as Langdi Tang) is a centuries-old Indian sport that focused on agility, balance and teamwork. “It is a refreshing, healthy alternative to digital entertainment for children; it encourages them to play outdoors and bond socially,” she pointed out. ■

India's dramatic rise in space technology

Rasheeda Bhagat

A very informative and entertaining session at the Lead25 Conclave in Chennai was an exhaustive, and yet entertaining hour-long talk by ISRO chairman

V Narayanan. He took the audience through a journey of what India and its capabilities were when we got Independence in 1947, and where we stand today. Particularly when it comes to space research and application,

launching of satellites and sending missions to the moon.

At the outset, he thanked Rotary for its work for local communities and said he was highly impressed by the 100 social service projects launched during this conference, "particularly the '100-autos-for-women' project which would give economic empowerment to 100 families."

He came from a humble background, he said and recalled that when India attained Independence, 94.5 per cent

of its population was below the poverty line. "I studied in a Tamil medium school in Kanyakumari district. In those days barely 50 per cent of the people had two meals a day, the remaining 50 per cent survived on just one meal. From that humble beginning, when we depended on food imports, we are now a foodgrains exporting country, and have become the 4th largest economy in the world."

The average life expectancy then was 33 and deadly diseases such as

RI Director M Muruganandam presents a memento to ISRO Chairman V Narayanan and his wife Kavitha. PDGs J Sridhar and John Daniel are also present.



polio were rampant; today that age had gone up to 72 years and India has become a polio-free country. "Take the education sector; at Independence, only 12 per cent Indians were literate; today that number has gone up to over 79.7 per cent. Primary schools have gone up from 2,825 to 8.5 lakh. There were no IITs, IIMs or AIIMS. We have to appreciate our education system, including the village schools, from where I come. In those days only 3,091 villages had access to electricity; I come from a developed state like Tamil Nadu and a developed district like Kanyakumari. In my village we got electricity when I was in Class 9; till then I studied using kerosene lamps. Today almost all of our 60 lakh villages are electrified."



When a Deepavali rocket defied a rocket scientist

At the Lead25 Conclave in Chennai ISRO chairman V Narayanan emerged a darling of the audience with his simplicity, humility and a very earthy sense of humour. He had the participants in the packed hall in splits when he described an anecdote about how he learned, the very hard way, that unlike the rockets and satellites he and his team at ISRO make, Deepavali rockets have a mind of their own.

"I can tell you that there is a small difference between our satellite launch vehicles and our Deepavali rockets. Deepavali rockets... when you fire them, about 10 to 20 per cent don't work, and whenever such a rocket works, it goes wherever it wants to! But our rockets have to be very precise," he said.

Narayanan described his experience with a Deepavali rocket last year; five days before the festival of lights, he was driving down from Madurai to Kanyakumari with his wife Dr Kavitha, who was present in the audience. On the way, he saw many shops selling crackers. "The attractive display made me stop the car, get down and I bought 10 rockets of 700mm height. My wife thought it was something for the children," and held her peace.

"On the Deepavali day, I asked my son why don't you fire a rocket and he said 'No,

no, there are so many houses around, I will not do it.' Meanwhile my wife was saying 'why did you buy so many of them? Around our home, there are several buildings, one a nine-storeyed one!'"

Putting things in perspective, the genial scientist told his wife: "I am a rocket scientist working in ISRO for 41 years, and know about rockets." He decided to fire them himself and headed to a vacant plot near his house. "Not trusting him much, she followed warning 'if it goes into anybody's house you will be in trouble, be careful.' With great difficulty and care, with her standing beside me, and going on repeating 'be careful, be careful' putting me in tension, I took out the first rocket, placed it very carefully pointing to the empty space and ignited it."

He was very happy that it "worked nicely and lit up, but then suddenly, it turned 90 degrees and went into the building nearby! My god, before the rocket could fire, my wife was firing me... shouting 'what have you done?'" Before the neighbours could come out and find them, they bolted and next day he handed over the entire packet to his driver, asking him to be careful, saying "the Deepavali rocket will go wherever it wants to."

Narayanan said India had developed to a great extent and predicted that “before our 100th year of Independence, we will be a developed country. I have no doubt about it. We have grown in all sectors... infrastructure development, air transport, telecom, industries, education, health, agriculture, and science and technology.”

The ISRO chairman took the audience down a nostalgic journey of the Indian space programme being launched in 1962 and progressing fast to become the pride of the nation. It was started by Vikram Sarabhai, “who is the father of the Indian space programme.” To bring the benefits of the space programme to the common man, three components were needed — satellites, launch vehicles to place the satellites in the orbit, and the ground equipment to support launching the satellites into space to collect data. Our space programme was started in 1962 in a fishing village near Thumba (Thiruvananthapuram) and ISRO was set up in 1969.

He recalled that in Nov 1963 “when we had the first rocket launched from India, the rocket was donated by the US.” Again, later when we wanted

to demonstrate mass communication through satellite and there were 2,400 TV sets kept in 2,400 villages in six states and “we had to get a satellite signal to pass through those TV sets, once again the US supported us for this. Truly, we were 50 to 70 years behind advanced countries,” he said, displaying a picture of a rocket being carried on a bicycle.

Also, we did not have adequate vehicles to move satellites and had to use bullock carts. (The reference is to ISRO using a bullock cart in 1981 to transport its experimental communication satellite, APPLE, for a special antenna test to ensure a non-magnetic environment. Later, Texas Instrument, the first multinational IT company in India, brought its satellite dish by bullock cart to Bangalore to provide uninterrupted communication with the US.)

“From that bicycle and bullock cart era, and getting donations from other countries, to July 2025, on what was a historic day for India, we launched a satellite called the NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR). It can take photographs in space in all weather conditions. The total cost ₹10,360 crore and this satellite was jointly developed by India



ISRO Chief V Narayanan and wife Kavitha.

and the US. Today we are standing shoulder-to-shoulder with developed countries in the space programme,” he said with immense pride.

India’s space programme comes directly under the Prime Minister, had 43 offices in 22 locations, and was supported by many industries, and 130 academic institutions. “Our annual approved budget is ₹13,500 crore,” he added.



From an era when we had to transport a rocket by a bicycle, today we are standing shoulder-to-shoulder with developed countries in the space programme.

Giving the example of a Deevavali rocket which has a mind of its own and can go anywhere (see Box), the scientist talked about the first experimental flight of India’s indigenous Satellite Launch Vehicle (SLV-3) programme in 1979, led by former President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam. This was a partial failure due to a control system malfunction, causing the rocket to crash into the Bay of Bengal, but



Sending people to the moon is
very easy, but we have to send
and bring them back... we are
working on that!

valuable lessons were learnt from this, which resulted in the successful launch of the SLV programme in July 1980, and India's first satellite Rohini-1, was placed in orbit. From then to now, 150 satellites of different levels have been launched and currently 58 are in the orbit.

Coming to application of space technology, Narayanan said, "Very few believed that space technology could help the country, but today there are 55 space applications, contributing to food and water security, power, TV broadcasting, rural connectivity, telemedicine and telecommunications.

The ISRO chief then asked the audience if they recalled an era when every Friday we could watch only five songs on TV; "if you missed it, you had to wait till the next Friday. And do you remember how tough it was to make a trunk call, waiting in a long queue, from Chennai to Delhi? You'd get the connection and the line would be disconnected after few seconds. Today you can make a call to the US from your home in seconds."

There was an era when one had to go to the railway station to book tickets and while travelling, had to often wait for hours at the station due to delay of trains. "Today, thanks to space technology, 8,700 trains are connected in real time, and you can see these on an app. Thanks to its application on weather forecasting, the huge number of deaths that resulted from calamities such as the 2005 tsunami and the Orissa floods can now be prevented." As for Operation Sindoor, "I can't give you details of the part we played, but I can tell you our satellites have done a perfect job for the safety and security of every citizen of India. Hypothetically, if one day at a given time, if our satellites are switched off, there will be no ATM transaction, no TV will work, and no weather forecasting made."

Summing up India's spectacular advance in space technology, Narayanan said from a very humble beginning, apart from its own satellites, India has launched 433 satellites of 34 countries from Indian soil! On our successful Chandrayaan Mission, he said "India, along with the US, is among the first two countries to find water molecules on the moon. And today, we have the best camera in the moon's orbit, and the best photos from the moon come to us!"

Another important activity ISRO was performing was to study the sun, and "the project director is one of our outstanding scientists Nigar Shaji, whose brother (PDG Sheik Saleem) is in the audience. India is the 4th country having a satellite to study the sun, and we have enough scientific data to be No 1 in some critical aspects. When we placed 104 satellites, we created history; we have also managed to dock or connect two satellites in January. ... a long journey from the time we faced so many insults from the international community on our limited space capability. The world now knows not to underestimate the growth of India's space programme, even America is amazed at our fantastic achievements. Today we are supporting and helping other countries with less capability to grow, and handholding private companies to do space activities."

Future plans include building 300 satellites in the next 15 years, and a programme to send our own people to the moon, the genial scientist said, before adding a punchline in his characteristic brand of humour: "Sending to the moon is very easy... but we have to send and bring them back... we are working on that!"

Pictures by Rasheeda Bhagat

Designed by N Krishnamurthy

Rotary sparks cosmic curiosity

Kiran Zehra

The century-old Institute of Science, Fort, came alive in August with over 1,500 school and college students from across Mumbai gathering to celebrate the National Space Day 2025. The event, organised by RC Mumbai Sion, RID 3141, in collaboration with Dr Homi Bhabha State University, offered students an opportunity to explore India's achievements in space research and innovation, particularly the success of Chandrayaan-3.

What set this initiative apart was its youth-led organising team, said club president Kiran Shetye. "Our young club members, professors Anish Gawande (Department of Zoology, Elphinstone College, Mumbai) and Neha Nakashe (hospital administrator and healthcare management expert at Gleneagles Hospitals, India), designed an interactive, hands-on learning experience that encouraged students to go beyond observing and build, explore, and satisfy their own curiosity about the universe." The duo also coordinated the creation of handmade and 3D-printed rocket and

satellite models, made in partnership with ISRO, adding a functional dimension to the exhibition.

Shetye and Dr Rajanish Kamat, the vice-chancellor of Dr Homi Bhabha State University, inaugurated the event. The two-day exhibition "reflected our club's commitment to advancing scientific literacy and empowering youth through experiential learning," says Shetye.

At the heart of the event was Anish Gawande, a multilingual science communicator and researcher with over a decade of experience in science popularisation. As president of Teenovation, an NGO affiliated with Vigyan Prasara (Department of Science and Technology, Government of India), and an officially registered space tutor of ISRO, Gawande has dedicated his career to making science accessible and engaging to young learners. Through this partnership, Teenovation disseminates knowledge about space science and technology in line with ISRO's outreach initiatives. His miniature rocket replicas have even earned a place in the India Book of Records.

For Neha Nakashe, this project was "more than just an educational initiative. My journey as a science

Professor Anish Gawande explains to a group of students the working of a rocket launch vehicle and satellite system.





Above: A student carefully assembles a paper satellite model during a hands-on space science activity.

Top: Neha Nakashe with A S Kiran Kumar, former chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation.

communicator began with a spark of curiosity and a paintbrush,” she says. In 2019, as a student at MD College, Mumbai, “I volunteered at Teenovation’s science fest, painting intricate rocket models. I never imagined my fascination with space would take flight in such meaningful ways. Years later, when I met former ISRO chairman Dr AS Kiran Kumar, holding an ISRO rocket model beside him felt like my childhood dream had come full circle.”

Visitors were treated to a wide range of exhibits and experiences. A scaled ISRO exhibition showcased India’s space milestones, while a 7D moon-landing simulation offered a thrilling glimpse of Chandrayaan-3’s journey. A mobile planetarium and creative workshops, such as astro-art and satellite model-making, helped participants grasp complex concepts through play and imagination.

To ensure inclusivity, all shows were conducted in English, Hindi and Marathi, allowing students from diverse educational backgrounds to engage fully. “Science shouldn’t be limited by language,” says Gawande. “Our goal was to make space exploration accessible and exciting for every child.”

The exhibition also paid tribute to ISRO’s evolution. “Founded in 1969 under the visionary guidance of Dr Vikram Sarabhai, India’s space programme began in a small fishing village near Thumba, Kerala. In those early years, rocket parts were carried on bicycles and bullock carts to the launch site because there were no vehicles or roads equipped for the task. Despite limited resources, Indian scientists persisted with ingenuity

and determination,” he says, brimming with pride.

“The Aryabhata satellite, launched in 1975, marked India’s first step into space. The SLV-3 project in the 1980s established India as a nation capable of developing its own launch vehicles. Over the years, ISRO’s advancements from PSLV and GSLV rockets to landmark missions like Chandrayaan-1 and Mangalyaan reflected the power of home-grown innovation,” says Neha. At the exhibition, as students moved through detailed 3D-printed models from Aryabhata to Chandrayaan-3, “they could literally trace India’s journey from bullock carts to the moon. Seeing these models together really showed how far India has come,” she smiles.

Teachers who accompanied the students left with the feedback about the programme sparking curiosity and confidence among the young learners. “Many of these students have never been to a science exhibition before and the hands-on experiences and visuals gave them a new perspective on what’s possible when curiosity meets creativity,” adds Neha.

“Rotary’s role is to create opportunities that nurture innovation and curiosity, and if even a few students here are inspired to pursue science, we’ve achieved our purpose,” says Shetye.

Neha adds, “As the event concluded, students left with star charts, models, and a renewed sense of possibility. Beyond celebrating ISRO’s success, the event showed students that science, when shared with excitement and purpose, can help them dream bigger.” ■

Talent is equally distributed in India, but opportunities are not

Jaishree

At the Lead25 Rotary Leadership Conclave, Rajya Sabha MP and movie icon Kamal Haasan was recognised with a Lifetime Achievement Award for his ‘service to humanity through art’. Kamal Panpaattu Maiyam, the social and cultural foundation led by Haasan, signed an MoU with Rotary to empower youth with leadership and vocational skills, and encourage innovation, entrepreneurship and environmental stewardship.

Haasan thanked Rotary and the audience for their warmth. “My education has been extramural, so I am not used to much formality. But I admire the remarkable service that Rotary, this great international family, is doing.” He drew a parallel between the Rotary Wheel and the Ashoka Chakra. “Rotary’s wheel is not just symbolic; it is a virtuous cycle. Like the wheel of Dharma, it must always keep turning in the right direction, without breaking the axle between virtue and vice.”

Quoting Jawaharlal Nehru’s famous “tryst with destiny” speech, Haasan said, “That midnight of 1947 is long past. Today, in 2025, it is dawn. Our nation is ready to fulfil its destiny.” For him, true progress is not measured by money, but “by how wisely it is invested — in education,

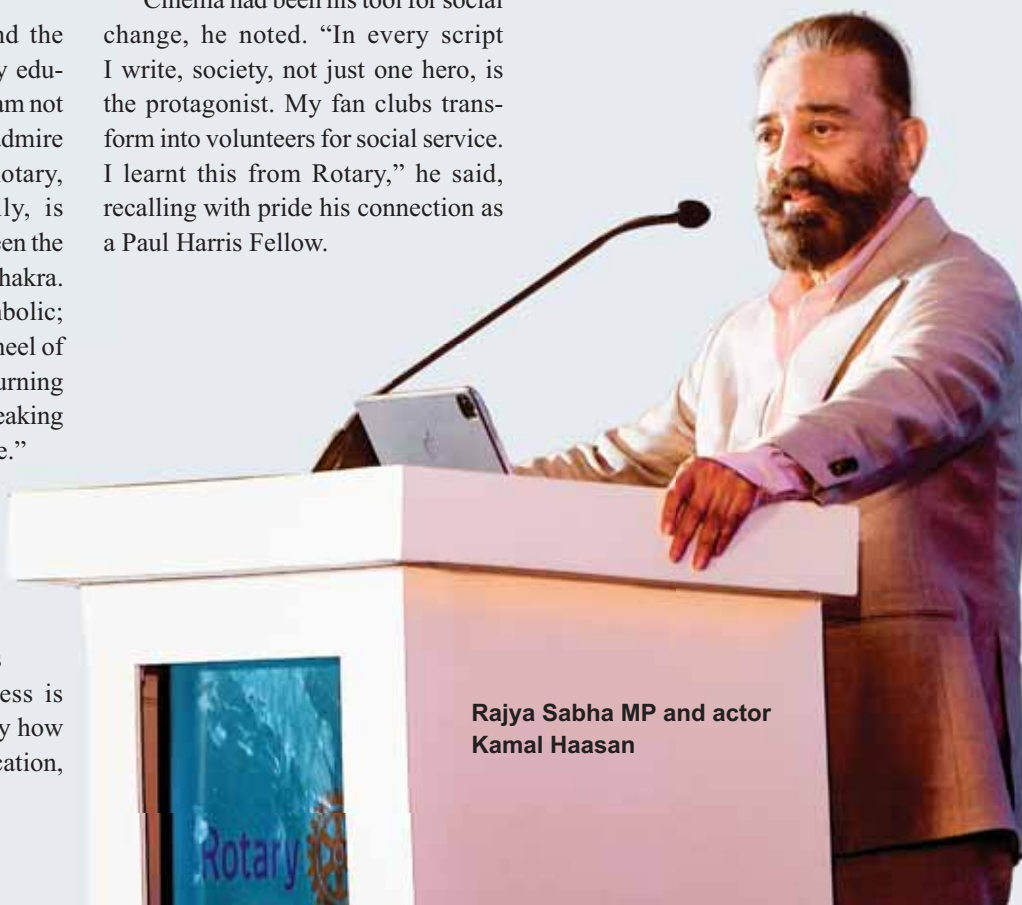
service and in building a virtuous cycle of growth.”

He believes that the next revolution for India must be in skill development. “Skilling India is extremely vital, and Rotary is already leading this change,” he noted. He praised the country’s industrial pioneers like GD Birla, JRD Tata, and Ratan Tata for giving back to society, alongside freedom fighters, observing that their legacies endure because of their sense of responsibility.

Cinema had been his tool for social change, he noted. “In every script I write, society, not just one hero, is the protagonist. My fan clubs transform into volunteers for social service. I learnt this from Rotary,” he said, recalling with pride his connection as a Paul Harris Fellow.

“Talent in India is equally distributed. But opportunities are not,” he said. The pact being signed at the conclave was “an effort to balance that equation, to incubate innovation, nurture ethical leaders and create civic solutions. When service-minded people collaborate, the impact multiplies exponentially.”

Turning to the subject of awards, Haasan wryly commented: “I get worried whenever people call something



Rajya Sabha MP and actor
Kamal Haasan

In conversation



RI Director M Muruganandam interacting with Kamal Haasan.

After his keynote address, Kamal Haasan engaged in a lively Q&A session with RI Director M Muruganandam.

You have reinvented yourself many times in cinema. What is your mantra for staying relevant across the years?

Where do I belong? That is the question I have asked myself throughout my life. To belong, I must prepare, and be worthy. That is what I keep striving for. The true measure of life is in its depth, not its duration. Love, too, is the biggest business in life; it needs no money. It is a barter system where love is exchanged freely.

How do you define leadership?

Leadership is an opportunity, a delegation. People entrust you with responsibility because they believe you deserve it. In Rotary, you can see how even the smallest wheel makes the larger wheel move. A clock cannot show the right time without its tiniest parts. Leadership works in the same way.

How do you deal with stress?

Stress is something that presses you, compresses you, compels you. The way to overcome it is by moving with time, not getting trapped in vested interests. That has been my principle in life and in work. Like the Archimedes principle, it keeps you afloat.

What is your advice for young Indians?

“Young Indians” is a temporary phase. Soon, they will be the elders of this country. I never imagined I would sit on that list myself! So it’s not advice, but perhaps a warning: time moves faster than you think. Prepare for it.

Looking back, is there any decision you would want to change if you could turn the clock around?

That would be regret. If I say, I wish I had done that, it is regret. But if I say, I will do that, it is about the future. What matters can still be achieved with perseverance. As Dr Abdul Kalam said, “A dream is not something that comes when you are asleep. A dream is something that doesn’t let you sleep.”

What still motivates Kamal Haasan every morning?

Every morning I look in the mirror — for not more than 10 seconds. That is the narcissist in me. Then I look into my own eyes and tell myself: Go mind your business. Ideals remain constant. So go execute them. Don’t waste time in the mirror. That is why I prefer the camera; it shows me how others see me. And that keeps me going.

a Lifetime Achievement Award. Does that mean my life is already over? But I see it differently. Life is divided into quarters. This is just my quarterly report. I am in my second quarter, and I hope to come back for another report in the next phase too.”

He recalled a song in one of his films where he was referred as *Ulaganayagan* (hero of the world),

and said that true heroes are not on the screen. “Each of the 40 million people who leave home in search of a livelihood is an *ulaganayagan*,” he said. He also reflected on being called *Vinveli Nayagan* (hero of space) in another song, and pointed out to ISRO chairman V Narayanan who was also a speaker at the conclave; “He is the true hero of space, considering the monumental

milestones in space explorations that are making our country proud.”

Referring to the logo of his party (Makkal Needhi Maiyam) which depicts six hands holding onto one another, he concluded, “Thank you for reaching out and shaking hands with me. I want more hands to join. No one man can do it alone. It must be together, with people like you.” ■

RC Nagpur's mental health initiatives

Rasheeda Bhagat

The Rotary Club of Nagpur, RI District 3030, has done some excellent work in raising awareness on a bunch of mental health issues, and focusing attention on the need to counsel people, particularly youngsters, struggling with issues related to fear, peer pressure, anxiety, anger, guilt and related emotions. This is thanks to the passion and involvement of a small group of Rotarians in the club, led by past president Neerja Shukul, Dr Rita Agarwal, and the unstinted support they've got from the club leaders.



As the club had run a very popular project titled *Wellness in a Box: Prevention of Depression* for school students for a few years beginning 2021, its success kindled in Neerja a dream of establishing a counselling facility at their Rotary Centre in Nagpur. This dream became a reality in January 2025, when the counselling centre Chaitanya was inaugurated. “When I stepped down as club president in June 2025, I took a promise from incoming president Parag Date and vice-president Gogi Bhasin, to take our project on mental health forward and ensure long-term continuity

and sustainability. This was in accordance with the RI goals of assuring at least three years continuity and not running single-year projects. Now I know that this initiative will never stop and will become a permanent project of RC Nagpur,” she smiles.

Chaitanya was inaugurated by PDG Dr Larry Kubiak, a neuropsychologist from Tallahassee, Florida, US, and a director on the Board of the Rotary Action Group on Mental Health Initiatives.

Neerja’s interest in mental health issues began when her older sister was studying psychology in college around 1975 and peaked when her daughter Kanika also decided to major in psychology many years later. Thanks to her own interest in psychology, “I was following her course keenly, and was

shocked to find that the content of the study material for both her sister and daughter was almost the same.” She says that while Indian education has made a lot of progress in technology, math and science, in subjects like psychology we haven’t advanced much. This was proved when her daughter went to the US to do a Master’s in psychology at the Chicago School of Professional Psychology, and found herself lagging behind so badly that she had to do another course to upgrade her skills and catch up.



Through constant interaction with her daughter and noting the progress of mental health related issues in the US, and taking note of the alarming rise in suicides among youngsters in India, “I realised how urgently India needs to strengthen this neglected discipline and provide counselling services in issues related to mental health. Meanwhile I also witnessed the impact and success of the *Wellness in a Box* project; all this prompted me to start this counselling centre.”

Asked about the kind of impact Chaitanya has made and the interest from the local community, Neerja says that the counsellor employed by the club — and sponsored by her — Devika Gokhale, a Rotaractor who is a trained clinical psychologist, began by visiting schools and colleges and giving in-person counselling to students along with parents and teachers. Several youngsters benefitted, found it useful and opted for regular therapy sessions, all of which is being provided free of cost.



(From top clockwise): PDG Dr Larry Kubiak, a neuropsychologist from Florida, US, and a director of the Rotary Action Group on Mental Health Initiatives, speaking to PP of RC Nagpur Neerja Shukul (in red top) and Counsellor Rita Agarwal; Rtr Devika Gokhale addressing students; two students who attended a counselling session; Dr Rita Agarwal addressing women members of the club.





O n the response, she says initially it was moderate, but “now that exams are over, the counselling is getting traction and there is overwhelming response; this month alone around 90 sessions were conducted by our counsellor Devika, so much so that she does not find time to go to schools and colleges these days,” beams Neerja.

On the kind of issues youngsters face which lead to mental anxiety and other negative emotions, she says most of the problems revolve around peer pressure. And peer pressure in the young is mainly associated with body shaming. “I was closely associated with the *Wellness in a Box* project, and we had a partnership with a CBSE school in Nagpur, where we conducted sessions for Class 8 students. You won’t believe the kind of problems they faced.”

One major problem is related to mobile addiction and another to body shaming. “The other surprising thing I heard so often was that children’s parents don’t love them. We used to have 200 young people sitting in a session and those who had the courage would come up and say *hamarey mummy papa hamey pyar nahi karte*. (Our parents do not love us).”

She says that even in a small place like Nagpur so many suicides among the young are reported. Recently a boy who had got a whopping 99.9 per cent in his NEET exam (for the undergraduate medical course) committed suicide because his parents were pressurising him to study medicine, a field he was not interested in. “So the gap in understanding and agreement between the parents and children is a burning issue which is causing a lot of anguish in the young.”

Even after their *Wellness* project, which club member and a professional psychiatrist Dr Rita Agarwal had

started and conducted many mental awareness programmes, was over, “the demand for it continued. So we used to send a counsellor for a whole day to the schools and children who knew about it, would go and talk to her. They became very friendly and comfortable in talking to her and were constantly asking why the counsellor no longer come to the schools. Hence, when Chaitanya was started, Devika used to regularly visit two schools and one college but now she has her hands full at our centre and can no longer visit those institutions.”

At their Rotary Centre, Chaitanya has been tucked away in a little secluded space — the centre itself is in a secluded space in the city, she says — so that those who are afraid

of the stigma associated with mental health issues can visit it comfortably. She admits, though, that slowly but surely, the stigma associated with mental health issues is coming down, particularly in the young.

In the last few months, the centre has conducted several mental health awareness sessions for club members on topics such as ‘Heartfulness’ and ‘Wellness among Women’, concentrating on stress management, lifestyle disorders, etc. The psychiatrist who conducted this session for the women said “our anxiety increases so much during certain times and we need to talk about it.”

Asked about the kind of questions women ask and the concerns they share, Neerja says, “Women don’t come up easily to speak out in the open. But when they do, they talk about their struggle in balancing the house and their jobs. The other thing

is middle-age depression related to the empty nest syndrome. For instance, I myself cry for three days when my daughter leaves after a visit, so we tell them there is nothing wrong about this emotion, so speak about it. Also, we are trying to pull such women into Rotary, saying come and join us, we will give you enough interesting work to do!”

A three-day workshop on ‘Emotional Regulation using Expressive Art’ for kids aged 9–12 and various awareness sessions for Interactors and Rotaractors were also conducted.

Is there any difference in the way boys and girls express their struggle with mental health issues? “Oh yes, boys live in a different world, and generally, they do not bother about small things. Right now, Devika is concentrating on girls, who are much more concerned about the way their look, their body shapes, and the fear



of being judged if they do not have a boyfriend.”

When I express surprise that this is an issue even in a relatively conservative place like Nagpur, she says, “Oh yes, we have found girls who are distressed and teased by their friends if they do not have boyfriends! We do sessions at a medical college where there is a Rotaract club and they talk about such things... the other girl has a boyfriend and I don’t have one, so I feel left out and the other girls make fun of me.”

Coming to future plans to expand their services, club president Parag Date says, “In just nine months this project has already begun to make ripples of change. We have so many plans to make this centre a vibrant

place for mental health solutions and promotion of wellbeing.”

These plans include monthly group sessions, listening circles, and workshops and building a community where conversations about mental health are considered normal talk. “With the demand steadily rising, the centre also aims to function as a full-day facility instead of the current three-hour facility from the next academic year. We want to ensure that help is available when it is most needed. I see Chaitanya growing into a platform that touches many more lives in meaningful ways. There is great scope to bring in new ideas, collaborations, and innovative initiatives that keep the spirit of the project alive and relevant to changing times.”

The club’s leadership is committed to promoting “more open dialogue around mental health and emotional growth, while also making sure that our work is accessible to those who

India urgently needs to strengthen mental health services. The success of Wellness in a Box project prompted the Chaitanya wellness centre.

Neerja Shukul
past president, RC Nagpur

need it most. Going ahead, I want Chaitanya to not just sustain, but to expand its reach so that more individuals and communities can benefit from it,” says Dr Rita Agarwal, consultant psychologist, Chaitanya and club member.

Art therapy workshops for youngsters struggling to give expression to their anxieties, fears, etc and a helpline for those who can’t bring themselves to talk openly about their struggles with mental health issues are also in the pipeline.

“We are happy that people are gradually realising the need to show more empathy and be non-judgmental while dealing with mental health issues. Individuals who once hesitated to seek help now step into therapy with hope. We are so happy that Rtr Devika Gokhale, the psychologist/ counsellor in this project, brings her dedication and compassion in every session. This project is more than a service — it is a promise. A promise that no one in our community should have to carry on with their struggles in silence,” adds Dr Rita. Neerja reiterates her resolve to raise whatever funds are needed for expanding their activities, including hiring a second counsellor to visit schools and colleges. ■







Tastes of Taipei

Rick Bayless

From night markets to tea plantations, an American chef leaves no avenue unexplored as he tastes his way through Taipei. Find out what flavours he'll never forget. Then, get ready to pick up the culinary journey yourself during the Rotary International Convention 2026.

Food stalls famous for quality

I was a few steps into the Ningxia Night Market when the sweet potato balls caught my eye. The golden and purple spheres glistened as the cook pulled a tray from the hot oil and hoisted them into a stainless steel bowl the size of a kid's bathtub. The problem was I couldn't figure out how to extract myself from the human river that bore me along so I could order a bagful of what my gut told me I would likely never forget.

Now, sweet potatoes might not be top of mind when you think of Asian cuisine. But from their birthplace in the Americas, the tubers boarded huge galleons as early as the mid-16th century, travelled across the Pacific to Manila, and then slowly wandered from one Asian culture to another, finding warm — if not celebrated — welcomes nearly everywhere. That diffusion reached Taiwan, where the potatoes now attract long lines when cooked, mashed, mixed with other tuberous starches, and transformed into those shiny little balls.

Once I extricated myself from the enthusiastic crowd, I discovered what I can only describe as pure delight. Those ping-pong-sized spheres, known as *di gua qiu*, were unexpectedly hollow and lightly sweet, with a hint of the sweet potato's characteristic earthiness. I laughed a little as I popped another and then another into my mouth.

The Ningxia Night Market is famous for the quality of its food stalls. Head of the list, at least in my opinion, is Yuan Huan Pien Oyster Omelette. I could watch the ballet of red-aproned cooks working the circular griddles for hours. The briny sweetness of the oysters, the chewy-tender texture of the batter, the richness of the egg, the lightness of the

greens — it was obvious why locals line up for hours to tuck into one of these beauties.

The next hour was a blur of fried taro balls with preserved egg yolk and pork floss, perfect mochi with pulverised toasted peanuts and sesame for dipping, and those pork belly-filled, fold-over steamed buns (here called *gua bao*) that have become popular across the US. Though everyone had warned me away, I fell in love with — or maybe it's more accurate to say I had a momentary crush on — stinky tofu. I contend that anyone who's taken with punchy blue cheese like Roquefort will like this medium-firm tofu that's been marinated in a complex fermented brine.

Dihua Street

For the sheer pleasure of it, I've practised cooking Asian food all of my adult life, relying on well-respected guides like the Wei-Chuan Cooking Books for the techniques to a perfect stir-fry. My wife, Deann, brought back to our homes copies of *Chinese Cuisine* and *Chinese Snacks* from her year-long teaching English in Taiwan back in the 1970s.

What I didn't know is that the soy sauce the books were likely calling for has a different taste than others. Better. The artisan's local soy sauce is made from black — not the typical yellow — soybeans that ferment for months. Tasting Taiwanese soy sauce for the first time is like that first taste of Pappy Van Winkle's 23-year-old bourbon when you've only been used to Jim Beam 4-year. Rich and round, complex and satisfying.

I discovered my favourite artisan soy sauce in, of all places, a meat product store along Dihua Street. I loved wandering the area's lively shops, their goods spilling out

onto the sidewalks. Piles of tropical fruits, thousands of spice packets and jars, a variety of dried seafood that made my head spin. That was where I found the famous tree-grown mountain pepper (*maqaw*) that seasons many Taiwanese dishes. And that was where I found the great soy sauce, in Jiang Ji Hua Lung, a nationally renowned store owned by Rotarian Hsien-chiao Chiang. The store specialises in cured, dried pork — think of it as pork jerky — that’s gently seasoned with soy and sugar. I found the compressed heart shapes formed from chopped jerky and the pork “paper” — so thin it crunched like a sweet, salty potato chip — to be wondrous.

Tea and truffles

Driving southeast from Taipei, we wound our way through mountain peaks and past farmhouses with adjoining rice paddies before descending into Yilan County. As far as my eyes could see, the earth was filled with cabbages. Straight row after straight row, field after field, creating a haphazard patchwork of brassicas.

Clearly, in a world of supply and demand, Taiwan appeared to have enough cabbages, which led one local farmer, Jinrong Huang, an indigenous village chief, to work with Rotary on an outside-the-box idea. At Jinrong’s farm, nearly a decade before, he had planted a grove of oak trees, and, for the last few years he’s been inoculating the earth beneath them with spores he hoped would grow into truffles — an agricultural product with vastly more value than the overplanted cabbages.

Jinrong got out of his car wearing heavy leather boots and a resolute look. His two squirmy dogs shot into the trees like they’d been exploded from a gun. One dog went straight to the base of a tree and, with a constant, fast whimper, wagged his tail so forcefully that I thought he might hurt himself. These

were the dogs he was training to hunt the truffles.

A few more minutes down the valley, we came to Yaba’s Mountain guesthouse. Nestled in a bend of the road, the simple two-storey structure kept watch over the dozens of long, tightly packed rows of jade-colour tea bushes that rose high up the mountain. We piled into the back of a small four-wheel drive truck and then bumped our way up the rutted road to the top.

Other than the beautiful vistas and the thrill of running your hands through the small, densely packed leaves of the camellia plants — tea is in the camellia family — visiting a tea plantation is less exciting than visiting a place that grows, say, berries or peaches. There’s nothing fresh to taste. As with coffee and vanilla, tea’s brilliant flavours develop during the fermenting, drying and/or roasting process.

Back down at the guesthouse, we watched our host give a quick rinse to a big cup he’d filled with the balled-up dry leaves of lightly fermented, high-mountain oolong tea from the fields we’d just seen. Then he filled the cup, let it steep a minute or so, and strained the liquid off into porcelain cups for us to taste. It was richly complex, fresh and gently floral with a hint of bitter, a hint of sweet. Working over a perforated stainless steel box to catch splashes, our host was fast and slapdash, re-steeping



Tea is served with an assortment of complimentary snacks.



A bounteous sampling of the island’s seafood.



Preparing crunchy breakfast youtiao.



There's a simpler, clear version that is rich with beef bone broth, and there's a thicker, richer version that's seasoned with spicy Sichuan fermented fava bean paste (*doubanjiang*) and, if you wish, Sichuan peppercorns.

We drank a remarkable cold sparkling oolong tea as we tucked into the steaming bowls of goodness. For me, all that deliciousness was almost eclipsed by the noodles themselves. These weren't like the typical wheat-flour noodles I was expecting. Instead, they had a slight chewiness to them, a little resilience, a little bounce. I asked to speak to the chef. They were made partially with yam flour, he said.

That's when I began to understand what the Taiwanese call 'Q texture'. People on this island are obsessed with texture, and one of their favourites is that brilliant spot between resilient and soft, chewy and tender, sticky and gummy. I encountered it, too, in the night market's spectacular oyster omelette and celebrated mochis.

Taiwanese breakfast

When my wife lived in Taichung in the 1970s, she fell in love with Taiwanese breakfast. She has told me about sitting in roadside stands, dipping the crullers called *youtiao* into warm *doujiang* (soy milk) and relishing every minute of it.

So, when Henry Hsieh, an energetic young Rotarian with a food-centric Instagram account, picked us up one morning for a visit to the Binjian Market, I was secretly hoping that breakfast would be the first stop. Not only was he planning breakfast, he was planning it at the legendary Fuhang Soy Milk, the Michelin-recognised spot that draws more than 5,000 people on some days.

The line of people patiently waiting to get into Fuhang stretched for more than a city block. "People start lining up at 5am for their 5.30 open," Henry laughed. With a swift grin, he said, "Follow me."



From top: Rick Bayless inspects lobsters at a seafood restaurant; Bayless, Henry Hsieh, and his mother, Catherine Hsieh, at the market.

and straining the leaves, round after round, for us to taste how the flavour evolved. (My favourite was the second steeping.)

The flavours hovered in my head like the fading notes of an unrivalled string quartet. It was unlike any tea I'd tasted.

Q texture

We hadn't been more than three hours off the plane when we found ourselves descending the stairs at the Regent Taipei Hotel into the open dining room of the Azie restaurant, where we met our hosts, Rotarians Jimmy Chih-Ming Lai and Wenny Lin. We were there to eat beef noodle soup, one of Taiwan's standout dishes. While beef noodle soup sounds commonplace, the Taiwanese version is unique, even thrilling. Brought by immigrants to the island in the middle of the 20th century during the Chinese Civil War, it is considered emblematic of the island's cooking.

Like a school of salmon swimming upstream, we worked our way through the crowd. We followed Henry towards a kitchen on one end of what appeared to be a food court. A young guy with a backward baseball cap gave Henry a joyful hug, then waved us into the kitchen. Turns out Henry's friend is the grandson of the people who started Fuhang.

We watched as cooks rolled out thick, rectangular breads and passed them to others to slap on the sidewalls of barrel ovens, cooking them to a rich golden brown. Other cooks coated thinner rectangles with sesame. Further on, cooks deeply creased strips of yet another dough to fry into *youtiao*. The rhythm was captivating, the production astounding. The scene felt almost operatic.

The young man handed Henry a bag and we made our way back to the car. We couldn't cut the hour-long line, but we could get takeout. I hadn't imagined that my first taste of the legendary Fuhang restaurant would be in the back seat of a sleek, late-model black sedan, but I couldn't wait to dip my crunchy-fresh *youtiao* into warm soy milk — some of the best, nuttiest I've tasted.

Kitchen comrades

Henry had arranged for me to cook with a couple of other chefs at his restaurant Wildwood, a sleek, comfortable spot that specialises in wood-grilled fish and steaks. Preparing food alongside chefs in another country is an opportunity I jump at. Even when we don't share a

language, the communication through food — the way we handle it, the way we combine flavours, the way we work with fire — is fluent and full.

Jarry Liu, Wildwood's chef de cuisine, built a wood fire for us to cook on. Rotarian Jay Liu had driven up from Taichung to be my other comrade in the kitchen and attend the Rotary meeting happening at the restaurant later that night.

I thought chef Jarry was going to grill some fish to show off a specialty at Wildwood, but he couldn't stay away from the chicken cockscombs I'd found at the Binjian Market. Before I knew it, he'd started braising the fleshy crests from the birds' heads, and then he gave them a brief tour on the grill and a lively adornment with pickled red onions and cilantro. They were spectacular.

By the time I started grilling my chicken thighs to flavour with a blend of herbs, roasted garlic, green chile and lime, chef Jay was deep into another poultry dish, the famous Taiwanese three-cup chicken. Its preparation involves braising the chicken with sesame oil, rice wine and soy sauce. Then you sweeten the reduced cooking liquid to a shiny glaze and garnish the dish with Thai basil and red chiles.

We talked fire and its infinite possibilities. We talked ingredient proportions and history and the role of food in cultural identity. We talked childhood and how our tastes are crafted by family and community, about how those tastes become so deeply rooted that they feel like the very fabric of our beings.



A crab being weighed at Taipei's market.

Food from the heart

Of all the brilliant food we'd enjoyed, the meal we ate at a food kitchen established by Rotarians in Taipei was one of the most memorable. The enterprise started out in 2016 as a service project to reduce food waste by salvaging leftover produce and turning it into meals for low-income families, older adults living alone, and others. Through a Rotary Foundation global grant, the members transformed an unused city building into a gleaming stainless steel kitchen where they teach unemployed people to make box lunches, and, with the help of volunteers, get them delivered to those in need.

We climbed the stairs to the second-storey meeting and teaching facility and found spots around the table. When I opened the paperboard box that was set in front of me, the careful beauty the cooks had created greeted me like a broad smile. The flavours were so simple, so homey, so perfect. They nourished and filled me with happiness — a happiness particular to all food made with love.

The writer is the chef and co-owner of award-winning restaurants including Frontera Grill and the Michelin-starred Topolobampo in Chicago.

Pictures by I-Hwa Cheng

Reproduced from *Rotary*

7-Elevens

Numerous locations

Try one of the many packaged entrees that you can warm in the provided microwaves and enjoy in the shops' dining rooms.

Nanmen Market

Da'an district

Find more than 200 vendors across four floors, including a popular food court serving Taiwanese specialties.

Diwali sweets for jawans

Team Rotary News

For the tenth year, Rotarians from RID 3080 and other districts have sent Diwali sweets to army soldiers guarding our borders in some of the most difficult terrains and harsh climate.

Punjab Governor and Chandigarh administrator Gulab Chand Kataria flagged off army trucks carrying the gift of eight tonnes of Diwali *mithai* from the Raj Bhavan. He appreciated the Rotarians for their gesture, and “remembering the contribution of our jawans who protect our borders so that the nation can rest in peace.”



Punjab Governor and Chandigarh administrator Gulab Chand Kataria (centre) flanked by PRIP Rajendra Saboo and RC Chandigarh president Abha Joshi, flags off the trucks carrying Diwali sweets for army jawans. Also seen are Usha Saboo (left) and DG Ravi Prakash (3rd from right).

DG Ravi Prakash recalled that this project of sending Diwali sweets to soldiers on the borders was conceived and initiated by PRIP Rajendra Saboo and his wife Usha Saboo with the tagline, *Aap hain toh hum hain* (we are here because of you).

Though the programme was “first launched by our club with a gift of four tonnes of sweets ten years back,

many clubs from Mumbai and other districts have joined us with their annual contribution,” said Abha Joshi, president, RC Chandigarh. PRIP Saboo, Usha Saboo, DG Prakash, PDG Madhukar Malhotra, club president Abha and project chair Anil Chadda were present when the trucks were flagged off from the Raj Bhavan, Chandigarh. ■

A Rotary-Rotaract meet in Coimbatore



RI Director M Muruganandam, DG Chella Raghavendran, PDG A V Pathy, RID 3233 DGE Shriram Duvvuri and other district leaders, along with Rotaractors of RID 3206.

Rotarians and Rotaractors of RID 3206 had a lively interaction at an event in Coimbatore, where their dreams for future and the power of collaboration were discussed, said DG Chella Raghavendran.

Stressing the importance of collaboration, RI director M Muruganandam said, “Rotary and Rotaract are not two paths — they are one journey, driven by purpose, compassion, and the courage to lead. When we walk together, we don’t just create change, but also history.” DG Raghavendran thanked Muruganandam for motivating the Rotaractors and thus nurturing future leaders of Rotary.

Rtr Vinmitha Kannan, immediate past president, RAC PSGR Krishnammal College for Women, anchored the session. DRR Gogul R, and PDGs of RID 3206 including A V Pathy attended the event.

Muruganandam honoured Rotaractors who had contributed to TRF amidst cheers that rang through the packed hall. The meet was hosted by RACs Coimbatore Smart City, KCT and PSGR Krishnammal College for Women. ■

Mumbai Rotarians deploy CPR and AEDs to save lives

Rasheeda Bhagat

The Rotary Club of Bombay Airport, RID 3141, has made a mark in donating AED (Automated External Defibrillator) machines to various organisations and conducting over 50 CPR (Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation) sessions for many groups in Mumbai. Their most notable achievement is the installation of AEDs at 54 Railway Stations, which includes all stations along the Western Railway route from Churchgate to Virar.

As is well known even a few seconds can make

a difference between life and death if timely CPR is not given immediately after a cardiac arrest. The club's foray into providing this service to people in Mumbai in a project related to heart care began when Dr Akshay Mehta, an interventional cardiologist, took over as club president in 2023.

When he became club president two years ago, he launched a collection drive for putting up

AEDs at prominent places in the city of Mumbai, particularly railways stations, by organising a

musical event to raise funds. This was attended by club members, their friends and families and his patients. At that event an impressive ₹70 lakh was raised, and the collection drive continued with club members and their friends and families. The kitty has passed the ₹1.5 crore mark and with this money 60 AEDs have already been given.

On how this idea came to him, Dr Mehta says, "Whenever I travel by air, I see AED machines at airports and know that these have been used effectively to save lives when a cardiac arrest happens. This



Dr Akshay Mehta (centre), an interventional cardiologist and past president of RC Mumbai Airport, demonstrates CPR administration to schoolchildren.



Above: An AED device being presented to a railway station officer.

Left: Dr Mehta teaches CPR technique to a police personnel.

made me wonder why railway stations in Mumbai and elsewhere do not have these life saving devices, particularly when stations such as Andheri, Dadar or VT in Mumbai see at least 10 lakh footfalls a day.”

He thought that people of all ages and classes pass through these stations, but there was no help available in case somebody suffered cardiac arrest. Talking to the porters, railway staff, etc he learnt that several incidents of cardiac arrest had indeed occurred at stations, and lives had been lost as the staff watched helplessly.

Dr Mehta had also seen that in many countries AED devices were readily available to save victims of cardiac arrest. The AED project began in right earnest, with the club putting up these small, portable machines in railway stations, and prominent places in the city which saw a lot of buzz.

The device, which costs around ₹1.1 lakh weighs less than a kg and can be easily rushed to the spot where the cardiac arrest occurs. “It is meant to be used by lay people but they have to be trained. I’m happy to share that two persons who suffered a cardiac arrest at the Marine Lines and Dombivli stations were revived by the station masters, who we had trained along with their other staff, and their lives were saved.”

The news that the club had provided AED devices to several places in Mumbai, particularly railway stations spread and Dr Mehta was pleasantly surprised to recently get a call from the Arthur Road prison, requesting for the donation of an AED machine.

Past president of the club Kevin Colaco explains that this jail houses over 3,500 inmates and an occasional cardiac arrest did occur here, so one or two AEDs, and CPR training and how to use these devices were badly needed here.

When the 61st AED from the club was installed in the jail in August, in the presence of PDG Rajendra Agarwal and club president Pragna Mehta, and donors PP Shachin and PDC Hima Nanavati, Colaco, who was present said in a lighter vein to the prison authorities: “So now, with the help of these AEDs you will be able to revive them first before hanging them later!” There was laughter all around and the comment was taken in the spirit in which it was made.

“It was a delight to train the medical staff and the jail inmates in CPR and use of these device, which is rather easy as two pads have to be applied; the trainees were both eager and enthusiastic to learn, so that they could help save lives when the need arose,” he adds.

Dr Mehta says that apart from the stations in the Western Railway corridor, along the Central Railway



An AED device being handed over to the King's Circle railway station.

line also two distant stations like Lonavala and Ulhasnagar have been covered under this project and AED machines given. "At every station, intensive training to recognise cardiac arrest when it happens, and the correct response to it by way of CPR and use of the AED machine were imparted to the railway officials as well as stall vendors, shoe polish men, porters etc. The biggest reward for our efforts were not only the two lives saved by railway staff at the stations mentioned but also a third one saved by a staff member in her neighbourhood after getting trained at a railway station."

Besides railway stations and their offices, AEDs have also been installed by the club at other places like police stations and chowkies, office premises, the SRPF ground, a Free Mason Lodge, etc. "We got one installed at the Mount Mary Church (a famous Catholic basilica located on a hill in Bandra) where during the St Mary festival nearly 10–15 lakh people visit this holy place. We are also encouraging large housing societies to have an AED in their complex, with people trained to

handle these machines. I do believe that this is a crying need of our country," says Colaco.

The club wants to install at least 100 AED machines and "I've also told DGs Vinod Sarogi (Chennai) and Elizabeth Cherian (Bengaluru) that they should take up a similar project in their district," he adds.

In conclusion he says that the training differentiates between a heart attack and a cardiac arrest; while the person who suffers a heart attack should be rushed to the hospital, the one suffering a cardiac arrest has to

be "revived through CPR or pumping of the chest so that the residual oxygen in the lungs goes to the brain to prevent it from dying before 7 minutes. Because if the oxygen doesn't go to the brain within that time, the person will suffer a brain death. As the procedure is so simple and the machine so easy to operate, all efforts should be made to save as many lives as possible by making available both the AEDs and the required training," he adds.

Mehta says this project has continued for two years and will go forward thanks to the generous support of our club members, PDG Rajendra Agarwal and PP Girish Agarwal, who really helped do the project at the railway stations. As we install more AED machines and conduct CPR training sessions, we seek support from everyone reading this to spread awareness about how CPR and AEDs can save lives so that we can cover as many people as possible and as many sites as possible. Because in cardiac arrest, every second and every pair of helping hands can make a difference between life and death." ■

I'm happy to share that two persons who suffered a cardiac arrest at the Marine Lines and Dombivli stations were revived by the station masters, who we had trained along with their other staff, and their lives were saved.

Dr Akshay Mehta
past president, RC Mumbai Airport

Smart glasses for visually-impaired

RID 3080 launched *Project Su-Drishti*, an initiative to empower visually-impaired students through smart technology. As part of the project, 25 students from the Institute for the Blind received AI-powered, smart visual aids. The project was supported through CSR donations. IPDG Rajpal Singh, DGE Dr Rita Kalra and DGN MP Gupta attended the event.



A student receiving AI-powered smart glasses.

Sewing machines distributed

Under the leadership of DG Bhupesh Mehta, RC Bhiwani Downtown, RID 3090, distributed sewing machines to 30 underprivileged women to help them gain skills and earn a livelihood. The project cost ₹40,000.



Rotarians, along with beneficiaries, after the distribution of sewing machines.

Weekly health camp

Addressing the growing burden of lifestyle-related diseases and chronic pain, RC Rudrapur, RID 3110, has launched a weekly health camp at Dr Bhatt Clinic and Pain Management Centre, Rudrapur. Patients receive free orthopaedic consultation, bone density tests, posture and pedoscan assessment, body mass analysis and blood tests valued at ₹5,500 each.



Patients at the health camp.

Nutritious milk for destitute

RC Coimbatore New Town, RID 3206, donated a cow and calf to St Joseph's Home for the Aged and Destitute, Podanur, to provide a sustainable source of milk for the inmates. DG Chella K Raghavendran handed over the bovines to the special home.



DG Chella K Raghavendran, along with club members, handing over the cow and calf.

Transforming lives in Manipur

Jaishree

Takhel, a small village just 9km from East Imphal, Manipur, now has a new public toilet complex, thanks to the initiative of the Rotary Club of Imphal, RID 3240. “The RCC in Takhel mooted the idea, as the village lacked a common facility. Every household has a toilet at home, but there was none in the public space,” notes N Muhindro Singh, the club’s president-elect.

The facility has been built in the bustling community market area and will benefit the 1,500 villagers who frequent it daily. With one unit each for men and

women, an overhead tank for running water, and dedicated caretakers — a man and a woman employed by the RCC — maintenance has been taken care of. The ₹1.21 lakh project was supported through district grants.

This 53-year-old club, with 113 members, has been consistently making a difference through innovative community projects. Among its most impactful initiatives is the Rotary Egg Bank, launched in 2021. Every month, 1,680 eggs are supplied to three homes for girl children, ensuring that each child gets four eggs a week. “The eggs are sourced from local poultry farmers, so



Above: Eggs being distributed to caretakers of children’s homes.

Below: Members of RC Imphal at the inauguration of a public toilet complex at Takhel village.





the project also supports their livelihood. It is our gift to our loving girl children, to help them stay healthy and strong,” says club president Digel Singh.

For over five decades, the club’s annual painting competition is eagerly awaited by schoolchildren in Imphal. “The topic is announced

on the spot, and it’s amazing to see the creative talent and social awareness the children bring to their artwork,” he says. The event takes place at the club’s Rotary Bhavan in Mantripukhri, Imphal East, and continues to inspire young minds year after year.

In addition to these, the club regularly donates wheelchairs and hearing aids, and offers scholarships to deserving students from less privileged families. At the start of this Rotary year, members planted over 100 fruit-bearing saplings in the Sajiwa Central Jail complex as part of their greening mission. Blood donation camps are also organised in collaboration with the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences, Imphal.

A unique signature project of the club is celebration of the World Plastic Surgery Day (July 15). Since 2013, the club has sponsored reconstructive surgeries for individuals with deformities, while also providing them with livelihood tools to start afresh. This year’s gifts included sewing machines for two women, a welding kit for a burn injury survivor, electric saw sets for two accident survivors, and educational aids and uniforms for four children who had undergone reconstructive surgery at a relief camp.

“Every project, big or small, is a step towards making our community stronger and more hopeful,” says Muhindro Singh. ■



(From L) Club secretary Sonamani Okram, past president Pramod Jaiswal, Sachidanand Singh and W Vikram at a greening project in the Sajiwa Central Jail complex.

Mumbai's municipal schools taste e-learning

V Muthukumaran

In 2019, a six-member team from the Rotary Club of Bombay Mid-Town, RID 3141, led by the then club president Abuzar Zakir and project chair Ashwin Shah, visited 150 municipal schools (Mumbai Public Schools) for a spot study on their classroom facilities, atmosphere and the quality of teachers. "Our field survey broke the social myth among the Mumbaikers who prefer to send their children only to private convent schools. Even the lower middle-class families believe that municipal schools are not fit for their wards as they lack basic facilities and good teachers," says Zakir.

Contrary to the widely-held belief that public schools are meant only for students from extremely poor families, "our study found that these municipal schools have excellent classroom facilities, spacious grounds and highly motivated teachers. They provide free uniforms, textbooks and noon meals." All these add-on features encourage students to perform well in their public exams, says Zakir.

The Rotary team found that all the teachers were well-paid, motivated and "highly qualified to teach and inspire students." After brainstorming among members, the club zeroed in on "introducing digital learning to students in municipal schools which will give a boost to their public image, thus attracting more students and change the false mindset of the public."

Now as the chair of *Project E-Learning*, he is happy that his club has distributed 360 digital panels (75 inch-smart TV) to 16 municipal schools, benefitting 10,500 students across Mumbai, in the last six years. "Each smart TV comes with a pen drive that has subject curriculums in Marathi, Hindi, Urdu and English for students to easily understand concepts through audio-video-graphics," he explains. Even intricate concepts and

difficult subjects are made easy and simple, "thanks to the digital panels."

The facility has been installed in schools in neighbourhoods such as Dharavi's Transit Camp, Imamwada, Colaba, Goregaon East, Khetwadi, Kamathipura and Wadi Bunder: "places synonymous with struggle, where students battle not just for marks, but for any opportunity to learn." During the Covid times, when schools were shutdown, 200 tablets were given to five public schools to help teachers hold online classes.

Great support

All the 120 members of this 57-year-old club support *Project E-Learning* in one way or another. Two corporates — Ion Foundation, owned by club member Rajesh Sharma, and PPFAS, a mutual fund company owned by Gita Parikh, also a member, are its major contributors.

Members of RC Bombay Mid-Town, along with president Svetlana Toshniwal (second from L), project chairman Abuzar Zakir and IPP Jagar Nath Thakur, making a presentation on *Project E-Learning* to BMC Commissioner Bhushan Gagrani.



The education officials of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) extend their wholehearted support to the digital initiative at the public schools. In a widely circulated note among the school department officials, BMC deputy commissioner Prachi Jambhekar points out that the “pass percentage of students from the beneficiary schools in public exams has risen from 72 to 98 per cent after the introduction of digital panels.” There is a dramatic increase in new admissions each year after the launch of digital panels at the Mumbai Public School, Balaram Street, on Grant Road, Mumbai, says its headmaster Ishtiak Ansari. “Now, parents attend meetings with teachers regularly and profusely thank our faculty for improving the educational standards of their wards,” he says.

The school dropout rate “has stopped completely at our beneficiary schools. Earlier, when children reached Class 8, they quit schools and did household chores, as they came from low-income families with meagre resources. But now there are



Students and teachers, along with headmaster Shailesh Pawar (right), at the Mumbai Public School, E S Patanwala Marg, where the club has installed a digital panel.

no dropouts in the schools that have got digital panels, smiles Zakir. In the current Rotary year, his project team is planning to distribute at least 100 digital panels (each set costs ₹1 lakh) to five more public schools.

“There are 1,200 municipal schools run by the BMC, and we will be expanding the digital project in the coming years.”

During a felicitation event, BMC commissioner Bhushan Gagrani complimented the Rotarians for doing the noble task of building the future of the nation. Additional commissioner Amit Saini has also assured support to the club for extending the project across all schools.

In a buoyant mood after praise from civic officials, club president Svetlana Toshniwal says she will go all out to raise funds so that the e-learning project is continued for many years to come. “In these classrooms, a single digital panel can open up the world. We’ve seen shy girls become confident speakers, reluctant readers discover science videos, and teachers are able to reach larger, more diverse groups quickly and effectively,” she says.

Zakir is now keen to expand this digital classroom project into a district-level initiative. ■



Books take flight at Jharsuguda airport

Jaishree

At most airports, waiting for a flight means endless scrolling on your phone, a quick coffee, or simply staring at the departure screens. But at the Veer Surendra Sai Airport in Jharsuguda, Odisha, passengers now have a far better option: they can pick up a book. A cosy corner of the departure lounge has been transformed into a 'Flybrary,' a free-for-all reading nook, thanks to the Rotary Club of Jharsuguda Green, RID 3261. A neat shelf at the departure lounge has been stocked with children's books, novels, self-help titles, and magazines such as *Reader's Digest*, along with publications on art, travel and culture.

The idea for this library took root last year on International Yoga Day (June 21). For two years, the club had been conducting yoga sessions at the airport with staff and occasional passengers joining in. "The response has been overwhelming; many passengers even keep in touch with us later for online classes," says club member Priyanka Patwari.

After one such session, a casual conversation with airport director Sandeep Tiwari turned into something bigger. The group

reflected on how digital devices and social media were eclipsing reading habits, especially among the younger generation. "Little did we know that what started as a small chat would shape our next project, promoting a healthier society through reading," she recalls.

The club planned to install a library at the airport. Tiwari immediately offered space for it at the departure lounge, and the 'Flybrary' was born. The club members and airport staff donated novels and magazines which were arranged in a shelf at the lounge area. Passengers could now reach for a book while waiting for their flight, whether it was a children's story to read aloud, or a magazine to flip through between announcements. "Initially, we let people take books home on the promise that they'd return or replace them later. But very few did. Now, books remain in the lounge itself, with an airport staff member overseeing the library," explains club president Anand Kumar Goel.

To keep the shelves alive, the club is collecting

books from members, other Rotary clubs, and the public. A steady stream of books arrives through appeals made on social media. "We all have books gathering dust at home, why not let someone else read and enjoy them?" says Priyanka with a smile. The club is planning more initiatives such as author visits, book clubs and reading sessions for children to further nurture the habit.

RC Jharsuguda Green, chartered in 2021, has 58 members including 12 women members. "All of us are active participants, be it fellowship or community service," says Goel. The club has recently adopted the



A traveller browsing through a book at RC Jharsuguda Green's 'flybrary'.



A cervical cancer vaccination camp in progress.

UGME Government School in the city, transforming it into a 'Happy School' with fresh paint, furniture, and a computer lab for digital literacy will come up soon.

The club organised a cervical cancer awareness drive for parents and vaccinated 50 schoolchildren in partnership with EJV Foundation, with plans to extend this to 200 more



A painting competition for students at the UGME Government School.

children with support from JSW Steel. In another effort, members planted over 100 saplings on school grounds and public land, adding to the city's greenery. ■

From RI South Asia

Paul Harris Fellow recognition points transfer

TRF recognition points are awarded to donors who contribute to the Foundation through the Annual Fund, PolioPlus or approved global grant. Donors receive one recognition point for every US dollar contributed to these funds. Contributions to the Endowment Fund and Directed Gifts are not eligible.

Donors can transfer the Foundation recognition points to others to help them qualify as a Paul Harris Fellow or Multiple Paul Harris Fellow.

- ❖ A minimum of 100 Foundation recognition points must be transferred at a time, and donor must complete and sign the Paul Harris Fellow Recognition Transfer request form.
- ❖ The points cannot be transferred from individuals to a club or district.
- ❖ Individual donors are authorised to transfer recognition points from their account only.
- ❖ Club presidents are only authorised to transfer recognition points from a club account.
- ❖ District governors are only authorised to transfer recognition points from a district account.

After completing the PHF recognition points transfer request form and signed by donor, kindly email its PDF format to Manju Joshi at manju.joshi@rotary.org for processing.

In general, it takes 5-10 business days to update and reflect online.

Rotary Foundation Month

November, which is Foundation month, is a good opportunity to inspire Rotarians and Rotaractors by sharing impactful stories. Here are some tips:

- Encourage clubs to invite a speaker to join their club meeting in November. These speakers can share their personal experiences with a Foundation programme.
- Feature individuals such as Peace Fellows, grant recipients, grant partners, or Rotarian/Rotaract leaders who have been positively affected by TRF at club or district events.
- Promote Foundation recognitions and motivate your members to strive for the next level of TRF recognition.
- Show appreciation and gratitude to all donors, including new Major Donors, Bequest Society members, Paul Harris Society and Paul Harris Fellow members or those who contributed for the first time.
- Encourage inactive or non-contributing clubs and members to contribute to TRF.
- Promote online giving and urge members to make their donations online through their My Rotary login.

Anganwadis become happy learning spaces

Jaishree

Once dull and uninspiring, 83 anganwadis in and around Pune are now bursting with colour, creativity and cheer. The drab walls have come alive with bright paint and ‘speaking walls’ sporting with pictorial depictions of alphabets, numbers and shapes, while tiny chairs, benches and playful learning corners invite children

to sit, learn and explore. “The children now look forward to coming here every day. They enjoy learning through fun activities with the dedicated *sevikas* who teach them lovingly and patiently,” says Niranjan Mathure, IPP of Rotary Club of Poona West, RID 3131.

This heartwarming transformation is part of a larger mission that began in 2023 when the then DG

Manjoo Phadke signed an MoU with the Maharashtra government’s Ministry of Women and Child Development to turn 1,000 dilapidated anganwadis across the district into *Ujjawal Anganwadis* (bright anganwadis) by 2026. RC Poona West pledged to upgrade 100 centres.

“We wanted to make these playschools so lively that children would be drawn to them, to learn, laugh and grow in a fun, stimulating environment,” says Mathure. The plan included providing teaching aids, educational toys, growth monitoring devices and other resources that support early cognitive development.

During 2023–24, the club identified 55 anganwadis that needed urgent attention, with guidance from the local Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs). “Some of them required major renovation; others had no



furniture, faulty wiring, or absent *sevikas*, with helpers filling in. We inspected each centre, understood its needs, and completely transformed it,” he says.

The project cost of ₹55 lakh was made possible through CSR contributions and support from five partner Rotary clubs. Last Rotary year, TRF sanctioned a global grant of \$54,178; RC Omaha Suburban, US, was the international partner. The club also received CSR funding of ₹21 lakh from Vulcan Technology. Ten more Rotary clubs including RCs Pune Central, Pune East,

Pune Sinhgad, Pune Pride, Pune University, Pune Sarasbaug, Pune Sahwas, Pune Pimpri Elite, Pune Mid East, and RC Mumbai North Island (RID 3141) joined hands to uplift another 28 anganwadis. Work is in progress in another 10 centres in Mulshi and Maval villages, says Mathure.

In early 2025, the Maharashtra government rolled out its own large-scale upgrade programme providing TVs, e-learning kits, utensils and

The anganwadis transformed by Rotary radiate joy, featuring cheerful murals, tiled floors, sturdy furniture, TVs, e-learning kits and colourful indoor and outdoor play facilities.



RC Poona West president Santosh Chiplunkar (third from R) and club members with children at one of the anganwadis renovated under Project Ujjawal Anganwadis.



furniture. “We then re-evaluated our project scope with CDPOs and avoided duplicating what the government was already supplying,” explains Mathure.

Today, the Rotary-transformed Happy Anganwadis radiate joy. They feature cheerful murals, tiled floor, sturdy furniture, TVs, e-learning kits, safe drinking water, utensils, and colourful indoor and outdoor play facilities. Essential repairs — from roof leaks to compound walls and window grills — have made them secure, functional spaces. Breakfast, lunch and nutritional supplements are provided to the children at the centres by the government.

What makes the project truly special is its accountability. “Once the work is completed, we invite our CSR and synergy partners for an official handover in the presence of CDPOs and local authorities. It’s a proud moment for everyone involved,” says Mathure. He is happy that Rotary clubs have turned these once-forgotten spaces into bright beginnings for hundreds of children, “where learning feels like play and every wall speaks the language of hope.” ■

Focus on retention

He was introduced to Rotary by his friend PDG A Karthikeyan in 2007. Dhanasekar aims to increase membership by 1,200 this year, having already achieved 50 per cent of this goal. He emphasises that club presidents must share project stories and anecdotes with others, and keep potential members regularly updated about their service initiatives, fellowship events and global meets.

For member retention, a special programme was organised to honour senior Rotarians with over 25 years of service. "This recognition has led to renewed enthusiasm among senior members, motivating them to become more active and engaged," he says.

Integrating women into the all-men's clubs remains a challenge. To address this issue, the district is studying the barriers and has launched all-women Rotary clubs, "which women find easier to join," he says. The district has also expanded its footprint with the launch of 15 new Rotaract and 100 new Interact clubs. For TRF-giving, his target is \$2 million. As on July 1, 2025, there are 15 AKS members and 150 Major Donors in the district. The DG was "thrilled to host TRF trustee chair Holger Knaack, a major highlight of the year."

The district plans to establish six new crematoriums and four old age homes, partnering with Lux Industries, Prithvi International and other CSR partners, he adds.



B Dhanasekar
Real estate promoter
RC Tirupur Pride
RID 3203

Meet your Governors

Kiran Zehra



**Arun Daniel
Bhandare**
Construction
RC Ichalkaranji Executive
RID 3170

Fellowship is the key

A Rotarian since 1997, Bhandare believes that "fellowship is key to strengthening membership and boosting retention." This year, the district has launched fellowship tours to places such as Vietnam, Kerala, Rameswaram, Goa, Dandeli and Bali. Participants on these tours receive a special incentive: the district contributes \$24 to TRF in their names, and an additional \$24 to each family member who joins. He is also promoting the Rotary Family Friendship Exchange, with seven inter-district programmes in India and three international exchanges.

He aims to raise the membership from 488 to 1,000 by "highlighting friendship, fellowship, and the power of like-minded individuals coming together." He is also trying to bring in new members from diverse professions. The district has so far chartered 62 Rotaract and 16 Interact clubs.

His TRF-giving target is at \$1.3 million including \$50,000 to Polio Fund (\$42,000 has been achieved). Another \$50,000 for environmental initiatives, which will be matched by the Ravi Shankar Dakoju Environment Endowment Fund.

To enhance Rotary's public image, the district is hosting walkathons, marathons and car rallies, including the Rotary Run (formerly Goa Marathon) and the upcoming Gokaka Half-Marathon, featuring personalities like cricketer Priyanka Patel, the Mysore and Baroda Maharajas, PT Usha, and Colonel Sofiya Qureshi.

Boosting membership

Introduced to Rotary in 1999 by his friend PDG Ramesh Babu, he was inspired by “the organisation’s effort in community service.” He aims to increase district membership by 20 per cent, adding 1,000 members to the existing count of 5,868, bringing the total close to 7,000.

New members must attend at least two out of four monthly meetings and take on leadership roles as project chairs or co-chairs. Members relocating to new cities or districts are assisted in joining Rotary in their new places, ensuring a smooth transition and continued engagement. The district has chartered six new clubs. All clubs are required to start both a Rotaract and an Interact club. Leone acknowledges that DEI progress is slower in India compared to other countries. He is all for encouraging members to “think about diversity, inclusion and engagement in open discussions, as acceptance is still a gradual process.”

His TRF-giving target is \$1 million, including \$800,000 for the Annual Fund and \$200,000 for the Polio Fund. So far, \$40,000 has been contributed towards polio.

Some CSR projects include providing solar panels to the Rotary School in Mayiladuthurai in association with the NLC, partnering with the ONGC to enhance infrastructure, installing RO water purifiers in a government school in Chidambaram, and donating 300 sewing machines in Puducherry through Martin Foundation, Coimbatore.



J Leone
Civil engineer
RC Kumbakonam East
RID 2981

This year, RID 3170 has launched fellowship tours to places such as Vietnam, Kerala, Rameswaram, Goa, Dandeli and Bali. Participants on these tours receive a special incentive: \$24 to TRF in their names, and \$24 for each family member who joins.



Y Kalyan Chakravarthy
Doctor
RC Kakinada
RID 3020

Saving lives through CPR

His Rotary journey began in 2006–07 with a GSE trip to Atlanta, US, where he gained a deep appreciation of cultures and Rotary’s values. He joined Rotary on return and hosted visiting GSE teams. He also led a VTT team to Nigeria in 2016–17, performing 400 surgeries in just four days.

With 4,200 members in the district, which has one of the largest clubs, RC Vijayawada Midtown with 800 members, he aims to reach 5,000 members by the year-end. Over 50 per cent of district office-bearers are women this year. The district plans to host an exclusive meet for women to boost their membership. He is also exploring the inclusion of transgender members in existing clubs and RCCs. His TRF goal is to raise more than the \$1.5 million by increasing the participation of members from the present 13 to 30 per cent.

CPR training programme is close to his heart, as he was moved by the deaths of a school child and a friend who lost their lives as no one knew CPR at that time. In partnership with the Indian Society for Anaesthesia, Indian Medical Association and Indian Society for Critical Care Medicine, the CPR sessions will train 10,000 students and Rotarians. Other key initiatives include HPV vaccination camps with 2,500 girls benefitted so far.

RYLAs transform Akola's children

V Muthukumaran

School students in Akola, a town of five lakh people, 250km from Nagpur, always look forward to participate in the three-day RYLAs conducted in the Melghat forest area by RC Akola, RID 3030. Now into its 80th year of service, the club has “taught time management, punctuality and leadership qualities to over 1,500 students through big residential RYLAs in forest camps and small, half-day RYLAs at the schools,” says club president Naryosang Taraporevala.

He has plans to hold two mega RYLAs in Oct-Nov at the Melghat forest “where we will erect numerous tents, hold camp fire, play games and

hold interactive sessions. As it will be held in winter, the scenic hills, a part of Satpura mountain range, will give the students a pleasant backdrop to enjoy their brief stay there,” he explains. The club will host 10–12 half-day RYLAs at schools this year. So far the club has conducted around 120 such leadership sessions since its inception. For tribal and rural students, free educational RYLAs are held, “while for residential camps, we levy a nominal fee as we have to take care of food, accommodation and logistics.”

Tribal welfare

Skilling tribal women and children has been the top priority of the club for the last five years. Rotarians visit government-run Ashram Shalas (tribal schools) in Gullarghat, Dharghad and other remote villages in and around Akola on a regular basis and engage children under *Project Read with Me*. “We have reached out to around 30 private and government-aided schools, and donated thousands of books across genres including academic books, notebooks, stationery and other school essentials,” says Radheshyam Modi, a senior Rotarian and former district chairman of Rotary Youth Exchange. More than 1,500 students would have benefitted under this literacy school project.

The idea behind the project is to “hook children to the reading habit and enable them to write legibly with clarity of thought. We provide wall paperboards to schools for students to display their articles and sketches for others to see and appreciate,” he explains. Under the third component of *Read with Me*, a group of 20 Rotarians hold communication sessions for students from low-income and disadvantaged families.

Recalling his club’s intensive work in the Melghat tribal areas, Modi says, “around 600 Adivasis including

women, children and youth have benefitted from Rotary’s outreach consisting of training programmes. While women were trained in tailoring and post-natal care of newborns, youngsters learnt driving so that they can earn a decent income.”

During his visit to the Moharidevi Khandelwal Kanya Vidyalaya, a girls’ school in Akola, decades ago, after the event got over, Modi invited a young girl to give a vote of thanks. “But instead of addressing the gathering, she started to cry. I talked to her and helped her deliver a small speech which she did well. Years passed; suddenly, one fine morning as I was standing near a swimming pool at dawn, I saw a college girl running towards me to say ‘Thank you’. She said: ‘Now I am leading my college hockey team, which would not have happened if you had not encouraged me to speak on that day in my school.’ I couldn’t control my tears then,” smiles Modi.

Another iconic project of the club is its 50-year-old cataract screening camp, through which 100–120 surgeries are done each year. “We have done cataract surgery on more than 1,000 patients in these years. To mark the 80th year, we want to reach out to 1,000 people this year alone,” says Taraporevala.

Before India became polio-free in 2014, “our PolioPlus teams used to move around the slums and underserved areas (*jhuggi jhopdis*) across Akola, braving the insanitary conditions of these settlements. Our groundwork earned us goodwill among the communities, and mothers readily took their newborns to the nearest PHCs or clinics to get them oral polio drops,” recalls Modi with pride. “We were accompanied by medical volunteers who gave polio drops at the doorsteps in the vulnerable areas of Akola.” The club president intervenes

Rotarians visit
tribal schools in the
Melghat forest area and
engage children under *Project
Read with Me*. Tribal women
are also being skilled.



Diverse books are provided to children in the Melghat forest area during RYLAs.



RC Akola president Naryosang Taraporevala (2nd from R), along with (from L) Shrikant Padgilwar, Dr Manish Harshe, Girish Dhabalia and Sabhapati Shukla, at the cataract surgery camp.



Girls read aloud at the Savitribai Phule Vidyalaya, Akola, under *Project Read with Me*.

to add that they organised two skating rallies, as a fundraiser, at that time — Nashik to Amravati, and Jalgaon to Nagpur — each having 15 skaters. “All the rallyists enjoyed the hospitality of the Rotary clubs on the route who offered them accommodation and food. We raised ₹2 lakh from the rallies for our PolioPlus drive.”

Some of their regular projects include blood donation camps, tree planting drives, and health awareness sessions for schoolgirls from low-income families. “Each year, we hold at least 50 healthcare sessions for

schoolgirls in which they are taught menstrual hygiene and other good sanitation practices.”

Attracting Gen Z

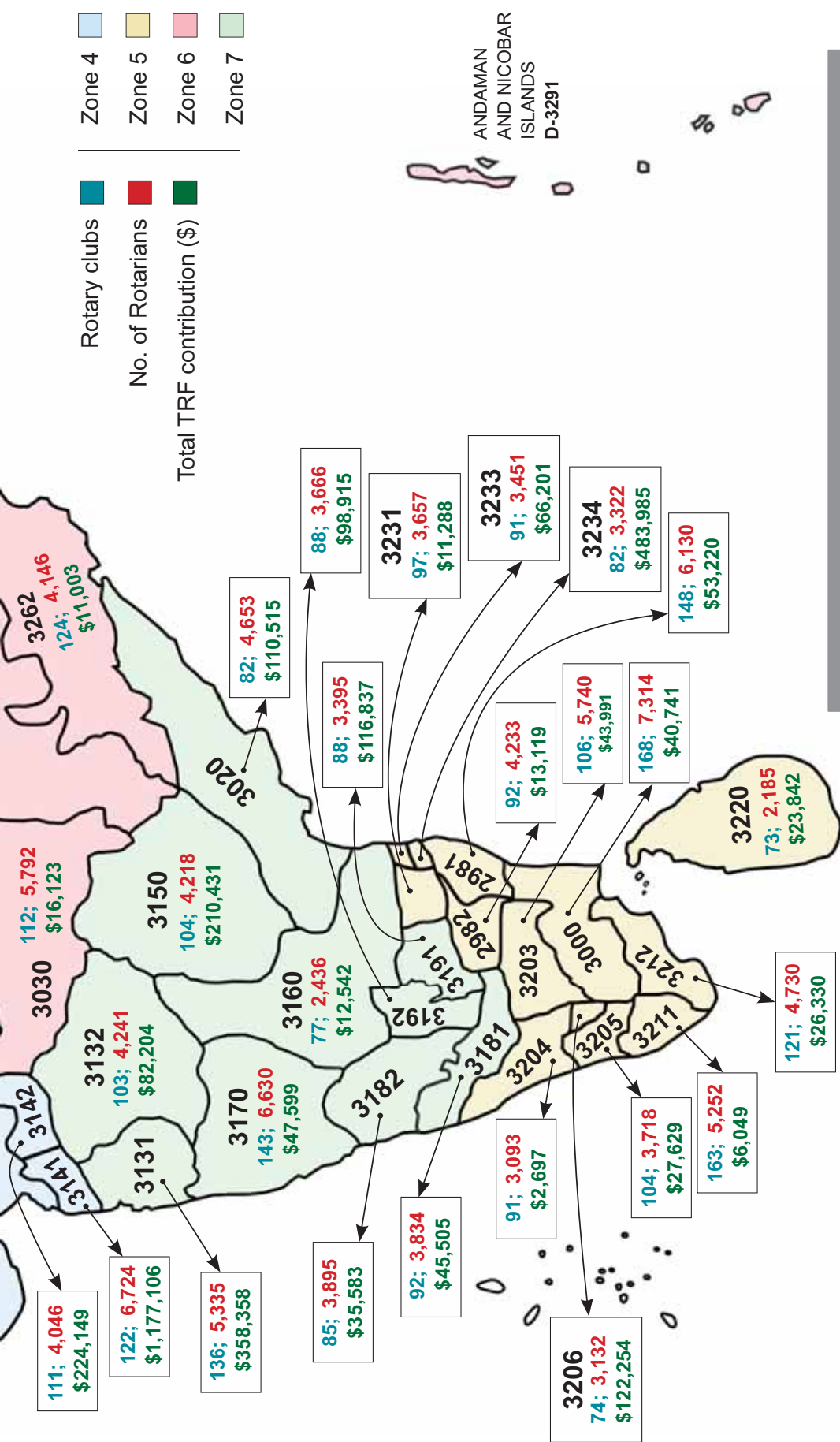
When he joined Rotary in 1967–68, Modi (84), a tax consultant, recalls that it took him “two years to understand what the Rotary movement is all about, what it stands for, and how I can contribute as a Rotarian.” Now after more than five decades, “I breathe Rotary; it runs in my veins... Rotary helps me to lead a happy and contented life.”

But he warns that today, “new members join and leave after 12 months. They think Rotary is a social club, which it is not. It is a service club. We have to attract Gen Z groups as they are sharp, witty and come well-prepared. RC Akola is making efforts to draw more young professionals into its fold by making our club attractive to them.”

Chartered in September, 1945, the club has 30 members consisting of entrepreneurs, traders, academicians and businessmen. ■

Membership & TRF contribution summary





Rotary worldwide

Rotary clubs	: 36,462	Rotary members	: 1,161,050
Rotaract clubs	: 9,764	Rotaract members	: 104,627
Interact clubs	: 18,323	Interact members	: 421,567
RCCs	: 14,236	As on October 22, 2025	

*Membership figures as on October 1, 2025.
*TRF contribution figures as on September 30, 2025.

Making a difference

Bicycles for rural girl students

Bicycles were given by RC Hinganghat, RID 3030, to 51 girl students from 10 different schools to make their commuting to and from school less tiresome. Now, they can pedal their way and have more time to focus on education and other chores at home.

PDG Raje Sangramsingh Bhonsle presented the bicycles to the girls and appreciated the club for taking up such impactful school projects in the rural areas of Hinganghat in Wardha district of Maharashtra. ■



Girl students with their new bicycles, along with Rotarians and school faculty.



Students of the Rotary Public School ready to board the bus sponsored by RC Bargarh.



A spate of initiatives in RID 3261

Under DG Amit Jayaswal's guidance, Rotary clubs of RID 3261 collected 2,500 units of blood through blood donation camps; over 50,000 saplings were planted across the region, and 25,000 schoolchildren participated in painting competitions under *Project Splash* aimed to create awareness on environment protection.

RC Bargarh has begun construction of a new school on a four-acre plot to replace the existing one, along with a free school bus facility. Efforts are on to upgrade the Rotary squares (chowk) in various cities to make them more attractive. ■

Empowering women in Thane

Sewing machines and raw materials were given to 20 members of self-help groups by RC Thane West, RID 3142, in a joint project with RC Thane Green City and the Inner Wheel Club of Thane West.

Thanks to the support from Aarna Foundation, this initiative will empower transgenders and women from low-income families by equipping them with skills for a sustainable livelihood. PDG Kumar Kewalramani was the chief guest at the handover event held at the Aarna English High School. Rotarians Sadhana Vaze and Sakshi Chandna, among others, have contributed to the project. ■



SHG members working at the tailoring unit.



School projects on I-Day

Bicycles were donated to 30 girl students at the Sardar Raghunathrao Dhavale High School, Kendur, by RC Pune Camp, RID 3131.

With an aim to promote digital learning, two e-learning kiosks were installed to make education interactive and engaging for students. While bicycles will improve the school attendance for those travelling long distances, the digital learning will help students to get exposure to global knowledge sources, and broaden their career horizons, said club president Kavitha Mutha.

A set of career guidance books was also donated for the benefit of students. ■





RID 2981

RC Thanjavur Mid-Town

The club is providing dinner throughout the year at nursing homes, orphanages and special homes as part of a mega food distribution project, boosting its public image in this temple town in southern Tamil Nadu.



Club matters



RID 3012

RC Delhi Mayur Vihar

Fifty-five people were examined for chronic illness including blood sugar, BP, dental issues, and got their eyes screened at a medical camp held at a community centre in Noida. ECG test was done with the support of Medanta Global Health Hospital.

RID 3020

RC Vizianagaram

Footwear and ulcer medicine kits worth ₹62,500 were given to inmates at the Lepira Society, Narava village. IPDG M Venkateswara Rao and club president B V Srinivasa Rao handed over the essentials to the people suffering from leprosy.





RID **3040**

RC Sagar

On International Chess Day (July 20), a one-day workshop was conducted in which around 50 children and a few elders were trained in the presence of club members. The event was held as part of the youth service project of the club.

RID **3000**

RC Karur Young Gen

Around 50 children were screened at a dental check-up and awareness camp held at the Vasavi Aided Primary School, Karur, in tie-up with the Rotaractors. Dr P Mahesvari examined the students who were each given a toothbrush and toothpaste.



RID **3056**

RC Shri Madhopur Sunrise

Around 35 patients were identified for cataract surgery at the Sankara Eye Hospital, Jaipur. The club had organised an eye examination camp at the Rotary Bhawan. Spectacles were given to people with vision defects.



RID **3060**

RC Udhna

Around 100 girls at the Mook Badhir School, Surat, were inoculated at the HPV vaccination camp in a joint initiative with RC Surat Riverside. The vaccine will reduce the risk of cervical cancer by up to 90 per cent in these young girls.

Understanding ageing

Gita Mathai


India, along with the rest of the world, is ageing rapidly. It is a scary proposition. Even with financial security, a failing body and a forgetful, slow-reacting brain make coping with life difficult. Additionally, children may reside in distant countries. Social security benefits are limited, and finding domestic help may be challenging.

This has led to a plethora of anti-ageing advice on social media, in medical journals and anecdotes. Some wealthy people sit in hyperbaric oxygen chambers and devote a greater part of their day to anti-ageing devices. Many treatments are unproven, and some may be dangerous.

We all start life at conception as a single cell. It multiplies at an unbelievably rapid rate to form a baby. The cells continue to grow as the child grows and matures. Then, all of a sudden, in early adulthood, growth stops and gradually senescence sets in. Cells do not divide as rapidly as they used to. Repairs to damaged body parts are slow or do not occur at all, as with ageing, cells lose the ability to divide and replace lost or damaged tissue. The mitochondria within the cells become less efficient. The ends of the chromosomes (telomeres) break off and become shorter. Our immunity decreases.

Ageing is an inevitable biological process, not a disease. It is a





time-dependent functional decline that affects every part of our body. DNA damage is considered a primary driver of ageing, controlled by genetic pathways, which regulate metabolic efficiency and defences against age-related damage.

By the mid-thirties we start losing muscle at the rate of 1–2 per cent every year. Balance becomes a problem, joints ache, and lifting that “carry-on” into the overhead bin becomes a herculean

task. It contributes to a decrease in aerobic capacity, and fatigue sets in faster.

The factors that affect ageing are complex. They are partly hereditary, genetic and partly environmental. We may inherit good genes, but if we are constantly exposed to toxic, polluted and an unhealthy environment, as in the air we breathe, and the food and water we consume, then ageing and death are likely to occur at a faster rate.

Most people do not want to age. If they must, they want to remain healthy and free of incapacitation. Many people search for a magic potion which, if taken with minimal effort, will keep them young and fit for life. All kinds of theories and advice circulate on how to “remain young forever,” but much of it is unscientific and unproven.

The genes we inherit are not under our control, but the rate at which damage sets in can, to some extent, can be influenced. This is not achieved by some magic elixir or by drinking a glass of red wine daily (containing resveratrol), under the mistaken impression that it will retard ageing. Some wealthy individuals resort to hyperbaric oxygen chambers and other expensive gimmicky contraptions, but this is impractical for most of us.

Life expectancy in Japan is high. There are many centenarians. Their emphasis on family, government support and daily calisthenics well into old age are contributing factors. They also experience less stress, with strong family ties and a government that provides a good quality of life and social security to seniors. This has led to a fascination with Japanese practices.

Genes control our lifespan.

If you are blessed with good genes, unless you do something to drastically cut short your life, you will probably live as long or longer than your parents.

To age well and look good:

- **Exercise aerobically.** Walking, jogging, swimming, dancing, or cycling for 40–60 minutes a day, at least six days a week. Muscle attrition slows down. Strong muscles provide good balance and hold joints in place, decreasing the risk of fall and preventing incapacitating joint pain.
- **Do strength training** with 2–5kg dumbbells with at least 30 repetitions on each side. You can also walk holding 2kg dumbbells or wear a weighted vest to increase exercise efficiency. Try Japanese interval walking: 3 minutes at a fast pace where talking is difficult, followed by 3 minutes at a slower pace.
- **Practise yoga.** Eye exercises help prevent rapid deterioration of eyesight, ear exercises help with hearing, and balance exercises prevent falls.
- **Avoid toxins** such as smoking, alcohol and fast food.
- **Diet.** The Japanese do not take a second helping of food, even if it is delicious. They follow the *Hara Hachi Bu* principle (eat until 80 per cent full), which helps prevent overeating. Eat only until the edge of your hunger disappears.
- **Control lifestyle diseases** that you may have unfortunately developed.
- **Do not underestimate the power of natural oils.** Massage your face and body with a mixture of 250ml coconut oil, 250ml sesame oil, and 100ml castor oil. Leave it on for 10 minutes and wash off. Your skin will retain its youthful glow.

Here's to healthy ageing for everyone.

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

A lifeline for children with neurological disorders in Dhule

Jaishree

For over two years, the Rotaract Club of Dhulia, RID 3060, has worked relentlessly to establish the Samarpan Multi-disability Rehab Centre at the Kasturba Hospital, Dhule, Maharashtra.

“Back then, Dhule had no dedicated facility to treat children with neurological disorders. Parents had to travel all the way to Mumbai, Pune or Indore to access specialised therapy,” recalls past president Veeram Shah, who is deeply invested in the project from the time it was conceptualised in 2023.

For more than 15 years, Dr Anaita Negde, a renowned paediatric neurologist from the Breach Candy Hospital, Mumbai, conducted medical camps in Dhule every six months. Over three intensive days, children were examined, CT scans and MRIs were done free of cost and treatment ranging from medications to surgery was offered. “Seeing the large number of children being brought to the camps, Dr Anaita suggested setting up a rehabilitation centre in Dhule. Our parent club, RC Dhule, supported the idea wholeheartedly and encouraged us to join in,” he says. With her guidance, equipment was installed and staff trained to deliver specialised care.

Inaugurated in March this year, the centre, among the first in North Maharashtra, caters to children up to 18 years of age diagnosed

with autism, neuromuscular conditions, ADHD, and visual and auditory disorders, while also providing counselling for their families. Setting it up cost about ₹1 crore.

Rajesh Bhatwal, a past president of RC Dhulia and a former Rotaractor, significantly supports the centre through his corporate Nitiraj Engineers. He remembers how heartbreaking it was to see parents wait six months or more between camps. “That’s when we decided that Dhule needed a permanent centre.” Veeram’s father, Pradeep Shah, also a past president and CSR head at his company, shared the same passion, and “together we made it happen.”



To streamline support, the Rotary Club of Dhule Charitable Trust was formed. Other partners include the Matruseva Sangh, Kamal Udwardia Foundation, where Dr Anaita is a director; State Bank of India and 360 One Asset Management.

The facility is equipped with state-of-the-art devices and therapies: EEG testing to detect abnormalities in the brain, BERA testing to check hearing and nerve function, audiometry testing, and speech and vision therapy, orthotics and prosthetics are offered. Virtual reality sensory



Staff teaching children at the centre.

integration session enhances sensory processing, and occupational therapy provides livelihood skills for the older children.

Importantly, services are free for underprivileged families and cost as little as ₹100 per session for others, compared to ₹400–500 elsewhere. With 400–500 children visiting every month and 20–25 sessions conducted daily, the centre's running cost is about ₹11,000 per day. "Thanks to social media campaigns and 365 committed donors, the centre has never faced a fund crunch," smiles Veeram.

The Rotaract Club of Dhulia, chartered in 1969 and now 50 members strong, also runs *Project Aarogya*, another impactful

initiative. For the past five years, the club has ensured essential medicines and health supplements for 100 girls with mental illness at the Sanskar Matimand School. The monthly expense of ₹4,000–7,000 has always been sponsored by an individual member or well-wisher, never by the club itself, says club secretary Palash Agarwal.

To sustain its other community projects, the club organises a popular mega exhibition every December. During Diwali every year, the Rotaractors deliver home-made sweets and savouries to NGOs taking care of children and senior citizens. "It is an opportunity for our club members to bond as all of us gather in one of our homes and prepare the goodies ourselves," he says. Cooked food packets are distributed to street dwellers regularly. ■

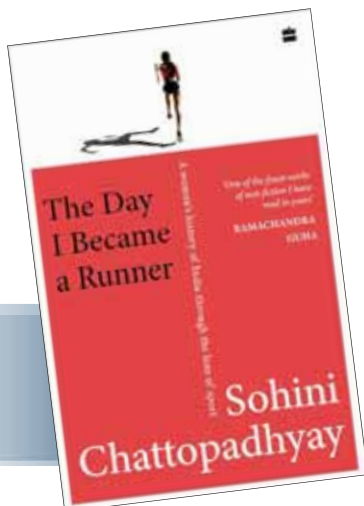


Running and the art of being

While we lament the demise of the sporting spirit, let us pace along with two mind-bending books for willing souls.

I don't know if I would have picked up *The Day I Became a Runner* by Sohini Chattopadhyay if it had not been highly recommended on a friend's book club

WhatsApp group. Its red, white and black cover is a stunning example of taste and balance. Designed by Saurav Das, the highlight is all text — title, name of author, endorsement of the book, and tagline that reads: "A women's history of India through the lens of sport". And then you notice a tiny image of the back of a sprinter, her shadow stretching long on the background: Wow!



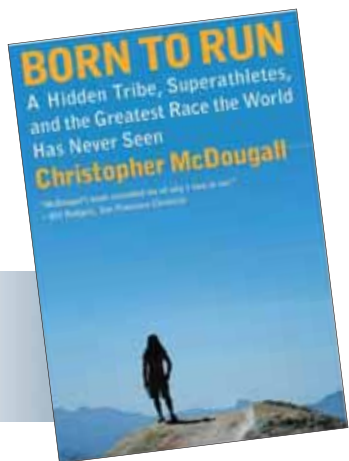
Sandhya Rao

Comprising chapters on athletes, women who ran short, middle and long distances, as well as an organisation that trains girls to run, the book opens with an introduction curiously titled 'The Bengali Woman's Running Diary'. It is an introspective look at the author's own engagement with running, which began, she says, as a mourning ritual upon the death of her grandmother. As she writes, so eloquently, 'I was a lump in those days — a squat, easily breathless lump. I ran in the lower, unlevelled half of the garden. I didn't deserve to run on the jogging track — I wanted to be unseen. Some of this was the grief. I didn't want to be.'

I was reminded of an anecdote in Sheela Dhar's delightful memoir of music

and of being a diplomat's wife, *Raga 'n' Josh*, in which she talks about the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi requesting bureaucrats' spouses to entertain a royal visitor, the Queen of Samoa. When one of the women asked the sweet-faced, sanguine Queen what she did to keep herself busy in her country, she replied, 'I be-s'. Such a wonderfully philosophical response when you think about it: to just be.

And in this state of just being, we turn to *Born to Run* by Christopher McDougall where we meet coach Dr Joe Vigil whom the author describes as "the greatest distance running mind America has ever seen". "His head," he goes on to write, "was a Library of Congress of running lore, much of it vanished from every place on the planet except his memory." In the course of researching what made distance runners/running special — especially those intrepid souls not intimidated by ultramarathons that course across miles and miles of challenging terrain — he had zoned in on one aspect in particular: love. The love of running. *Born to Run* takes a deep dive into the world of the Tarahumara people of the Sierra Madre mountains in Mexico who — men and women of all ages — go for hundreds of miles with a smile on their lips, enjoying every moment and only very rarely sustaining injuries. Extraordinary, considering how many athletes' careers have been cut short by injuries. What is special about the Tarahumara, McDougall writes, is that they "remembered that running was mankind's first fine art, our original act of inspired creation. Way before we were scratching pictures on caves or beating rhythms on hollow trees, we were perfecting the art of combining our breath and mind and muscles into fluid self-propulsion over wild terrain. ... We were born to run; we were born *because* we run." He calls attention to



the way children, when they first learn to walk, then run, just run and run; they run so they are!

Sohini seems to echo these sentiments in her chapter on PT Usha — she can never be ignored when we speak about Indian athletes — as she describes the golden girl during the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984: “She was feeling very light on her feet those days, moving and landing in rhythm with her breathing. As if her legs were moving instinctively to the quiet music of drawing breath and releasing it. Even her heartbeat, echoing in her ears, was in sync with that rhythm.”

Through the stories, struggles, practice and points of view of athletes as remarkable as Mary D’Souza,

PT Usha, Kamaljit Sandhu, Ila Mitra, Santhi Soundarajan, Pinki Pramanik, Lalita Babar and Dutee Chand, Sohini Chattopadhyay communicates a narrative that is at once thrilling and provocative, thought-provoking and prompting self-reflection. Based on in-depth interviews, these are not always stories of glory, but they are all stories of guts, whether the individuals pitted themselves against society/societal norms, or peers, or government, or themselves and their own bodies. For most people, the controversies surrounding spectacular athletes such as Santhi Soundarajan, Pinki Pramanik and Dutee Chand provided grist for gossip for a while, and then they were forgotten. Sohini reminds us why we must remember them: for their talent, for their achievements, for their courage, even if, oftentimes, sporting officialdom in India will not or, worse, penalise them, as champions Santhi, Pinki and Dutee discovered.

Over four years as a competitor, Santhi won 12 medals at the international level and several more at the national level in the middle-distance category. At the Doha Asian Games in 2006, she won silver at 800 metres. “Two days later,” Sohini writes, “Santhi had been summoned for a medical test that took place over several hours, then put on a flight and sent back home by herself that same day. A few days later, the media broke the story that Santhi had failed a ‘gender test’. Today, it seems obvious that the nomenclature is incorrect. Gender is a matter of personal identity — a personal choice. How can anyone fail a test of personal choice?” In 2012, it was reported that Santhi was working as a labourer in a brick kiln. But she was not embarrassed

doing the work her family did. It was the “termination of her sports career that had left her in shock”.

The history you will find in *The Day...* is not about dates and dynasties, or even really about winning and losing; it is about women who dared despite the times, trials, tribulations, and in spite of society, the media and an unsparing, if short-sighted, public gaze. It will change the way you view yourself and the world around. In the way that meeting with the Tarahamura and learning about them changed McDougall’s perceptions of sport and life and the secret to happiness. *Born to Run* is full of amazing nuggets and anecdotes. One, for instance, is to do with chia seeds, now so essential to a healthy diet. The Tarahumara make an energy drink with it called *ishiate*, which is a combination of chia seeds soaked in water and topped with sugar and lemon juice. Then there is a brief but beautiful section about Emil Zatopek, the amazing Czech Olympian who once secretly slipped his 1952 gold medal for 10,000 metres into Australian Ron Clarke’s suitcase, “because you deserved it”. And Clarke thought he was smuggling a message for Zatopek! And you get to meet ‘Shaggy’, later transformed into the mysterious Caballo Blanco or White Horse and who became a legend in the Copper Canyon where the Tarahumara live, who may have started life as Micah True (or something else!) and who was the subject of the film, *Run Free!*

No two books on the same subject could be more unlike each other. If Sohini’s book is a series of sprints, McDougall’s is all long-distance in approach, in style, in finish, in the feelings they evoke. But in both, breath and muscle move in step with each other.

The columnist is a children’s writer and senior journalist

We were born to
run; we were born
because we run. He calls
attention to the way children,
when they first learn to walk,
then run, just run and run!



RID 3070

RC Dharamshala Central

Stretchers and wheelchairs were donated to the Zonal Hospital, Dharamshala, in the presence of local MP Rajeev Bhardwaj. This gesture will enable the hospital to reach out to patients with better service.



Club matters



RID 3131

RC Pune Royal

As part of its DEI outreach, the club felicitated the security staff at the Bharti Vidyapeeth in a programme. They were honoured for their role in ensuring safety and discipline on the campus. District director Kranti Shah and club president Medha Kulkarni spoke.

RID 3170

RC Shirol Heritage City

At an eye check-up camp, 180 people were screened for sight disorders. Also, spectacles were given to needy patients. Club president Sanjay Patil and other members were present at the screening camp.





RID 3212

RC Nagercoil Heritage

More than 200 people were examined at a multispecialty medical camp in Kulachal, organised with the support of KMMC Medical College and Hospital, Muttam, and a district fishermen's body. Over 40 doctors and paramedical staff rendered their services.

RID 3110

RC Kashipur

To promote waste segregation at source, dustbins were distributed to local shopkeepers and residents. City mayor Deepak Bali, club president Vineet Sangal and other members took part with the support of the civic body.



RID 3231

RC Tiruttani

More than 100 people were screened at an eye check-up camp, of whom 82 were selected for cataract surgery. The camp was held with the support of Sankara Eye Hospital, Pammal, and the District Blindness Prevention Association.



RID 3291

RC Jodhpur Gardens Calcutta

Rotary's Four-Way Test posters were shared with RI President Francesco Arezzo, RI directors M Muruganandam and KP Nagesh at the Lead25 Conclave in Chennai. PP Sreya Mukherjee distributed small cards of the same to delegates.

Compiled by V Muthukumar



Turning e-waste into critical resources

Preeti Mehra

Your e-waste can bridge an important gap and become a national asset.

With geopolitics and tariffs impacting global supply chains, self-sufficiency has become the buzzword all over the world. Among the most discussed raw materials in India are rare minerals critical to our growth. These include lithium, cobalt, nickel, rare earth elements, copper and graphite. All these are essential for wind turbines, solar

panels, batteries, electric vehicles and producing low-carbon technologies.

These minerals are considered rare because they are only found in specific geographical regions, such as China and parts of Africa. While India has started to mine for these minerals, experts believe that a significant contribution towards self-sufficiency can be achieved by recovering these minerals from our e-waste.

This is where we can help as citizens. E-waste includes a wide range of discarded devices that we ‘use and junk’ like smartphones, computers, televisions, and household appliances like refrigerators, washing machines, air conditioners, batteries, modems and routers.

The thinking now is that e-waste can be



scientifically recycled to recover rare minerals like lithium, nickel, cobalt, graphite, antimony, cadmium, gallium, silicon, tin, tungsten, titanium, vanadium and zirconium, among others. However, for this to happen, citizens must make an effort.

The cardinal principle to follow before discarding electronic goods is to determine whether they can be refurbished and reused by someone else. If they can be, then one can extend the lifespan of these goods and reduce the carbon footprint required to manufacture them afresh. In this context, it may be wise to choose products from manufacturers committed to sustainability and who have a 'take-back' programme in which they accept their used products from customers.

In fact, there is a mandate under the E-waste Management Rules 2022,

which came into effect in April 2023. Under it all manufacturers are expected to follow the Extended Producer Responsibility norm where they are required to ensure safe collection and recycling of their respective products.

According to experts, this move by the government is important because India has reportedly emerged as the world's third-largest generator of e-waste after China and the US. It generated 3.8 million metric tonnes (MMT) in 2024. This is of major concern because e-waste poses both environmental and health hazards. The release of toxic heavy metals and chemicals can cause neurological and respiratory damage to those exposed to it. Environmentally, it can harm ecosystems and contribute to greenhouse gas emissions.

So, how can we help to support the circular economy as individuals in our day-to-day life? The first thing, say experts, is not to allow large number of devices such as smartphones, laptops, tablets, batteries to fester in our drawers and cupboards at home. When I was speaking to a friend the other day, she told me she had at least five old mobiles lying in her drawer as she is so attached to the devices that she finds it difficult to part with them. So, she thought, the next best thing to do is to stash the phones deep inside her drawer and forget about them.

Is she right in what she does? I am sure most of us would agree that it is not a wise thing to do. Indeed, if my friend was half-serious about doing some good for the environment and her country, she would have given the discarded mobiles to an authorised recycler who would have mined valuable minerals from the devices gathering dust in her drawer.

The process of recovering useful minerals from e-waste is called urban mining. It is an activity where electronic waste is recycled by formal,

certified recycling companies and critical minerals are retrieved from them to make new products. Today there is even a regulation that certain new products being manufactured must use some percentage of recycled material.

There are many social impact startups that are also trying to bring illegal e-waste recyclers into the formal fold. Ecowork, a Delhi-based startup, has opened a facility where they provide informal recyclers, who do not have the means to own recycling units, with the infrastructure to recycle ethically and scientifically.

Coming back to our role in all this, where do we begin? For a start, we could all try to reduce our e-footprint. If you are looking for an electronic device like a laptop, printer, smartphone, or even an air conditioner, it would be wise to go in for a refurbished one. Do a bit of research on refurbished devices and approach a vendor who has a good reputation in the world of refurbishing. When I was in Delhi, a friend introduced me to someone who refurbishes laptops. I bought one of his machines. The laptop was refurbished to perfection and was so much cheaper that I didn't feel a big dent on my pocket. Believe it or not, it gave me many years of unstinted service.

Of course, if you are a citizen who is already aware of the difference you can make by dropping off your device at a recycling centre or returning it through an app that is specifically for the purpose of collecting e-waste, you could get involved in a movement pushing others in your family, neighbourhood, office or community to do the same. The unfortunate reality is that we have extra capacity at several recycling companies, but collection is not good enough to feed this demand. It would be great if each of us could plug that gap.

The writer is a senior journalist who writes on environmental issues



Anti-dengue drive in Hiranandani Estate

V Muthukumaran

In the last 10 years or so, Hiranandani Estate, an integrated township of around 10,000 families in Thane near Mumbai, has seen rising cases of vector-borne diseases, especially dengue, with many people getting hospitalised.

Hence, “the club leadership of RC Hiranandani Ivan, RID 3142, decided at its first sitting in July to take up an anti-dengue campaign to create awareness and sensitise the residents to adopt preventive steps against the disease,” says club president Vinay Pratap Singh.

The Thane Municipal Corporation has also taken up fumigation of water bodies and vulnerable pockets of the township where large stagnant puddles and potholes breed swarms of mosquitoes that attack the immune system,” he says. “Even residential societies are doing fumigation on a regular basis, but still we see an alarming increase in malaria and dengue cases each year.” During monsoon, heavy rains transform the craters and trenches, a result of year-long construction activity, into small artificial ponds which then start breeding mosquitoes.

Another feature in Hiranandani is that people in high-rise buildings grow mini parks on their balconies, terraces and in common areas where hanging pots and containers attract fleas and rodents.

The club organised an anti-dengue campaign through a two-pronged effort from July-September, when rains batter this region nestled between the Yeoor Hills and the Ulhas River. First, Rotarians took up a social media campaign, and placed advertisements in local papers to educate people on preventive steps to ward off dengue. On the eve of Ganesh Visarjan, the Rotarians took up



RC Hiranandani Ivan president Vinay Pratap Singh speaks at an RWA meeting on the need to take preventive steps against vector-borne diseases.



A club member fumigating a bushy area.

fumigation of small ponds created to immerse the idols.

An elaborate dos and don'ts poster titled *Aapka Prayas, Dengue Khallas* (with your efforts, dengue can be finished) was distributed among residents, shopkeepers and traders. "We formed a team of 12 Rotarians to fumigate public

spaces like parks, roadside habitats, small ponds etc over three days," says the club president.

Secondly, they visited apartment complexes and spoke at their RWA meetings on the need to curb the spread of dengue through preventive steps. These efforts were appreciated by the residents.

The 18-month-old club has spent around ₹50,000 for its three-month anti-dengue drive. All the 40 members support their club's initiatives. "Next year, we will join hands with the municipal corporation to expand our anti-vector drive during monsoon," smiles Singh. ■

From Silence to Smiles

Nandita Sisodia



Parwati with her hearing aid.

What seemed like indifference to many was in fact a hidden struggle. For years, Parwati, a domestic help in her 40s, was thought to be inattentive or forgetful. The truth was far more heartbreaking — she was hard of hearing. Misunderstood by neighbours, employers and even family, she lived in a world of muffled silence.

When I spoke with her, I realised the depth of her struggle. An ENT specialist confirmed the need for a hearing

aid for her. But the cost was far beyond her means. With her modest income and family responsibilities, affording such a device was impossible.

That's when Rotary stepped in. After discussing the matter with my husband, Pradeep Sisodia, vice-president of the Rotary Club Chandigarh Midtown, RID 3080, we reached out to our Rotary fraternity. The response was immediate and overwhelming — members opened their hearts, and within a day, the funds were arranged.

Parwati was soon tested and fitted with a hearing aid. The transformation was instant and moving. As soon as she heard clearly, her face broke into a radiant smile. With tears in her eyes, she whispered: "Didi, you have changed everything in my life."

Today, Parwati works with a newfound confidence. Her employers and family are amazed at the change. She communicates with ease, follows instructions and participates in conversations with joy.

This heartwarming story is a reminder of what Rotary stands for — compassion in action. When individual kindness combines with collective effort, miracles happen. Together, we didn't just restore Parwati's hearing; we restored her hope, confidence and dignity.

The writer is a Rotary Ann from RC Chandigarh Midtown



Guests and gripes

TCA Srinivasa Raghavan



Inconsiderate guests come in all ages, shapes and sizes. As you've done I'm sure, I too have seen my share of them over the last 70 years and decided to construct an 'Annoyance Index'. Just like how Prannoy Roy had constructed a misery index on NDTV, based on heat and humidity. The higher each was, the more miserable you were. I always wondered how that would work for cold and dryness. Zero degrees with zero humidity can be as miserable as 40 degrees with 80 per cent humidity.

My index is highest for fussy eaters. We entertained a family of four once — father, mother and two grown-up children — who stayed for four days and treated the kitchen like it was their own house. Two entirely different types of meals had to be prepared, three times a day. The girl, 16, was normal as was the boy, 20. The father, 52, however, thought he would die within hours if there was no egg, mutton, chicken or fish with each meal. The mother had a series of *vrats*, so some meals had no garlic and onion, while some only had fruits and milk — and so on. No meal was straightforward. This family is at the very top of my index, not least because my wife took out all her irritation on me whenever we were alone, even though these relatives were from her side of the family. Wives are like that only.

The second rank on my index goes to guests who think they are always alone and play their phones at maximum volume. Music, talk and even simple phone calls are at full or near full volume. We had a lady staying with us once who not only played her phone loudly but also kept up a running commentary on whatever she was listening to. I am very allergic to noise and nearly went mad whenever she was nearby.

The bronze medal goes to the way people eat. We have several relatives who, when they eat or drink, emit different sounds. The squelch of the rice, the chomp of the roti, the slurp of the rasam or dal, the crunch of the papad, and the loud sipping of some liquid, reduces conversation at the table to zero as others wait in a mixture of wonder and irritation for the next lot of sounds to emerge. The emitter, of course, is clueless as to what a spectacle he or she is making of herself.

The fourth place goes to those with a poor sense of bathroom etiquette. I will not go into the details but one deserves mention: the way people use the wash basin either while brushing their teeth — very loud gargling — and how they rinse their mouths after a meal. Both can be very disgusting. And, of course, leaving the bathroom wet. We have experienced this also.

There is also that rare person who simply takes over your house within an hour of arriving. I have a close relative who is like this. He has completely inverted the Spanish phrase *mi casa, su casa* (my house is your house). Fortunately he has visited only once which is why I have given him the fifth place.

Then there are the people who arrive with children. I have two cousins who refuse to discipline the apples of their eyes. These little thugs can, and do, run amok. One even threw the remote of my TV because he couldn't switch the channel to cartoons. Luckily nothing broke.

Last, but not least, are the people who constantly interrupt others. I regret to say the ladies in my family are gold medallists in this. They frequently interrupt themselves and leave many sentences incomplete. ■

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