

Rotary News

India

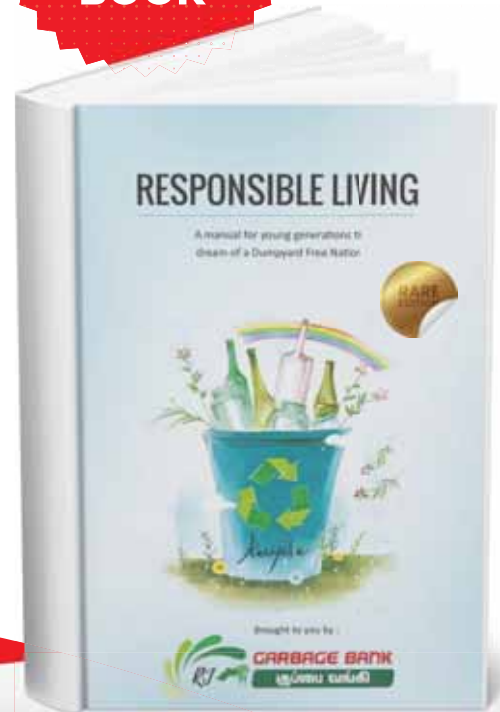
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Rotary 

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Excellent coverage of Tejas Institute

My compliments on your excellent piece *Should directors have a 3-year term?* I know from experience that it is not easy to report a meeting of this kind which features many issues and diverse voices. Sometimes a participant is not quite cogent, but a professional journalist reporting the event has to make up for this drawback!

Your piece reflected the “rigorous and engaging dialogue” inspired by the “tough questions” raised by past RI president KR Ravindran, and the response by RI President Francesco Arezzo. It is true that the stance of the present US Government on issues such as suspending of funding for USAID and withdrawal from WHO conflict with the principles of Rotary. I was shocked to read that 64 governors have been refused US visas this year. “Why are we still sitting in the US?” was a candid question. But discussion revealed that other countries have refused visas too. As many as 200 visas were refused for a summit in Belgium.

Most review meetings — relating not just to Rotary, but to the entire gamut of politics, economics and development in general — prefer to skirt controversy and draw a diplomatic veil over differences. It stands to Rotary’s credit that it has not chosen to do so And



laurels to *Rotary News* for the professional competence and detachment displayed while reporting this meeting at the Tejas Institute in Delhi. Thanks, Rasheeda!

S R Madhu

RC Madras South — D 3234

The events from Tejas Institute were presented in a very simple and interesting way, so that even those who did not attend the event, could experience it. Especially the Q&A session of former

RI President K R Ravindran. I have attended his sessions and from them you always get the feeling that the greatness of Rotary should always be protected. The answers of RI Director Muruganandam were simple and interesting. The information provided in all the articles written by the editor Rasheeda Bhagat about the Tejas Institute was very useful. Thank you.

R Thayumanavan, RC Cuddalore

Mid-Town — D 2981

The cover-page photo of Tejas institute is scintillating. In his message, Rotary President Arezzo touched the most important human elements, namely healing, friendship and access to happiness.

In her Editor’s Note and inside pages, Rasheeda Bhagat gave a good account of the Tejas institute

The article *RID 3233 helps 200 women weave a dream* (Dec issue) is interesting. Thanks, Rasheeda. We also have a tailoring project in our club, which has been lying dormant at present. Your article motivates us to revive it. Your write-up on Arundhati Roy is highly informative, But the photo showing her smoking is not in good taste.

Radheshyam Modi
RC Akola — D 3030

Rotary stands for disease eradication. End Polio is our very successful campaign. *Rotary News* is read around the world by Rotarians,

Rotaractors and Interactors. It is disappointing to see a beedi-smoking photo of Arundhati Roy. As young minds can easily follow celebrities’ behaviour, this picture could have been avoided.

Commander (retd) L Radhakrishnan
RC Chennai IT City — D 3233

RI President Francesco Arezzo (Nov issue) pointed out that let us give with gratitude, joy and hope to our Foundation, through which we unite for good. And in doing so, we leave behind not only projects but a legacy of peace, trust and service beyond self. TRF trustee Bharat Pandya was

superb. He urged us, as we celebrate the festival season, to continue giving to TRF so that it can keep doing good in the world. Among the articles, the one on RID Muruganandam donating \$250,000 for renovating Paul & Jean Haris’ home was informative. Congratulations to him for his generosity in donating this huge amount to Rotary.

Jaishree’s article *A record-breaking Rotary club chartered in Tiruchirapalli* was fantastic. A Rotary club born with 415 members is a miracle. Congrats to the charter members.

Daniel Chittilappilly
RC Kaloore — D 3205

LETTERS

in New Delhi. RID K P Nagesh wanted the the clubs to welcome the new members through meaningful engagement. TRF trustee chair Holger Knaack said that through the Healthy Communities Challenge, Programs of Scale and polio eradication, Rotary has proved that partnerships, community engagement, and vision can transform global health.

There is a good review of Arundhati Roy's book, *Mother Mary comes to me*, which narrates the love-hate relationship with her mother. *Rotary News* aptly respected the elders through an article, *Rotary adds sparkle to seniors' lives*.

KMK Murthy
RC Secunderabad — D 3150

In the Editor's note (Dec issue), I read about the Indian armed forces carrying out their duties on the glacier at a height of 21,000ft with minus temperatures at Siachen safeguarding the nation.

Moreover, the speech of Brig DS Basera, secretary, Kendriya Sainik Board, Ministry of Defence, at the Tejas Institute that our armed forces fight for earning 'naam' (country), 'namak' (soil) and 'nishan' (flag) is really heart touching. My salute to the Indian soldiers sacrificing their lives for the sake of our country.

Niranjan Kar
RC Bhubaneswar — D 3262

I liked the article on RI President Arezzo's speech at the Tejas Institute. He urged Rotarians to provide educational opportunities and health-care in the society especially to the poor, and quoted from the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Upanishads* to drive home the message. In this way, Rotary can play a big role in the world.

TD Bhatia
RC Delhi Mayur
Vihar — D 3012

Satellite programme — India's pride

Project Punch is a very good initiative by PDG V R Muthu. The write-up is so good. Though I have heard about this project, I fully understand its magnitude only now. This project should be extended to semi-urban and rural areas with financial assistance from the local Rotary clubs.

Since I am residing in a village near to Villupuram, I am aware of the student community in rural areas struggling to write and speak in English.

R Sairaman
RC Villupuram — D 2982

The simple language in which you have presented info about India's space programme in the article *India's dramatic rise in space technology* is praiseworthy. There are many people who don't know what rockets are and what their history is in India. They don't even know how much effort scientists have put into bringing the technology to this stage. From transporting rockets in bullock carts to occupying the third or fourth place in the world in space

technology today, we have to give full credit to our scientists!

The incident where the rockets in our space programme were compared to Diwali firecrackers was interesting to read. Hardly anyone would know that ATMs get help from satellites in their daily operations, as also tele-banking and other transactions.

Congrats to you for sharing this information and to those who have taken their country to this level today. We all remain in their debt! Thank you.

Vijay Rathi
RC Latur Horizon — D 3132

On the cover: Roma Birwani lends a hand at the Puri-Bhaji Centre, a service initiative started by her husband Maharaj and run by RC Deolali, RID 3030.

We welcome your feedback Write to the Editor: rotarynews@rosaonline.org;

rushbhagat@gmail.com.

Mail your project details, along with hi-res photos, to rotarynewsmagazine@gmail.com.

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

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More than job training

In a garage outside Salinas, California, young people who are learning to restore classic cars are doing more than developing a skill — they are reclaiming their futures. This training programme provides mentorship and, for some, a path away from gang involvement toward meaningful employment. Graduates leave with certifications, practical experience and hope.

This is what Rotary's Vocational Service Month celebrates each January — the power of bringing together people with unique skills to do good in the world. It reminds us that integrity isn't just about our actions matching our words. Integrity is in everything we do.

The California automotive programme has been such a success because it was built on integrity. Members of the Rotary Club of Carmel-by-the-Sea didn't assume they knew what the community needed. They listened. They learned there was a shortage of skilled mechanics as well as a large number of young people lacking job training. They recognised that technical skills alone wouldn't be enough, so they partnered with Rancho Cielo, a nonprofit offering counselling and support services alongside vocational training.

That is The Four-Way Test in action. Those four simple questions help us not judge others but guide us toward genuine, effective service.

Consider our commitment to ending polio. For nearly 40 years, we have promised the world's

children we will eliminate this disease. Despite obstacles, we persist, and today we are closer to defeating the virus. Keeping this promise is the very definition of integrity.

The same integrity must drive our vocational service. With 1.2 billion young people in emerging economies reaching working age in the next decade and only 420 million jobs projected, we face a critical gap. Communities long excluded from economic opportunities need our support.

But support doesn't mean imposing our will. It means listening to local needs, building partnerships, and designing projects that communities can sustain themselves.

You have knowledge that can transform lives. Whatever your profession, your expertise combined with Rotary's values creates lasting change. The question isn't whether you have something to offer, it's how you'll use your skills to serve.

This January, I encourage you to ask how your club can address vocational needs in your community. What skills do your members have that could change someone's life? How can your networks open doors for young people? What partnerships can create sustainable jobs?

Let integrity guide you. Let The Four-Way Test light your path. And let the young people in California and the multitudes worldwide who need job skills remind you why vocational service matters.

Let us celebrate putting our professional skills to work for humanity with integrity at the heart of everything we do.

Francesco Arezzo

President, Rotary International



Peace matters... more today than ever

Even as hectic arrangements were on in the Rotary world, particularly in India, to welcome Rotary's eighth Peace Center at the Symbiosis International University in Pune, came the horrendous news on Dec 14, of a mass shooting at the famous Bondi beach of Sydney, Australia. As Hanukkah was being celebrated by some 1,000 people from the local Jewish community, two gunmen were captured on videos, randomly shooting at the crowd, killing 15 people, including a child.

As the social media erupted with news of this horrendous act of terrorism, we started getting clips of a tall and hefty man running out from behind a car, jumping on one of the two gunmen, overpowering him, snatching away his rifle and pointing the gun at him, as the man ran for his life.

An eye-for-an-eye being a primordial instinct embedded in most of us, the first invariable reaction was: 'Shoot him'. After all, the gunman was killing at random innocent, unarmed people. But, then as rational thinking kicked in, you realised that ordinary people not trained in using firearms, cannot instinctively use a weapon and take a life. Anyway, the brave saviour took five bullets in his body, and irony of ironies, turned out to be a Muslim, of Syrian origin, who had risked his life to save many more Jews who could have been killed. He turned out to be Ahmed, a fruit shop owner in Sydney, and has survived the injuries. The two terrorists were Muslim too, and this shooting was obviously a retaliation for the continuous and relentless killing of innocent Palestinians that goes on in Gaza on a daily basis.


But let's leave geopolitics aside, the kind of violence that is engulfing our world is terrifying to say the least. First of all, mass killings are taking place through wars/military action that is sponsored, obviously, by the state itself... such as what we've been seeing in Ukraine

and Palestine, to give only two examples. Add to this, random shootings that take place, including in schools, of all the places, simply because of liberal gun laws that make the legal owning of guns so easy in many parts of the world, led by the United States, and astonishingly, we have violence that fails to get any reaction from the government. That big chunks of civic society in these countries are in favour of liberal gun laws, as well as wars, is more saddening than infuriating. It says a lot about the kind of people that we are becoming. What is worse, our condemnation of violence or state-sponsored killings, is getting more and more selective depending on our political and ideological leanings in a world that is getting increasingly polarised.

It is in this context and background that Rotary's eternal, unflinching and passionate quest for peace becomes priceless. And it is not only platitudes and verbal sermons that senior Rotary leaders across the globe have to offer when it comes to peace... they are literally putting their money where their mouths are... to put it simplistically. RI is committed to promoting peace through concrete action, scholar by scholar, by establishing and funding peace centres where young scholars are trained on how to work for and negotiate peace in the trickiest of environments and places.

Indian Rotarians should be justifiably delighted and proud that the next Rotary Peace Center is being inaugurated in Pune this January. God knows we too need to revisit our revered Gandhiji's peace and non-violence mantra! Good luck, godspeed and three cheers for this Peace Center!

Wishing all of you a very happy 2026... and a more peaceful world!


Rasheeda Bhagat



PROJECT PUNCH

Celebrating 3 Key highlights

LESSONS TURNING INTO RESULTS

Ms. Karunyashri S, Department of ECE, V.V. College of Engineering, Tisayanvillai, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, has been placed in INFOSYS – one among only 214 selected from 2,300 candidates.

She attributes her success to Project Punch, which provided her the first platform to speak confidently in English, laying the foundation for her placement success.

Project Punch A 3-day Spoken English programme



(Sponsored by IDHAYAM Edible Oils and executed by Beehive Communication Club in association with RID 3212) attains a milestone achievement.

As on December 13, 2025

No. of Occurrences **139**

No. of Beneficiaries **15,411**

FIRST-TIME EVER

Project Punch – Edition 139 marked a milestone by welcoming Dental students for the first time.

We are proud to have delivered Spoken English training to the future dentists of K.S.R. Institute of Dental Science and Research, Tiruchengode, Tamil Nadu.

A DISTINCTIVE ADVANTAGE

1615 students have benefited from 40 factory visits to IDHAYAM Edible Oils, gaining valuable industrial exposure and leadership insights through direct interaction with PDG Rtn. AKS V. R. Muthu.

Do you wish to Host Project Punch?

Contact:

Project Chairman

Rtn. A.Shyamraj - 97502 07464



Director speak



Keep glowing, keep growing

As 2026 dawns, let's start with thankful hearts and renewed passion to serve through Rotary. Rotary, to me, is a movement of light — and every Rotarian, a torchbearer. When we let this light shine, Rotary *glows*. And when we share that glow widely, Rotary *grows*.

After becoming an AKS member, I once thought to myself — *maybe now I can slow down, maybe I can focus on other Rotary work*. But then came a moment that changed everything.

My home club, Rotary Club of BHEL City Tiruchirapalli, invited me for the inauguration of a global grant project at the Government Hospital in Manapparai, a small town about 50km from Trichy. The hospital serves nearly 80 villages and welcomes hundreds of mothers every month. But for years, it had no Neonatal ICU facility. When a newborn fell critically ill, families had to travel all the way to Trichy — and heartbreakingly, many infants never survived that journey.

Through Rotary's global grant, the neonatal ward was equipped with life-saving equipment — turning an empty ward into a lifeline. In the last five years, that single project has saved thousands of newborn lives.

Standing there, watching these fragile yet determined lives breathing and thriving, I realised something profound: *this is the magic of Rotary*. That experience also reminded me of the true power of public image. Because when people see what Rotary actually does, their *belief* in Rotary grows deeper. Visibility builds trust. Trust creates participation. And participation expands impact.

Public image is one of the significant pillars of Rotary, alongside membership, Foundation and service. It is equally

vital to Rotary's growth. For the world to support us, the world must first *see* us and *understand* us.

In India, **83% of the population** is aware of Rotary, placing us **second in the world**. But awareness alone is not enough. Understanding is what truly matters — people knowing *why* Rotary exists, *how* it works, and *what difference* it makes. In that, India leads the world with **73% understanding**.

Let me share a thought from one of the greatest treasures of Tamil literature — the *Thirukkural*. It says, *Naraa malar* — flowers without fragrance. The meaning is simple yet profound: even the most beautiful flower loses its essence without its scent. Similarly, no matter how much we achieve in Rotary — if our work is not known, if our light does not reach others — it is like a flower without fragrance.

Through Interact and Rotaract, we are already taking Rotary's story to newer generations. Our Polio Eradication Initiative, too, has made Rotary a name recognised and respected in every corner of India. Rotary is seen very well in our country — now let us ensure in 2026 that it is *celebrated* in a larger way.

Every photograph shared, every project inaugurated, every human story told — adds to that fragrance. When Rotary's public image glows, Rotary itself grows — in membership, in Foundation giving, and most importantly, in the faith people place in us.

So my dear friends, as we step into this new year, let our projects speak loudly, and let our stories spread widely.

Let us keep glowing, and keep growing.

M Muruganandam

RI Director, 2025–27

Message from TRF Trustee Chair



Lasting transformation

When we think of global projects at Rotary, we often think of the cooperation between two clubs or districts that goes into Rotary Foundation global grants. These efforts form the backbone of our international grant activities. Yet we have also seen how larger projects can have even greater impact by attracting significant partners and long-term funding. These initiatives are measurable and visible, attracting yet more partners and new Rotary members who see the work in action.

Together for Healthy Families in Nigeria, one of the Foundation's Programs of Scale, embodies this vision. I asked **Dolapo Lufadeju**, a Rotarian from Nigeria and co-founder of the Rotary Action Group for Reproductive, Maternal, and Child Health, to share why this model has been so successful:

Together for Healthy Families in Nigeria, which began in 2022, aims to reduce maternal and neonatal deaths by 25 per cent. We focus on training doctors, midwives, nurses and community health extension workers in emergency obstetrics, neonatal care, respectful maternity practices, and long-acting reversible contraceptives.

The most vital aspect is community engagement. We conduct dialogues with traditional, religious and youth leaders. We are organising joint medical outreach and home visitations. State ministries of health are increasingly adopting these approaches as part of their primary healthcare interventions using the template and methodologies Rotary developed.

Our electronic data-tracking system allows better monitoring of maternal and child deaths. Notably, our community-based system now tracks maternal deaths during home deliveries, something previously unmeasured.

Most significantly, maternal deaths dropped by 20 per cent and neonatal deaths decreased by 28 per cent in supported facilities, while postnatal clinic attendance increased by 10 per cent.

I am also a member of the action group and have followed this project for over 20 years, long before it was awarded a Programs of Scale grant. In November I observed the dedicated work there of the teams with midwives and health workers.

This evolution shows what's possible when Rotary dedication meets strategic partnerships. The programme's success prompted Nigerian philanthropist Sir Emeka Offor to contribute \$5 million, allowing the initiative to expand. Other countries are interested in this model.

Every contribution you make to The Rotary Foundation strengthens its power as a global force for change that channels your generosity into lasting transformation.

Holger Knaack
TRF Trustee Chair

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Magazine

Message from TRF Trustee



Ribbon of Commitment

Ask 10 people why they give to The Rotary Foundation, and you will get 10 different answers ranging from “to help the needy”; “I want to share” to “the feel-good factor” and more. One thread runs through all answers — Giving allows you to look beyond yourself. Giving brings you love, joy, happiness, inner peace and self-worth. It expands your horizon and exposes you to a different way of thinking and an altruistic way of living.

Giving to The Rotary Foundation is a way to support service projects around the world and in your own community addressing some of the world’s most critical challenges. In fact, TRF allows you to contribute to a vast, highly efficient global network of community volunteers (Rotarians) who are dedicated to ‘Doing Good in the World’.

We give to TRF to fulfil our promise of eradicating polio. The journey has been long and challenging, but today we are closer than ever to a polio-free world. This is the time to redouble our efforts. Because the End Polio Now campaign is not just about raising money; but it is about children receiving drops of vaccine across the world... and ensuring that future generations of children will be free from polio forever.

Supporting the Annual Fund today allows us to do global grants tomorrow. During the past 107 years, the Foundation has spent over \$5 billion on life-changing, sustainable projects.

Supporting the Endowment Fund ensures a bright tomorrow for our Rotary Foundation. By increasing our endowment, we can ensure that Rotary can do good in the world well beyond our lifetime.

My friends, when we give to TRF we do not know who will benefit from our giving, and in which part of the world. But one thing is sure that the blessings of the beneficiary will come back to you again and again.

Thank you, dear readers, for your dedication to Rotary. Rotary members like you are the heart of our organisation, and your acts of caring, kindness and generosity play an essential role in advancing TRF’s mission.

So here I am with a bouquet of thanks for your support; but I am also here with a ribbon to remind you of your ongoing commitment and hope that you will give to TRF again this year and every year.

Happy New Year to all of you and your families...

Bharat Pandya
TRF Trustee

Puri making in progress.





A 28-year compassionate initiative to feed the hungry

Rasheeda Bhagat

The difference that a single human being's vision, compassion, dedication and passion, not to mention generosity, can make to hundreds of needy people in a community can be gauged from the story of past president of the Rotary Club of Deolali, RID 3030, Maharaj K Birmani.

On Sep 24, 28 years ago, Maharaj, a dedicated Rotarian of 40 years, an IIT Kharagpur graduate and a noted industrialist in Nashik district, set up a puri-bhaji centre, moved by the plight of the construction workers in the town who often turned up to work every morning on an empty stomach. The early reporting hours at the site gave them little time to prepare either breakfast or lunch.

Running a successful business on high tech security systems which he exported to many countries, Maharaj was extremely concerned about the underprivileged and needy people in the town, whose living conditions in the 1990s left much to be desired. Many of the construction workers in the town were malnourished. His concern for the poor and the desire to do something for them came



from his association with the spiritual guru Swami Sivananda who gave a lot of importance to feeding the poor and needy. This left a deep impact on Maharaj's thinking.

So to help those who suffered from ailments related to nutritional deficiencies, initially Maharaj started a medical centre where the affected persons were given free medicines by a doctor.

Noticing that most of the patients who came here for medicines were emaciated and undernourished, the good engineer started distributing milk and bananas to these people free of cost. But after a little while, he noted that this did not bring about the results he was looking for. After consulting doctors and dieticians, he came to the conclusion that adequate nutrition was the only solution to improve the health of the people. Next, he consulted his club members on what could be done to feed the needy and poor with something that was nutritious.



Above: Past president of RC Deolali J Sundararaman at the puri-bhaji centre.





Maharaj Birmani and his wife Roma.



Various options were discussed and finally the idea of setting up a place to make and give out puri-bhaji was accepted. But this was easier said than done. In May 1996 Maharaj launched a kind of pilot project, in which four puris would be served along with bhaji.

The bhaji had to be made without onion or garlic which a certain segment of the people do not consume for religious reasons. A recipe was finally decided upon and the bhaji was prepared



using potato, urad dhal, green chillies, turmeric powder, curry leaves and mustard seeds.

The resultant dish became an immediate hit with the poor, and 28 years down the line, utmost care has been taken to ensure that there is no tampering with the ingredients or the original recipe. The cost of the packet and its composition have undergone changes... the puris have gone up from 4 to 5, and even though subsidised, in the last 28 years, the cost had to be revised upward from the original ₹3 per packet to ₹5, 7 and now 10. On an average a labourer picks up 4 to 5 packets every day, which is sufficient for his family.

Maharaj's caveat has always been that if a poor person cannot afford to pay even ₹10 for a packet, he/she will be given the puri-bhaji packet totally free of cost. The mantra is that nobody in Deolali should go to sleep hungry. Needless to say, he himself picks up the tab for the loss made due to the subsidy and the freebees, which totals to a neat ₹1 lakh or more every month.

"Over the years, the taste has remained the same... the result is

Over the years, the taste has remained the same... the result is that people queue up in cars to buy our puri-bhaji packets, for the simple reason that the taste is so good.

J Sundararaman
past president, RC Deolali





For the past 15 years, Maharaj Birmani is also taking care of 100 people with very low or no income by providing them with monthly ration worth ₹750 and ₹1,000.

that forget the poor and the needy, people queue up in cars to buy our puri-bhaji packets, for the simple reason that the taste is so good,” chuckles past president of the club J Sundararaman, who volunteers his time at the puri-bhaji centre. Even though run, managed and financed by Maharaj and his wife Roma, the project has been embraced by RC Deolali and its members. People also come all the way from Nashik city, about 18km away, to buy the puri-bhaji packets!

This is clearly because only good quality flour and potatoes are used and the oil used to fry the puris is never reused. In a small place, news of such hygienic practices spreads like wildfire!

While the puri-bhaji centre became a big hit and was embraced by the local community, particularly the daily wage labourers, who could just grab a couple of packets — both for breakfast and lunch — in the initial years, the fledgling project ran into some rough waters with local restaurant owners and even street vendors opposing it for fear of it cutting into their income.



Maharaj received threatening calls from them, but the compassionate industrialist, instead of getting daunted by this challenge, exhibited both humility and grace. He met all those opposed to this project, and explained to them the real objective behind it, which was not to make money or set up a business. His only goal was to see that the poorer people of their town should not fall ill for lack of

nutrition or remain hungry for want of money.

Once it became clear that his aim was not to make money or start a food business which would affect already existing businesses, things started to change. And a full-scale project was launched during the tenure of the late Dr Arun Swadi as club president. It was named *Project Rotary Shrama Parihar*. The cost of a nutritious

Service during Covid

Interestingly, during the dark days of the Covid pandemic, this puri-bhaji centre in Deolali was a rare eatery that was given permission by the local government health authorities to function, while all other hotels and restaurants were forcibly shut down. "During those days this centre demonstrated remarkable resilience and dedication to serve the community. At that time, the poor and vulnerable people in Deolali heavily depended on us to get their food and we did not let them down. Some of the Rotarian volunteers would come in the morning, and with the help of the boys working at the centre, pick up 100 packets of puri-bhaji and deliver them at people's doorsteps during those challenging times," says J Sundarman, past president of RC Deolali, who has served as volunteer at this centre started and managed by Maharaj Birmani for the last 28 years.

While this centre stood out as a beacon of hope during Covid and left an extremely

positive impact on the community, not only about the philanthropist Maharaj, but also his Rotary club, its fame has spread beyond Deolali, so apart from members of this club, even the well-heeled from Nashik town come here to donate puri-bhaji packets to the poor in memory of their departed loved ones, or on their birthdays.

On such days, additional sweets or bananas are given free to all. The centre also feeds cows and stray dogs every day. Maharaj Birmani also takes care of 100 people with very low or no income by providing them with monthly ration worth ₹750 and ₹1,000. He has been doing this for the past 15 years.

Added to this he runs a multi-specialty medical centre where almost all medical systems such as allopathy, homeopathy, reiki, acupuncture are practised, and physiotherapy is also offered, all free of cost, including medicines. Every Tuesday and Friday cataract operations are done free at this medical centre.



and tasty puri-bhaji meal was only ₹3 then. And those who didn't have even this much, got it for free.

This venture became such a success that within two years Maharaj's medical centre was closed down, as no longer was there a need to treat people or give out supplements for nutritional deficiencies.





Maharaj Birmani overseeing the work at the centre.

Move over to 2025 and there are now two puri-bhaji centres, one in Deolali and another in the nearby village Sansari Gaon, and this benefits villagers in that area. “It is a franchise centre, they buy puris from here in bulk at ₹8 and sell at ₹10,” says Sundararman.

Of course, RC Deolali is totally involved in this project and supporting it. All birthdays or wedding anniversaries of club members are celebrated, with the member concerned buying a couple of thousand packets of puri-bhaji from this centre and distributing them to the needy in the community. Eight women and two young men are employed at the

centre. The women roll out and fry the puris, and prepare the bhaji and the men do the other work including home deliveries when required. The food is prepared in the mornings and each of the women is paid around ₹6,000 for a three-hour job.

Almost 1,000 packets are produced and distributed at this centre every morning. While 300 packets



are given out free, 700 packets are sold at ₹10. Many of the construction workers buy two packets — one for breakfast and the second for lunch!

Maharaj, a Rotarian since 1986, is now 79 and on dialysis, but he comes every day to the centre, and his wife Roma comes thrice a week, and herself makes puris. She is also in charge of the management of the centre, says Sundararaman. “He sits here, and gives ₹20 to very poor people.”

Sundararaman himself goes to the centre daily to help in packing the food, ensure that things run smoothly... his attachment to this project is all the more because “it was conceived initially when I was the club president,” he says proudly.

Apart from him another club member also comes regularly to monitor the operations and Rotary Anns from the club often volunteer their time to roll the puris!

Meanwhile, Maharaj’s business continues to flourish; “he has factories also in Goa, Hyderabad; he is one of the highest taxpayers of Nashik district and he spends nearly ₹2 to 3 crore on charity every year,” says Sundararaman.

The Rotary Shrama Parihar project is a great example of how

Till Sep 24, 2025, the centre
had prepared and distributed
1.2 crore packets of
puri-bhaji.



Rotary clubs can embrace long term and sustainable projects to provide some relief in the difficult lives of labourers and other poor classes. ‘Nobody should sleep hungry in Deolali’ was Maharaj’s mantra long years ago, and it speaks volumes for his passion, dedication and focus that he has been able to run this project for 28 long years. Till Sep 24, 2025, it had prepared and distributed 1.2 crore packets of puri-bhaji. The project has also received Rotary International Award for Alleviation of Hunger.

An emotional Sundararaman says, “I’ve been witness to this project as a Rotarian, from the very first day of its inception till date. Believe me, it requires special skills and dedicated hands at the centre, patience and compassionate hearts to

serve people who depend on the food prepared here.”

Like so many others, he too celebrates his birthday, wedding anniversary, etc by donating money for the puri-bhaji packets, “because we know where that money goes. Maharaj and Roma’s selfless service and dedication to the community is truly inspiring, as their efforts have left a lasting impact.”

Satyan Bhat, a member of RC Madras, who recently visited the centre along with his wife Parul, who spent an hour making puris here, said that he was overwhelmed by the service being provided by Maharaj and his Rotary team. “It’s an example that needs to be replicated by other Rotary clubs,” he added.

Designed by N Krishnamurthy



Valiant service despite odds

V Muthukumaran

Real-life struggles against odds and the steely resolve of three changemakers — Pushpa Preeya from Bengaluru; Dr Aparna Deshmukh, Pune; and Rtn Rudra Prasad Mohapatra, Bhubaneswar — to persist with their social service in their communities struck a chord among the delegates at the Tejas Institute in Delhi. Rotary Changemaker Awards were presented to these ‘selfless workers’ in a session moderated by PRID Mahesh Kotbagi.

Pushpa Preeya: Fondly called *akka* (elder sister) by her beneficiaries, she is an IT professional and a scribe for visually-impaired students. Till now, she has written 1,500 pro bono exams in Kannada, Hindi, Tamil, English and Telugu. Pushpa lost all her family members during Covid, but even in that traumatic phase, “she wrote exams for over 50 blind students.” She works on AI, machine learning, finance and HR, “but on paper I am not educated in a formal sense.”

Dr Aparna Deshmukh: A surgeon by training, Aparna runs Abhalmaya, an old age home and nursing care in Pune. When she saw an elderly woman in a “terrible state with flies and bed sores all over body, sitting in a road corner, I thought how can human beings be so negligent and callous towards sufferings. At that point, I decided to start an old age home. That lady had three sons, but none came forward to help her.”

She also decided not to marry, but to dedicate her entire life for caring the abandoned elders and destitute. First, she started giving medical support to elders at her 1BHK rented home with financial help from her father, and digging into her savings. Over the last 15 years, the 70-bed special home has given free food, accommodation, treatment and medical facility to over 300 elderly people abandoned by their children. Around 2,000 free surgeries were done on those in need, and in some cases, “legal support are extended to

elders. But having a sustainable, long-term rented place is a big challenge.” Soon, they will be moving into their 8,000 sqft building at Kirkatwadi, Pune. Both her parents are Rotarians.

Rudra Prasad Mohapatra: A former junior warrant officer at the IAF, after retirement he is committed to humanitarian causes by doing a spate of blood donation camps, distribution of artificial limbs, greening mission, and creating rooftop gardens in and around Bhubaneswar.

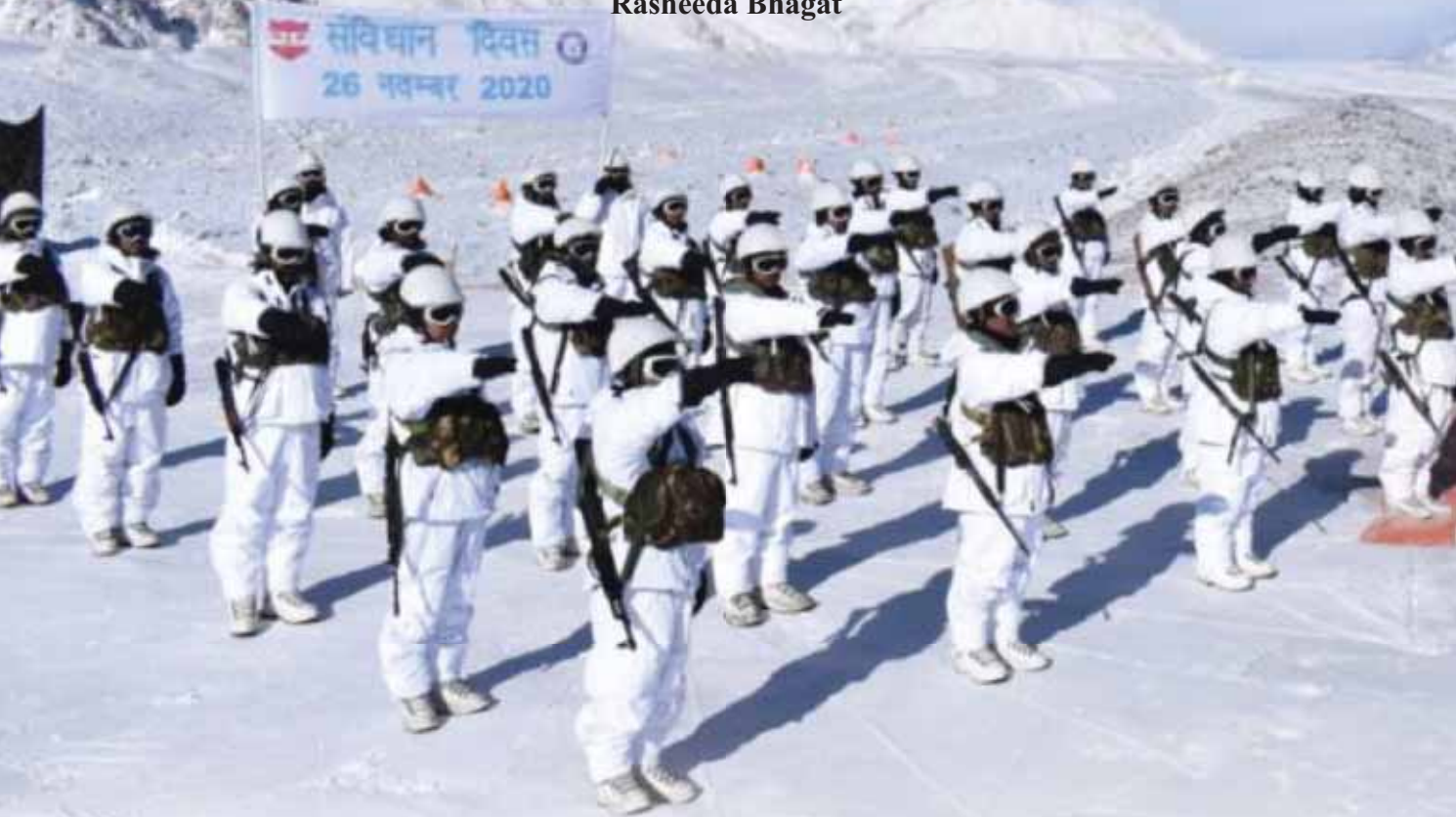
His pet theme is ‘giving back to the native place’. In a fervent appeal, he urged everyone to “go back to your village or native land, and do service at least once or one day in a year.” As War Veterans Family district chair (RID 3262), “Mohapatra is a compassionate Rotarian. He has served for two decades at the IAF, flying over 40,000 feet, and now he loves doing Rotary projects at his hometown,” said PRID Kotbagi. ■

Rotary President Francesco Arezzo and Vice President Alain Van de Poel present the Rotary Changemaker Award to Rudra Prasad Mohapatra. Also seen are (from L) Institute chair Sharat Jain, TRF trustee Ann-Britt Asebol, Institute secretary Manjoo Phadke, Dr Aparna Deshmukh, RI director KP Nagesh, Pushpa Preeya, Uma Nagesh and PRID Mahesh Kotbagi.



A leadership journey like no other

Rasheeda Bhagat



There was a stunned silence in the hall as Capt Raghu Raman from the Indian Army walked the delegates of the Tejas zone institute through the tough terrain of the Siachen Glacier in the Himalayas and described the nitty gritty of what it takes to exhibit leadership in one of the world's most difficult terrains. He was addressing a session titled *Leadership at 26000ft.*

While on a flat terrain the attacker to defence ratio is roughly 1:3, in a

place like Siachen it changes to 1:9; and if you have 100 people making the charge, "they know by the end of the attack, or the day, less than about 30-40 will be alive. The rest will be dead, or worse than dead, because they will be amputees for life."

While delivering such lectures, when he quizzed the audience why soldiers fight, he got answers such as 'patriotism, love for the country, discipline, uniform,' etc. The simple answer is that troops don't fight for a huge cause but for the leader who is leading them, he said.

Dissecting the group of soldiers who end up in Siachen, Capt Raman said, "More than geography, this is a lesson about reality. A boy who comes from Kerala does not know what the snow looks like. A boy from Kashmir doesn't have an idea what deserts look like. Our troops come from tiny villages, and have no vision of the strategy of the nation. Their visibility is limited to the comrades who are with them in the trench and that young leader... lieutenant or captain who is leading them. It is limited to the *izzat* of the *paltan*, the honour of the



battalion. There are no material tools with which military leaders can take their men into battle... no ESOPS, pay hikes, employee of the month award or bonus!"

Through a short and grainy video, he showed the audience what the Siachen Glacier was like. Where helicopters had to carry each and every piece of material under the most challenging conditions... such as the helipad

being "roughly the size of these two tables put together. For the soldiers posted there, there is no bathing, shaving, personal hygiene. You put a piece of cloth in cold water and wipe yourself with it. This is life at 18,000ft and higher."

Capt Raman painted a vivid scenario to the stunned audience on what life is beyond 21,000ft, where temperatures can go down to minus 20 or 25 deg C, with the wind chill factor taking it even further down. Another video clip showed patrolling soldiers carrying packs weighing 15–20kg,

and a rifle to boot! Whereas a patrol in normal conditions from Delhi to Dwarka takes 3–4 hours, in a glacier it can take 4 days, because when you put your foot in the snow, "it doesn't go down to your ankle or knee, but all the way down to your thigh!"

He said leadership had to be provided in such an impossible terrain where to get a cup of morning tea, a soldier used a pick axe to break "pieces of concrete-like rock solid ice, heat it in a *patila* for an hour and half." The soldier's clothes were black, thanks to the abundant use of liquid gold of the glacier — kerosene. "You can survive without food or water for weeks, but without kerosene, you will not survive a single night, because if the *bukhari* in your enclosure goes off in the night, in the morning, you'll wake up like an ice tray. Within days spent on the glacier, your eyes, nose and sputum that you cough out will have a black soot, because you're constantly inhaling kerosene fumes."

The size of the bunker was about the size of the stage he stood on, and 14–16 men lived in it! The entry is through a tunnel, which has been chiselled in, so God help you if you have claustrophobia. Inside, the walls are

lined with steel to prevent them from caving in. “So, if a novice by mistake takes off his glove and puts his hand on that steel girder at minus 40, you can imagine what’ll happen.”

Wryly, the army man said: “Now, through a five-minute clipping, I’m trying to show you what life is like for 12 months in Siachen. There is no way a video can show you what it really is like to live inside a bunker that stinks of unwashed human bodies mixed with the smell of kerosene, gunpowder, vomit and rotting food. You’ll have to extrapolate and imagine what it feels to live in that environment.”

Giving an example of combat leadership, Capt Raman next showed a picture of a winter cutout post, where once troops were inducted for six months, they couldn’t be de-inducted.

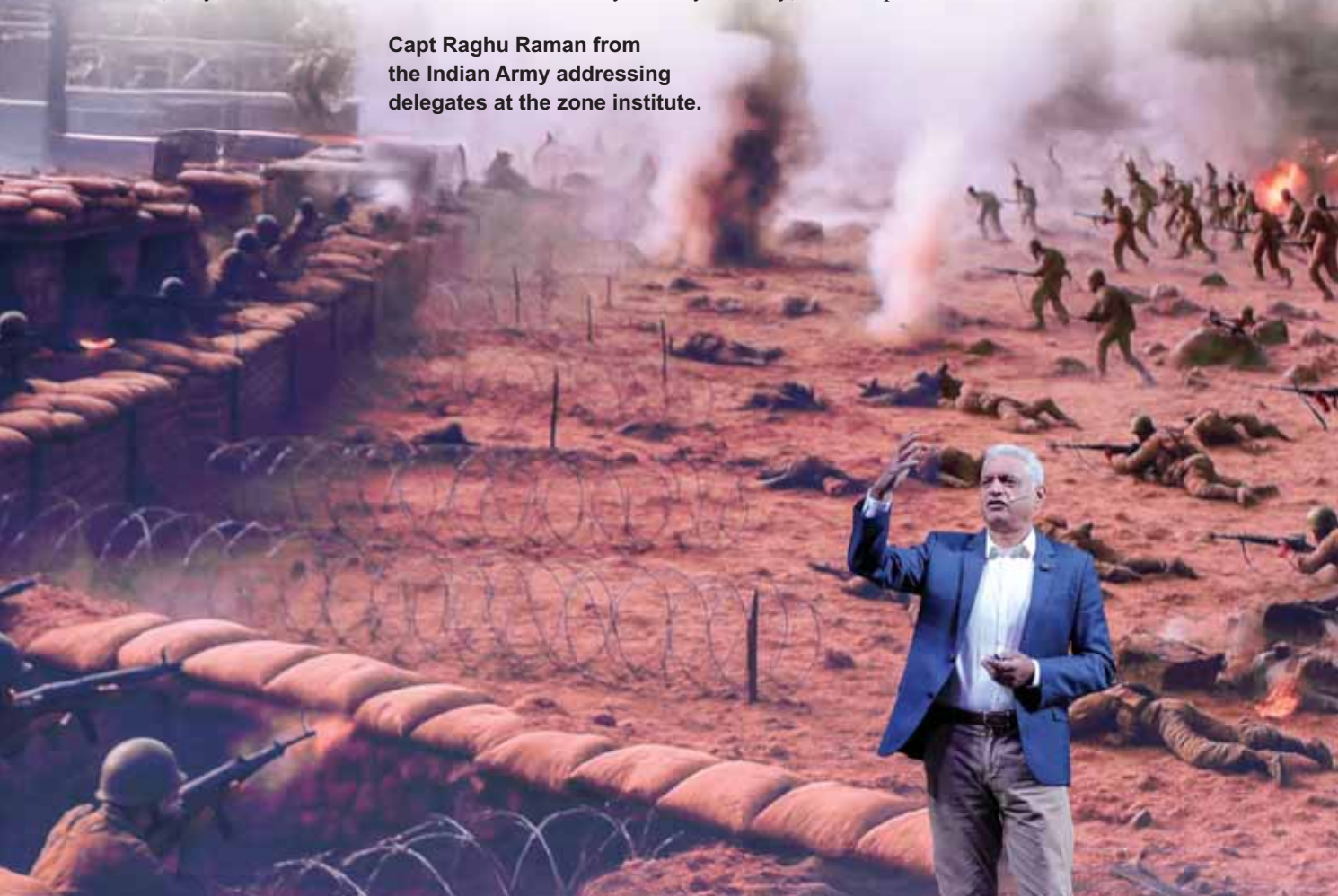
The reason was the steep gradient of the mountain face where tonnes of snow fell every hour, and the slightest of vibration could start an avalanche. He related the tale of a 20-year-old lieutenant, who had taken 20 men into that post. Within two days they had a casualty, with a soldier dying of cerebral oedema. “They wrapped the body of the soldier in parachute cloth, kept it next to the post. You couldn’t throw away the body, it was one of your own soldiers, and nothing would happen to the body at minus 40 deg. Just visualise the grit required by that 20-year-old lad who had to then lead 18 men through the next 5 1/2 months. Compare that to the long face we get, or our morale breaks down when something goes wrong at work, or somebody steals our car parking, or when someone says ‘no’ to us.”

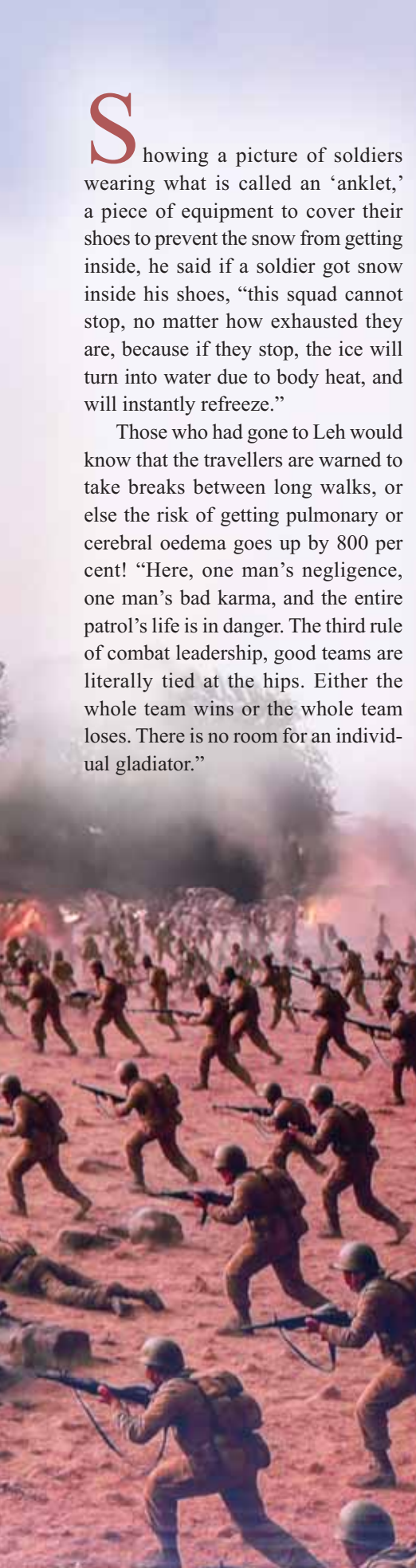
The Captain said that these men were not special forces or members of high-performance teams in various sectors. “They are very ordinary; what

There are no material tools
with which military leaders
can take their men into
battle... no ESOPS, pay hikes,
employee of the month award
or bonus.

they do together becomes extraordinary because they are led in extraordinary ways, they are organised in extraordinary ways. The second rule of combat leadership doesn’t matter if you are a lieutenant who was minted just two weeks ago; now that you have command, you are accountable, period. There is no excuse.”

**Capt Raghu Raman from
the Indian Army addressing
delegates at the zone institute.**





Showing a picture of soldiers wearing what is called an ‘anklet,’ a piece of equipment to cover their shoes to prevent the snow from getting inside, he said if a soldier got snow inside his shoes, “this squad cannot stop, no matter how exhausted they are, because if they stop, the ice will turn into water due to body heat, and will instantly refreeze.”

Those who had gone to Leh would know that the travellers are warned to take breaks between long walks, or else the risk of getting pulmonary or cerebral oedema goes up by 800 per cent! “Here, one man’s negligence, one man’s bad karma, and the entire patrol’s life is in danger. The third rule of combat leadership, good teams are literally tied at the hips. Either the whole team wins or the whole team loses. There is no room for an individual gladiator.”

Patrolling woes

About 80 to 90 per cent of the bulk activity on the glacier is patrolling. The patrolling soldiers were attached to one another by a rope and to safeguard against huge crevasses which could swallow up the whole group, but which were covered with ice and hence not visible, the first soldier poked the path before him with a stick to test the firmness of the terrain.

Every soldier in the patrol is tied to the next one with a stick in the front, and the scout or the vanguard soldier, pokes the ground in the front to look for crevasses or deep holes inside the glacier... “sometimes they are so deep that if you take a chunk of rock and chuck it inside, you will hear it going *kadak, kadak*, but you won’t hear it hitting the bottom!” Because of heavy snowfall, the crevasses are covered with an ice bridge, which can sometimes hold the weight of dozens of men, but give way at other times. “The drill, in case a soldier goes down, is that the remaining soldiers are immediately supposed to hit the crampons and use their ice axes to arrest his fall and pull him out. But this drill works like most drills do... in theory. In practice, every soldier is exhausted beyond belief and barely has any energy. In that exhausted state, if a heavy load goes

down, it jerks everyone off their feet and before they can get a grip in that powdery snow, the entire set of men starts getting dragged inside the crevasse.”

What do you do then, the captain asked the audience and got the response: ‘Cut the rope.’

What Capt Raman said next made many in the hall tear up. He said, “Yes, sitting inside this AC hall, it’s very easy to say cut the rope. But let me put this in context for you. The soldier who is dangling at the other end of the rope is the man who kept food hot and warm for you when you were out on a patrol. He is the man who nursed you back to health when you had 105 deg temperature in some god-forsaken post. He is the man who lent you money when you had to marry your sister. And he is the man who went and met your aging parents when you did not get leave that year. That’s the man dangling at the other end of the rope... it takes a lot of courage to give the order to cut that rope.”

But the first rule of combat leadership is that the mission comes first. “Even if it is your own brother dangling at the other end of the rope, you are accountable to the mission. The mission comes first, always and every time.”

It is in “that state of mind that leadership is being called for. Anybody can lead when the economy is doing great, business is good, environment is good and funding is coming in. Real leadership is actually called for in tough times.”

Next, displaying a bunch of letters, he said, “This is the only thing that brings a smile to the face of a soldier.... letters from home. But these are censored because you don’t want the soldiers getting any bad news. So, if a soldier’s daughter has died of dengue, he won’t be informed, but you,

There’s no way a video can show you what it really is like to live inside a bunker that stinks of unwashed human bodies mixed with the smell of kerosene, gunpowder, vomit and rotting food.

as his commanding officer, will know that. You will have to bear and carry that burden of knowing that your subordinate’s daughter is dead, but won’t be able to tell him.”

Saying that there were no good or bad soldiers, only good or bad leaders, Capt Raman related an anecdote about the time he was posted at the Siachen battle school as an instructor. By a coincidence, there were two battalions there from the same regiment who were manning two different sectors of the Siachen glacier. While in one the soldiers appeared to be



7ft tall... “the way they carried themselves, the snappiness of their salute, the vibrance in their eyes, I almost felt if I touch a soldier, I will get a static, that’s the kind of vibration, vibrance they had.”

“But in the other unit, the men were slouched, their cheeks hollow and eyes vacant. It was the same army, same training, same equipment, same codes, everything was exactly the same, but their leaders were different and that made all the difference! One was kicking ass and the other was crumbling like a pack of cards.”

The pressure cooker temple

In Andhra Pradesh, there is a temple called the Chilkur Balaji temple, better known as the Visa temple, called so because aspirants for a US visa, come here after the application, and do 10 rounds of the temple. And another 110 rounds once the visa comes. “I don’t know why it works, maybe it’s a branch office or something, but it works!”

Similarly, in the central sector of the Siachen glacier, there’s a temple called the Pressure Cooker Baba Mandir. “Do you know why,” asked Capt

Raghu Raman? Legend says that once from a Pakistani ridge when a heat-seeking missile was fired, it came to the hottest part of the post, which was a pressure cooker on top of a stove, and blew that up, saving the 28 men who were sleeping in the barracks close by. “Ever since that day, the fragments of that pressure cooker are kept in a shrine, and *pooja hoti uski din mein do baar...subah shaam aarti hoti hei uski.*” (Pooja of the pressure cooker remnants is done twice a day, complete with *aarti*).

Through another visual, Capt Raman showed a man, who was visiting the region when the temperature was around minus 23 deg C, wearing no special clothing. “This is not just excruciatingly painful, it’s downright

suicidal. So, why is he doing this? VIPs who come into the glacier, are covered from top to bottom as if they are going to meet some Eskimos! Of course, they need to wear those clothes, but they come mostly for photo ops... and they don’t listen to my briefing, they are only awaiting the sound of the chopper which will take them back! But when this man comes to my post, he is sending me a message... ‘Son, I am a brigade commander; I can’t be there with you for the whole 12 months. But for the 10 minutes I stay here, I’ll expose myself to the pain that you feel for twelve months so that you know that I know what your pain is. That is leadership, ladies and gentlemen! This is walking the talk.’

With this anecdote, he reminded the audience that “troops don’t expect you to solve their problems, they expect you to understand their problems.”

It’s easy to say cut the rope.
But the soldier dangling there
kept food hot for you when
you were out on a patrol; who
nursed you back to health
when you had high fever in
some godforsaken post, or
who lent you money for your
sister’s marriage.

Designed by N Krishnamurthy



AKS members recognised

Jaishree

Twenty Rotarians were inducted into the prestigious Arch Klumph Society (AKS) in recognition of their extraordinary generosity to TRF. PRIP K R Ravindran, thanking the donors, said that Rotary measures success not in wealth, but in the lives transformed through service.

He praised the inductees as those “who have chosen legacy instead of luxury, compassion against convenience,” embodying the spirit of Arch Klumph, the quiet visionary whose dream became The Rotary Foundation.



PRIP Rajendra Saboo and Usha being greeted by (from R) RI President Francesco Arezzo, RI Director K P Nagesh, PRIP KR Ravindran, DGE Ravishankar Dakoju and PRID AS Venkatesh.

He traced the Foundation’s beginnings to “a moment easily overlooked.” In 1917, at the Atlanta Convention, Klumph proposed the creation of an endowment “for the purpose of doing good in the world. There were no headlines, no thunderous applause.” Yet those softly

spoken words would one day change the world.

The journey was slow and often discouraging. The Foundation took 11 years even to gain its name and trustees, and many more years before it made its first charitable grant, \$500 to the National Society for Crippled



BSN Hari and his spouse Sunanda being recognised for their AKS contribution by President Arezzo and DGE Dakoju as (from L) RID Nagesh, PRID Venkatesh, PRIP Ravindran and RID Muruganandam look on.

Children (today's Easterseals in the US). "Even that \$500 did not come from the Rotary Foundation. It came anonymously from Paul Harris himself, routed through the Foundation."

From the first recorded contribution of \$26.5 from RC Kansas City, the Foundation has grown into "a global human powerhouse," touching millions of lives through water, healthcare, literacy and peace.

Ravindran recalled a million-dollar dinner in San Diego, an event he had originally planned to skip. As the pledges rolled onto the screen, he watched in amazement: "It hit a million dollars... and it didn't stop. It went on to \$16.2 million." But the true miracle came moments later. As he stepped down from the podium, a donor approached quietly and said he wished to double the entire amount, but anonymously. "\$34 million in one night! True giving does not always have to be in the spotlight. It only needs a soul and a good heart," he said.



He also spoke about his own unexpected journey to becoming a Major Donor. While on a flight with PRIP Rajendra Saboo, he was suddenly asked by Saboo to become a Major Donor. Assuming it was a small sum, he casually agreed, until Saboo held his hand and added, "\$25,000." Trapped "at 34,000 feet with no escape," he attempted to delay the decision by saying he would consult his wife.

At the time, he neither intended nor could afford such a gift. But days later, after surviving a frightening accident, he and his wife Vanathy reflected: "If anything had happened, we would have spent whatever little we had to make me whole." That moment changed his mind. "Generosity begins not from abundance, but out of gratitude," he said.

He emphasised that Rotary's giving is powerful not just because it is heartfelt, but because it is disciplined. "The spirit of the Foundation is not charity alone, but charity with structure, with accountability, with enduring impact." Through the Foundation, he said, "your giving becomes a strategy... a kindness that is bound to change things that last for ages."

To the AKS inductees, he said, "It is not your wealth, but your will. It is not your privilege, but your purpose. It is not your status; it is your stewardship. May your example inspire others. May your giving outlast you, and your legacy be written not in wealth, but in the lives you have touched, the hopes you have restored, and the future you have transformed."

Ravindran noted that there were 1,796 AKS members across the world. The South Asia region now has 251 AKS members, and RID 3141 has the highest number of AKS members in the world. "These numbers are not just statistics. They are signatures of hope. Your success is measured not by what you keep, but by what you have given to the world." ■

Arch Klumph Society honorees

PRIP Rajendra Saboo and Usha
RC Chandigarh, RID 3080

Sushena and Roshini Ranatunga
RC Colombo Fort, RID 3220

Malla Venkateswara Rao and Padma Kumari
RC Vizianagaram, RID 3020

Mukesh and Priti Sahu
RCs Sagar Phoenix and Sagar Grande, RID 3040

Indrani and DR Patnaik
RC Rourkela Midtown, RID 3261

Navdeep and Amita Chawla
RC Faridabad Central, RID 3011

Dharmaprakash and Anjali Tripathi
RC Hiranandani Ivan, RID 3142

Rajesh and Seema Gupta
RC Delhi Rajdhani, RID 3011

Vijaykumar and Gauri Jatia
RC Bombay, RID 3141

Ramamurthy and Krishnaveni
RC Madras Mount, RID 3233

Saroj and Sunil Siraslewala
RC Bombay Worli, RID 3141

Maheswaran and Revathi
RC Sivakasi, RID 3212

Sachiin and Himadri Nanavati
RC Bombay Airport, RID 3141

Bhanendra and Amita Bagda
RC Jaipur Mid Town, RID 3056

Sundeep and Sarnali De
RC Ukhra, RID 3240

Hari BSN Hari and Sunanda
RC Bangalore Orchards, RID 3191

Mahinder and Sarita Jain
RC Madras, RID 3234

Bhagwan Das Agarwal
RC Belur, RID 3291

Mohan and Sangita Gupta
RC Delhi Premier, RID 3011

Paresh and Beena Dattani
RC Bombay Pier, RID 3141



The mystery behind the title **Dakoju Dhanyavad**

Rasheeda Bhagat

At a “green” session of the Tejas zone institute in Delhi titled *Dhanyavad—Gratitutte to Mother Earth – protect, preserve, prosper*, Rotary’s favourite philanthropist and RI District 3192 DGE Ravishankar Dakoju explained why he had given his mega tree planting and environmental initiative across India the intriguing title *Dakoju Dhanyavad*.

He said that like most Rotarians he was “a sensitive and emotional person”. During the Covid pandemic, for no particular reason, “I started feeling low, guilty, suffering from anxiety and anguish.” Not able to figure out why he



was feeling so, he tried several remedies such as dabbling in alcohol, and praying at various religious institutions like temples, churches and mosques. But none of it helped him. Professional help from an expert at Bengaluru's NIMHANS and the medicines the specialist prescribed didn't help either. "I didn't know what to do. Because of Covid, we were not going anywhere. I started going for a walk in Lal Bagh. I wanted to find why I was feeling anguish, anxiety and depression. Then

my two daughters Ekta and Samta got married, and I thought I'll be alright."

But nothing changed. He couldn't even share his state of mind with his wife Paola, not wanting to worry her. During his walks in the huge 250-acre garden, he'd gaze at the tall trees and the hillocks close by. Slowly he turned to nature for an answer to his suffering. "Instead of spiritual leaders or medical consultants, I turned to the trees and the mountain for an answer."

From L: RI Director K P Nagesh; DGE Ravishankar Dakoju; PRIP K R Ravindran; CEO of the Ryan Group Ryan Pinto; Neil Michael Joseph, co-trustee of the Rotary Environment Foundation, treasurer Vijay Tadimalla and PDG Suresh Hari.



P OF
TUTIONS



**ION PLANTS BY STUDENTS
50 YEARS OF RYAN GROUP**

Months of gazing at these finally brought a sign... an answer... both the trees and mountains had a triangular or conical shape... "just like a namaste, which is actually gratitude, or *dhanyavad*." The message he gleaned from his long walks in the midst of nature was that instead of blaming anybody, he should enjoy or celebrate life and express his gratitude.

After some reflection, said Dakoju, "I decided that let me plant something which will continue to say *dhanyavad* for decades to come, and even after I go. But I thought I should not plant these trees only in my city or my neighbourhood where I, my family would benefit, but far away in places which have nothing to do with me."

He went to the Western Ghats, the Sahyadri range in a remote place of Maharashtra and wanted to plant trees there, but realised he couldn't do this alone. After consulting his friend in Rotary and fellow environmentalist Neil Joseph, they decided on putting together a team, into which RC Kudal past president Gajanan Khandalgaonkar was also roped in. "We began planting trees inside forests, graveyards, cremation grounds, schools, backyards of homes, lake and river beds and so on."

In two years, his team had planted 48,000 saplings, but it was still less than half of his target of 100,000. During this time, he was elected to a leadership position in his district, and from DGN became DGE, and while undergoing training with his batch-mate DGEs, discussed with them doing something which was transformational and would outlive them.

Rotary's mega project on polio was almost ending; but during the discussion the topic came up that while Rotary was ending polio from

the world, “our planet itself has got polio... in terms of climate change and global warming, so why don’t we do something about that? For polio we have drops. Now let’s plant trees.”

As the project became more ambitious with the goals constantly growing.... now to one crore trees... more partners were roped in. While several of his batchmates have come on board, the project, titled *Dakoju Dhanyavad*, found a major partner in the Ryan International Group of Institutions.

At the institute, an MoU was signed between Dakoju (Rotary Environment Trust) and Ryan Pinto, CEO of the Ryan Group. The key terms of this MoU include planting of 50,000 saplings in one day at the Ryan schools across India on the day Dakoju gets sworn in as governor in July 2026. This will be an attempt to create a Guinness World Record. Other terms include an undertaking by the Ryan Group to start 165 Interact clubs in one year in its schools. And, along with Rotary, it will strive to plant one million saplings across the country. With

I decided that let me plant something which will continue to say *dhanyavad* for decades to come, and even after I go. But I thought I shouldn’t plant these trees only in my city or my neighbourhood, but far away in places which have nothing to do with me.

Ravishankar Dakoju
DGE - RID 3192

RID Nagesh and TRF Trustee Ann-Britt Asebol induct Ryan Pinto as a Rotarian, as DGE Dakoju and PRID C Basker look on.



165 schools in over 20 states of India, this was achievable.

Addressing the meet, Ryan group CEO Ryan Pinto said for his group this was a “momentous occasion; it is with great pride and honour that we associate with Dakoju and the entire Rotary family in this project, the core of which is to protect our planet, our environment. This is something that is embedded in our institutional DNA, and the vision of our founder Dr E F Pinto and our CMD Grace Pinto. We would be very happy to imbibe the spirit of protecting our planet in our students.”

Pinto said that their schools educate a quarter million children every day. It was important to let them know that “it is not just for marks and degrees that we want to educate them. We want to

empower them with good values so they can become good custodians of this planet, good citizens of this nation and ambassadors to protect Mother Earth.”

He announced that while these were the terms of the MoU they had signed at the event, he assured Dakoju that the entire Ryan group would work along with him in his other admirable initiatives such as improving the tribal schools, and giving water to animals and birds. “We are very excited to partner in these projects as well.”

An overwhelmed and grateful Dakoju said: “We didn’t expect this! We had asked him for one, he has given ten. We had asked him to open Interact clubs in all his schools and partner with us in planting trees. But he has now volunteered also for tribal education and the water for animals initiatives. We are very grateful.”

To the Rotary leaders in the audience, he asked a simple question... Pinto was not even a Rotarian but he



admires Rotary's work so much that he wanted to partner with them. He sought a show of hands on how many in the hall were running schools, colleges or entire universities, and urged them to join the greening initiative.

RI director K P Nagesh said: "When I hear that somebody associated with Rotary is not a Rotarian, I can't digest that." He removed his own pin, and requested TRF trustee Ann-Britt Asebol to use it to induct Pinto into Rotary, and thanked him for his partnership with Rotary, particularly the promise to start Interact clubs in all his 165 schools. "Saving Planet Earth is our collective responsibility," he added.

Earlier, addressing the session, PRID C Basker said the session's title — to protect, preserve, prosper — was

most appropriate "as it reminds us that we are not owners of this planet, but only caretakers. For generations, nature has nourished us with air, water, food, energy and beauty. But our impact on earth has reached a point where gratitude must run into responsibility.... to value, protect and safeguard the fragile ecosystem. We have to redefine growth and take urgent action to preserve what we have... our forests, rivers, oceans, biodiversity and ensure they remain for future generations."

That is why what Dakoju was doing was important and had made "not only his club or district, but the entire Rotary world proud."

Spelling out the objectives of the Rotary Environment Foundation, its treasurer Vijay Tadimalla said the long-term goals were to create 1,500-acre Rotary forests, plantations in the north, south, east and west of India, particularly Assam, Goa, the Sundarbans of West Bengal, in educational

For generations, nature has nourished us with air, water, food, energy and beauty. But our impact on earth has reached a point where gratitude must run into responsibility... to value, protect and safeguard the fragile ecosystem.

C Basker
Past RI Director

institutions, temple lands, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal. The objective was to involve Rotaractors in this initiative in a big way.

The ultimate goal was millions of trees through Rotary, youth and partner networks, support for tribal education through the Ekal Vidyalaya support, compassion-led Rotary campaign for animals by putting up water feeders in schools, communities and homes in partnership with the NGO Water for Voiceless. The idea was to "instil empathy towards all living beings, not just humans. In essence, *Dhanyavad* is gratitude in action. It's more than a promise that is planted, nurtured and sustained. A thank you turned into a tree, a child's education, a forest, a fund, a legacy. And the person who turned that idea into action is a Rotarian who has pledged his time, leadership and wealth to the planet — DGE Dakoju."

Rotarians from all the four zones who had pledged money for TRF's Endowment Fund and those who had come forward to partner with the environmental initiatives were recognised at the session. ■

On the **sidelines**

Rasheeda Bhagat

At the Tejas Institute there were some lighter moments too which had the delegates laughing. After listening to serious speeches about the last mile to ending polio from the world, and the need to take urgent action to save the environment, the unimaginable hardships and pain our soldiers go through to defend our nation, when RI Vice President Alain Van de Poel came up to the podium to give the assembled leaders a glimpse into RI's finances for the next five years, many a person in the

hall must have prepared themselves for a quick shut eye.

But de Poel grabbed everyone's attention by his opening lines: "When I arrived, I heard that I must speak about different topics... but one bad news my friend Nagesh forgot to tell me was that I must speak about the finances of RI! So I thought since it is Christmas time, he wants to give me a gift!"

That he was saying this in jest became clearer in a moment when he added: "True, I was (working) in a bank for a long time, but I was not a commercial guy. But I have

good news for you... normally when I start to speak, I never stop. The advantage today is that because I have to speak about the finance of RI, this will be very short. I really have good news for you. The finance of Rotary International is all good."

As the surprised delegates burst into laughter, he added: "Are there any questions? If you have any, you can always email them to me, and I will send to the treasurer, who is my friend and a fellow director, and he will answer you."

Another indicator of the good health of RI's finance was that "we

From L: Institute secretary Manjoo Phadke, PDG Ashok Kantoor, RI Director and Institute Convener KP Nagesh, Institute Chairman Sharat Jain, Vinay Aggarwal and Ravi Kapoor.



Normally when I start to speak, I never stop. But because I have to speak about the finance of RI, this will be very short. The finance of Rotary International is all good.

Alain Van de Poel
RI Vice President



RI Director Nagesh and RI Vice President Alain Van de Poel distributing smart glasses and white canes to visually challenged girls.

still pay our invoices. That is good news,” he added.

Tension galore

As the Tejas organising team was all set to get the opening sessions

of the Delhi institute rolling, a big dampener was the late arrival of the chief guest, Vice President of India C P Radhakrishnan, who was scheduled to inaugurate the event. But as the prima donnas of the organising team scurried around the different sides of the podium, there was no sight of the VIP. The Tejas Convenor and RID KP Nagesh admitted after the inauguration was finally done, saying, “As you could see we were all in big tension, because we had invited the Indian Vice President to inaugurate Tejas. But because he had gone to Vizag for another event and his return kept getting delayed, we were all worried about when exactly he would come. We tried to match our schedule with his travel time, but his arrival kept getting delayed.”

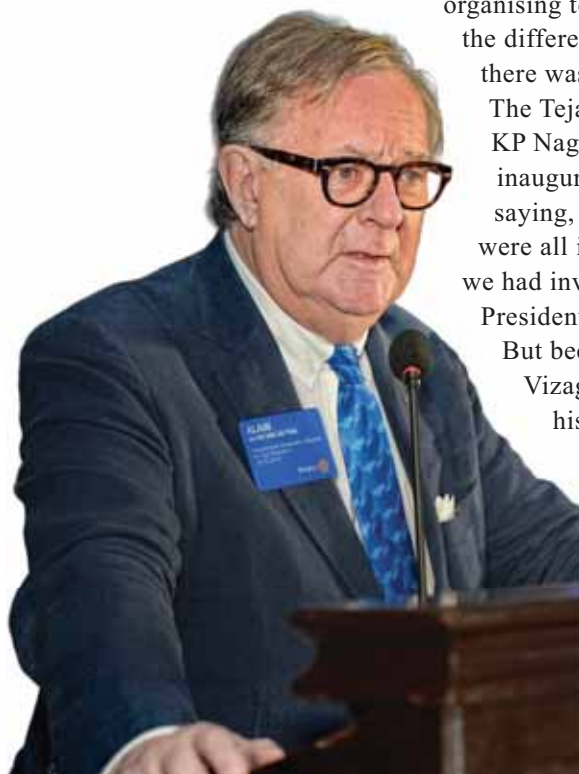
But somehow “we managed...

the VP came and blessed us and all was fine. But meanwhile, to overcome that tension, we decided to have a dance performance.”

The dance of course was “very good, it was also cool, but looking at the aerobatics component of it, again tension started creeping up.” (Later past RI President KR Ravindran compared the quality of that performance to the Cirque du Soleil shows, which are grand spectacles blending breathtaking acrobatics, music and dance).

Other highlights of this institute included a Rotary Golf Tournament, orchestrated by PDG Ashok Kantoor. “Thanks to this beautifully organised and executed golf tournament, we were able to raise \$250,000 for polio,” said Nagesh. This is the highest ever amount raised for polio in the history of Rotary in India through a golf event.

Smart glasses and white canes, sponsored by RID 3011, were distributed to 25 blind individuals during the inauguration of the House of Friendship. ■



RI Vice President Alain Van de Poel



Celebrating achievers

Jaishree

Five youngsters were honoured with the Rotary Young Achievers Awards for their remarkable commitment to service. The awardees were selected from 245 nominations from 29 Rotary districts by a jury comprising former Chief Justice of the Madras High Court Munish Bhandari, former Rajasthan minister Bina Kak, and sports journalist Jovito Lopes, said awards committee co-chair PDG Anil Agarwal. Each winner was given ₹1 lakh, along with a trophy and citation.



Clockwise from right: President Arezzo and Director Nagesh present mementoes to child entrepreneur Raul John Aju. PDG Sharat Jain is also seen; RID Nagesh and Uma, PRIDs Anirudha Roychowdhury and PT Prabhakar, and DGE Ravishankar Dakoju with the IFMR team; From L: RID KP Nagesh, TRF Trustee Ann-Britt Asebol, Anna and RI President Francesco Arezzo, PRID Raju Subramanian, Uma Nagesh, RID M Muruganandam and Sumathi with the 'Young Achievers'; PDG Manjoo Phadke felicitates a corporate awardee at the National CSR Awards event. PRIP Shekhar Mehta and Director Nagesh are also seen; Padma awardees Gurvinder Singh with his aide, CS Vaidyanathan and Dr Neerja Bhatla.





Among the recipients was Akarshana Sathish (14), founder of The Open Libraries, who has established 24 libraries to make books accessible to underprivileged children in Hyderabad. In a gesture reflecting Rotary values, she donated her prize money back to Rotary to help establish 100 more libraries across India.

Aneesha Narain, District Interact Representative, who is a Paul Harris Fellow from Delhi, was recognised for her humanitarian initiatives, including *Project OGAAN*, which provided 7,000 underprivileged children with new sweaters.

Nidhi Rana, an Interactor and entrepreneur from Chandigarh, is the co-founder of Steptern, TetraCaps and Eco Flow Initiative — ventures spanning AI-powered education, circular-economy furniture design and sustainable water engineering.

International bestselling author Bhavini Bhargava has won over 30

global awards for her poetry collection *Unheard*. Suhana Saini from Rohtak, a world junior table tennis champion, completed the list of young achievers.

Child prodigy Raul John Aju delivered an engaging talk on artificial intelligence, explaining its real-world applications and urging youngsters to focus on innovation, skills and creativity. While AI may transform job roles, it will also create new opportunities. Human curiosity and creativity remain irreplaceable, he said.

The institute also witnessed the felicitation of three Padma Shri awardees by Rotary leaders: Senior Supreme Court advocate C S Vaidyanathan recalled his association with Rotary as a Group Study Exchange student in 1978, when he was selected by RID 320 (Madras) for a programme in Mississippi, US. Dr Neerja Bhatla, former Head of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at AIIMS, New Delhi, and a former member of RC

Delhi Chanakya Puri, was honoured for her pioneering work in cervical cancer management.

Gurvinder Singh, founder of the Bhai Kanhaiya Manav Sewa Trust in Sirsa, Haryana, was recognised for his work in health, education and humanitarian service. A paraplegic due to a spinal cord injury from a road accident, his experiences during his hospitalisation inspired him to dedicate his life to public welfare, he said.

Thirty corporates, including JK Cement, Bata, Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Sun Pharma and Jindal Steel, were conferred CSR Awards. Conceived by PDG Manjoo Phadke as a district initiative in 2018–19, the programme has since grown into a national event, with 126 companies shortlisted from 740 entries for the final round.

PRIDs P T Prabhakar and Anirudha Roychowdhury felicitated a 39-member team of the International Fellowship of Motorcycling Rotarians (IFMR), currently on a pan-India rally from Kanyakumari to Kashmir. Having already covered 14,000km across the eastern, southern and western regions, the team is expected to complete a journey of 1.3 lakh km, spreading goodwill and raising awareness about Rotary across villages, towns and cities. ■



An entertaining **yoga session**

Rasheeda Bhagat

A session at the Tejas institute that all fitness buffs looked forward to was the one addressed by IIT engineer-turned-yoga-teacher, the young and dashing Saurabh Bothra. Needless to say, that many female participants lined up to tell him lovingly how religiously they participated in his online yoga classes. The intro video told us how this remarkable IIT graduate had transformed into a modern-day fitness phenomenon coaxing and motivating lakhs of people around the world to join his online yoga classes daily.

Beginning during the pandemic, he would conduct free online yoga classes for students, and didn't earn even a rupee. His parents were concerned and said at least earn enough not to be financially dependent on anyone. He started by charging ₹100 per person every month, but didn't

make much headway. But the second pandemic changed everything... more people joined, including his friend from IIT, Anshul, who challenged him to scale up.

He did and built the startup Habuild; today over 12.6 million people across 169 countries use that platform, transforming Bothra's initiative into one of the world's largest wellness movements. Today over 7.5 lakh people join his online classes every day.

Addressing the session, which Bothra transformed into an interesting exercise by making the delegates stand up and do some simple movements, he said it has been proved that "small daily action creates extraordinary transformation."

Underlining the importance of daily exercise, he said, "All of us brush our teeth every day; it's very easy, and has become a habit for all of us and we don't need any motivation to brush our teeth. But when it comes to

exercising daily, people make all kinds of excuses, such as I am lazy, I don't have the time, or I am not motivated enough..."

Challenging those who do not do any form of exercise, Bothra said they would surely be sceptical if he asked them to begin by exercising just five minutes a day, and would say this certainly would not have any impact.

Even though that was true, "you need to make exercise a part of your daily life, and you can begin by doing it for at least five minutes a day till it becomes a habit. Consistency is the key."

The fitness guru said that the problem about setting a goal like exercising for 30 to 45 minutes a day, was that, "by doing so, you are creating a boundary in your mind that unless I have that much time, I can't do it. And that is where the simple principle of doing exercise for just five minutes a day works like magic because all of you



certainly have five minutes to spare in a day! This way you don't have to fall into the trap of all or nothing."

But, he cautioned the gathering, while on a really busy day, even five minutes of exercise can make a difference, "the important thing is that what you do in those five minutes has to be a conscious effort." For example, many women said that since they do housework, their exercise is done. "But this is not true, and does not count. Unless it is conscious, it cannot be considered that you have given time for exercising, and it certainly does not count."

Through a fun-filled session, which left no scope for either yawns or small and swift naps, Bothra walked the participants through standing up, stretching their hands, clapping, punching the air and laughter therapy.

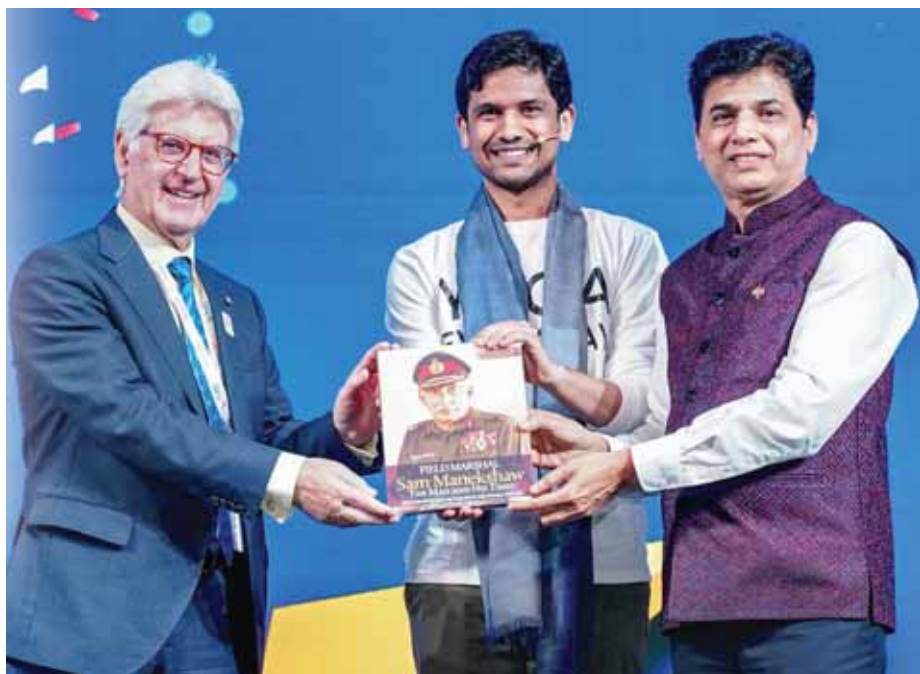
His parting message was simple but meaningful; if anybody enjoyed doing yoga or any other form of exercise, they should make sure to tell others about it. It was not enough to take care only of your own health and fitness; talking to others about your joyful exercise session was bound to trigger some curiosity, interest, and hopefully replication, in others, he added. ■



IIT engineer-turned-yoga teacher Saurabh Bothra

Left: Rotary leaders following instructions being given by Bothra.

Below: RI President Francesco Arezzo and RI Director K P Nagesh present a memento to Bothra.



Stop bottling up

Vidhya Subramanian

In our world today, many individuals silently endure emotional pain, suppressing their needs, tolerating toxic relationships, or internalising family pressures. Mental wellness is no longer optional; it is essential.

But it is important to prioritise emotional health and the boundaries between adjustment and self-harm, navigate abusive relationships, understand narcissistic behaviour.

There is a very real danger in bottling up emotions. People are often conditioned to stay silent, tolerate, and are told to “be strong.” But chronic emotional suppression results in:

- Anxiety, depression, and emotional meltdown
- Physical symptoms like insomnia, fatigue and high BP
- Personality changes and withdrawal
- Breaking down of relationships
- Low self-worth and self-esteem

Bottling up emotions does not prevent problems — it multiplies them. Mental wellness isn’t merely the absence of illness; it is the ability to feel balanced, think

clearly, set boundaries, handle stress, maintain confidence and seek help without fear.

In a courageous step towards breaking stigma around all issues concerning mental health and well being, RI District 3141’s Mental Awareness Team has launched a groundbreaking series of podcasts featuring Rotarians sharing real-life emotional struggles.

These aren’t scripted stories. They are raw, honest and deep human experiences about toxic marriages, emotional trauma, broken trust, loneliness and struggles with self-worth. When well known Rotarians, who are respected, open up and talk about the issues they have been facing, they send a powerful message: “If I can speak, so can you.”

Studies have shown that when mental health is nurtured, individuals thrive in relationships, careers, and personal life. Adjustment is part of life — but too much tolerance can lead to self-destruction. So it is essential to strike a balance and strive for “healthy adjustment”. This includes respect, communication, shared effort and emotional safety.

On the other hand, unhealthy adjustment leads to suppression, self-blame, confusion, guilt and emotional numbness. Each person must set internal limits: “How much is healthy?” and “When does adjustment become harm?”

This brings us to common questions and doubts revolving around coping with family pressures, as family expectations can be heavy and suffocating. These include maintaining appearances, continuing to stay in an unhappy or abusive marriage, fulfilling cultural roles and accepting blame to keep the peace.

Healthy coping strategies include clear communication, setting firm boundaries, seeking therapy, practicing self-care and rejecting guilt-based manipulation. It is useful to remember this mantra: Your well-being should never be sacrificed to satisfy others.

When a marriage turns abusive, very often the abuse is physical, emotional, verbal, financial, or



psychological. Learn to recognise the signs; these include criticism and humiliation, control over movements, money, or friendships, the silent treatment, threats or constant blame.

In such situations, the key question to ask is if staying in that marriage is damaging you more than leaving it would. If the answer is yes, leaving becomes not a choice but a necessity.

An important factor to remember is if your partner is behaving in a narcissistic manner, because narcissistic partners drain emotional energy. The traits to watch out for are lack of empathy, manipulation, a sense of entitlement, gaslighting, rage when questioned and double standards.

Unfortunately, victims often feel confused, anxious, and constantly inadequate. Narcissists rarely change unless they genuinely accept their problem, which is rare.

The first impact of the district's initiative was authenticity, because society trusts Rotarians, so their stories carry weight. The other major impact was that once silence around mental health issues was broken, it encouraged ordinary individuals to acknowledge their pain. Also, when you normalise mental health conversations, people realise emotional struggles are not a weakness.

The other advantage was huge social media appreciation: The series was widely praised for its honesty and courage.

One of the most impactful stories in this podcast series is of a Rotarian who bravely spoke about

his decades-long struggle with substance abuse. He spoke about how he began using substances as a teenager, searching for relief from anxiety, loneliness, and overwhelming emotional pressure. But what he thought was an “easy escape”, quickly became a dependency. And for over 30 years, he lived with the consequences — emotional instability, guilt, secrecy, and recurring hopelessness.

He kept functioning on the outside, taking care of his career, family, responsibilities and everything seemed normal. But within himself, from the inside, he was fighting demons... all alone.

The turning point came when he realised, slowly, that the escape he relied on was destroying his identity, his relationships, and his future. He sought help, accepted vulnerability, and slowly rebuilt his life.

His story matters because it shows that mental pain often hides behind seemingly normal lives. It reminds us that addiction is not a moral weakness — it is a cry for help. It proves that recovery is possible, but only when one stops bottling up emotions. His courage in publicly sharing his story has inspired countless others to reflect on their own unspoken battles.

RID 3141's platform gave him the strength to come forward — and his honesty has become a beacon of hope for others suffering silently.



Let us now look at the key steps toward personal healing. Healing begins with honesty and acceptance. Never forget that your emotions matter... and your peace matters the most. So make sure to acknowledge the problem, seek therapy, rebuild confidence, practice self-care. Along with all this, surround yourself with supportive people, strengthen boundaries and prioritise mental recovery.

The mantra to remember is that healing is not instant — but it is possible.

During our district initiative in giving a platform to different Rotarians to speak about their struggles, we found that *Stop Bottling Up* is more than a message — it is a movement dedicated to freeing individuals from emotional silence.

Our district's Mental Awareness Team has shown extraordinary leadership by creating a safe space for people to speak their truth without fear.

These stories of abusive relationships, toxic partnerships, emotional trauma, and decades-long battles with addiction conclusively proved that mental wellness must come first. It should come before tradition, society, expectations and relationships.

Every person deserves dignity, emotional safety, and peace.

The writer is a past president, RC Deonar, and member of RID 3141's Mental Health and Addiction Prevention team.



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Nagpur Rotarians do projects for tribals in Eastern Maharashtra

Rasheeda Bhagat

Children queued up for medical checkup at a camp in a tribal village.



Venturing into a Naxal-infested area in the Navegaon forest region, (famous for the Navegaon Nagzira Tiger Reserve)

in Eastern Maharashtra, members of the Rotary Club of Nagpur Horizon, RI District 3030, have distributed solar lanterns to 60 households in three remote settlements in the area — Ghogra, Chilamtola and Tumdi.

Each of these colourful lanterns, which have a life of around 2,000 hours, costs around ₹240. Club president Sudhir Mangrulkar said that the Adivasi families that inhabit this region, which has no electricity, live in poverty and even for their food, depend on forest produce. “We chose to do this project because our medical director was approached by the Forest Department which requested Rotary to help these families by giving them solar lanterns as they have to live in dark homes once the sun goes down. Since the area falls under a Naxal-affected zone, our team of Rotarians who attended the handover event, was escorted by armed police personnel stationed at the Magardoh village to guarantee their safety.”

He himself could not go to the village that day which is about 300km from Nagpur; the Rotarians drove in their own cars, but for the last leg of

The Forest Department requested Rotary to give solar lanterns to families residing in a Naxal-affected zone as they have to live in dark homes once the sun goes down.

the journey, as this is a difficult and tricky region, they were transported in a Forest Department jeep. The recipients were very happy with their lanterns, which can be easily charged with mobile phone chargers, and grateful for this gift which will now light up their dark homes.

The lanterns became so popular that “the policemen also requested us to give them lanterns and we have provided 50 of these to them. Our club members also wanted them, so we ordered another 200, as they make excellent gifts,” he smiled.

Past president of the club Vivek Garg explained to the villagers the proper usage of the lantern and how to charge it. The Rotarians who visited the villages included PDG Prafull Mokadam, past presidents Sudhir Thote, Rajesh Ballal and IPP Devyani Shirkhedkar. The villagers were so happy with their gifts that one of them spontaneously delivered an impromptu vote of thanks!

A workshop on organic farming was also conducted by the club in partnership with the Forest Department at the Bor Tiger Reserve, for farmers from surrounding villages. The programme was jointly organised by this club along with RCC Salai Pebath. “As is known in the Rotary world, RCC refers to Rotary Community Corps — groups of non-Rotarians who collaborate with Rotary clubs on community service initiatives. These people work to address local challenges such as illiteracy, hunger, sanitation, and water scarcity, thereby empowering communities through service and leadership,” said Mangrulkar.

At the workshop the farmers were told about the advantages of organic farming and value-added crops. The



Solar lanterns being distributed to residents in an Adivasi village.

speaker, a farmer himself, explained to them the organic techniques for preparing manure, pesticides and growth boosters to get higher yield. He also demonstrated simple, cost-effective methods to reduce labour requirements in irrigation and routine agricultural activities. They were also told about

the various companion crops that can be cultivated jointly for mutual benefit. Strategies for harvesting, packaging and marketing, were explained, and narrating his own experience he quoted numbers to tell the gathering how he had doubled his earnings by adopting direct marketing methods

instead of relying on middlemen at the *mandi*.

He told the 40 farmers attending the session that “organic farming is not merely a cultivation technique but a holistic way of life.”

Cub president and other members, Mangesh Thengadi, deputy director of the Bor Tiger Reserve and Manoj Waghmare, RCC chairman, participated.



Club president Sudhir Mangrulkar (seated third from L) and past president Rajesh Ballal (standing behind Mangrulkar) at an organic farming workshop for farmers at the Bor Tiger Reserve.

In another project, the club organised a medical check-up camp for children, to screen them for sickle cell disease, haemoglobin deficiency etc. Those requiring medicines were given the required dosage.

The club president said the RCC has requested the Rotarians to construct a small hall to carry out educational and recreational activities for children, and “we are raising funds to get this done.” ■

An inclusive talent fest for children

Team Rotary News

The Rotary Club of Madras-T. Nagar, RID 3233, in association with the Neeta Memorial Charitable Trust, hosted its signature Rota Talent Contest for differently-abled and underprivileged



Meenakshi Periakaruppan (L), district director, International Services, DG D Devendran (fifth from L) and Rema Chandramohan (R), Deputy CEO, Centre of Excellence for Autism.



children. The young artistes captivated the audience comprising 1,500 children and 400 caretakers with spirited performances in singing, dancing and dramatics, leaving everyone inspired by their creativity and self-belief.

Ensuring a joyful and caring experience, the organisers provided meals and snacks, along with engaging activities such as a bouncing

castle, mehndi and tattoo corners. Children also enjoyed popcorn and candy, and received thoughtful take-home gifts, while caretakers were presented with utility travel bags.

The event was inaugurated by DG D Devendran and Rema Chandramohan, Deputy CEO, Centre of Excellence for Autism, who applauded the club for sustaining this noble initiative for over three decades.

The club honoured the Samagratha Foundation with the Rota Voices of Victory Award and a cash prize of ₹15,000, in recognition of its efforts to amplify the voices of differently-abled singers. The Inner Wheel Club of Chennai Presidency conducted drawing and painting competitions for the children.

Actor Arun Vijay distributed medals and trophies to best performers from each school across both abled and differently-abled categories. ■



When Science rolls in

Jaishree

Ever wondered how different school science would have felt if the lab experience had been more lively?

If learning physics meant ‘watching’ a beam of light bend through a concave lens... if biology was ‘experimenting’ with how the human heart pumps, if chemistry meant feeling the excitement of chemical reactions bubbling over right in front of you? Many of us might have fallen in love with science much earlier.

For thousands of schoolchildren today, that excitement arrives on wheels. When the Vigyan Rath, a mobile science laboratory, pulls into a school campus, the atmosphere

shifts. Curious faces, restless energy, and, within minutes, an almost magical silence as students immerse themselves in physics, chemistry and biology experiments. Three hours pass before they even realise it.

Behind this enthusiasm are Naveen and Arivarasan, science educators with 16 years of experience transforming textbook concepts into memorable, hands-on demonstrations. “Children understand better when they ‘see’ a concept rather than simply read about it. Once they see it, it stays with them for life,” says Naveen.

The Vigyan Rath initiative began in 2009, conceptualised by Dr Pasupathi, a food scientist and trustee of the Parikshan Charitable Trust. His vision was to take quality science education to village schools that lacked even basic infrastructure. “In many rural schools, expecting a full-fledged lab, when even new science textbooks feel like a luxury, is unrealistic,” says Naveen.

Initially supported by public donations, the programme received a new lease of life in 2021 when RID 3212 PDG VR Muthu adopted the project through his corporate Idhayam. His home club,



Science educator Naveen helps a student perform the ‘Fire on Hand’ experiment at a school.



The Elephant Toothpaste experiment.



Experiments that make Science come alive

Naveen shares some favourites that leave students wide-eyed:

The Elephant Toothpaste experiment

Hydrogen peroxide and dish soap are mixed in a conical flask — nothing dramatic happens. To speed up the reaction, water is added to potassium iodide (catalyst) in another beaker. This makes the mixture turn cold — here he introduces endothermic and exothermic reactions.

When this mixture is added to the flask, a giant column of foam gushes out — like toothpaste meant for an elephant! He uses this experiment to explain decomposition reactions and catalysts. Hydrogen peroxide breaks down into water and oxygen; the soap traps oxygen bubbles, creating foam.

He also connects it to real life: “During an accident, a car’s airbag inflates due to a similar decomposition reaction involving sodium azide, releasing nitrogen,” he explains.

Fire on Hand

Students watch in awe as Naveen lights a handful of bubbles filled with a flammable gas such as butane, without burning himself. A coating of water on his hand absorbs the heat, making the reaction safe. “It’s an unforgettable way to teach principles of combustion and heat transfer.”

A stethoscope helps students hear how their heartbeat changes with activity, while a telescope opens a window into the night sky. ■

RC Virudhunagar, now oversees its operations.

“Idhayam maintains the bus, pays staff salaries, and supplies lab chemicals. The sponsoring Rotary clubs provide food and accommodation for the team,” explains project coordinator Vadivel Ramaiah of RC Virudhunagar. Rotary clubs across India frequently invite the bus to their local government schools and colleges. In schools, the programme extends to students from Class 6–12.

Over the last three months, the Vigyan Rath has covered schools in Karnataka and Maharashtra, supported by Inner Wheel clubs of RID 317. As it heads to Goa next, Naveen says, “We have about 700–1,000 experiments lined

up for the schools there.” Each session accommodates around 250 students for an immersive three-hour learning experience. Inner Wheel district chairperson Utkarsha Patil and project coordinator Shilpa Shetty are coordinating the schedule across both states.

Since 2021, the Vigyan Rath has travelled 50,000km, reaching nearly three lakh students and 15,000 teachers across multiple states.

In September, the mobile lab visited 22 schools in Pollachi, Tamil Nadu, reaching over 2,940 students and 100 teachers, with support from RC Pollachi, RID 3203. “The programme sparked scientific curiosity and opened children’s eyes to future opportunities,” says club president V Satish Chandran.

Since 2021, the Vigyan Rath has travelled 50,000km, reaching nearly three lakh students and 15,000 teachers across multiple states. “Science should not be seen merely as a subject. It is a way of exploring and understanding the world. We want to ignite a lifelong passion for learning, and dispel superstitions by helping children see the real science behind things,” says Vadivel. ■

A super-specialty health camp in Raigarh

Team Rotary News

RC Raigarh Royale, RID 3261, in collaboration with Suyash Hospital, Raipur, organised a super-specialty health camp in November at Ashrafi Devi Women’s Hospital, Raigarh. More than 300 people received medical consultations and diagnostic services.

The Ramdas–Draupadi Foundation sponsored the entire cost of sonography, CT scans and X-rays. Jivardhan Chauhan, the mayor of Raigarh and Degreelal Sahu, chairman of the Korba Municipal Corporation in Chhattisgarh, inaugurated the camp.



Patients waiting to register at the health camp.

A team of specialist doctors, including neurologists, diabetologists, cardiologists, gastroenterologists, liver specialists and orthopaedic surgeons, provided expert care. The camp offered tests for heart, kidney, liver and abdominal health, as well as blood tests, BP, diabetes and thyroid checks, and imaging services including

sonography, CT, MRI and X-rays. Over 120 imaging procedures and around 150 blood tests were conducted.

“We wanted to ensure that everyone in our community had access to specialist healthcare. Our women members played a crucial role in making this initiative a success,” says club president Dayanand Agarwal. ■

Your map of Taipei

You'll be in the heart of Taipei for the Rotary International Convention June 13–17. It will be easy to travel between your hotel, the stadium for big-stage sessions, the convention centre, and nearby must-see sites. A bus and train pass for the simple-to-navigate Taipei Metro, known as the MRT, is included in your convention registration.



1

TAIPEI DOME

Convention general sessions

- Walk to nearby shops and parks

2

TAINEX

House of Friendship, breakout sessions at the Taipei Nangang Exhibition Center

3

TAIPEI 101

The skyline's signature tower

- See the city in its mountain basin from the observatory

4

NATIONAL PALACE MUSEUM

One of the world's premier museums

- Houses about 700,000 Chinese artifacts

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Rotary
News Plus?

Or does it
go to your
junk folder?



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Read **Rotary News Plus** on our website

www.rotarynewsonline.org

Art, health and hope

Kiran Zehra



Children participating in the painting competition.

RC Trichy Heritage, RI District 3000, conducted a drawing competition after its members reflected on a simple question: “Would children understand what peacebuilding means? We were curious to know,” says club president I Johnson. Of the 580 students who registered, around 170 chose peacebuilding as their theme, over other topics such as environmental protection and End Polio.

“We live in a largely peaceful part of the world, and it’s difficult for children to imagine conflict or the kind of suffering they only hear about.” Many children expressed peace through small, everyday gestures like sharing food, helping neighbours and playing without quarrelling. “Their interpretations were simple, but that is something to be grateful for. Peace is what they’ve always known, not

something they have to struggle for like children living through war or disaster,” he said.

For 11-year-old Harish, a Class 6 student from a government school in Trichy, peace was painted as a narrow path connecting two pink houses. On one side, he drew children playing together and on the other, neighbours offering sweets to each other. “It wasn’t a grand statement — just his way

of showing what a calmer world might look like if everyone was a little more understanding,” says club member V Valarmathi who was part of the organising team.

What began as an activity to engage local schoolchildren on weekends grew into an effort to build awareness on peace, environmental care and polio eradication. In partnership with its Interact club, Aravind Police Academy and Mangalam Hospital, RC Trichy Heritage hosted this competition while simultaneously offering a free medical camp to the 500 parents who accompanied their children.

The campus was lively as students queued for registration and parents headed to the health camp. “Inside the competition hall, children bent over blank sheets, sketching clean rivers, quiet streets and



green landscapes. A few classrooms away, parents rolled up their sleeves for routine tests, some closing their eyes as blood was drawn. We had both care and creativity in the same space,” Johnson quips.

While children bent over blank sheets, sketching clean rivers, quiet streets and green landscapes, parents rolled up their sleeves for routine medical tests.

Doctors from Mangalam Hospital conducted basic screenings, and for “several mothers, it was their first check-up in years. Many homemakers simply don’t prioritise their own health. Everything at home runs smoothly, so families assume they are fine. A few mothers had high BP but appeared perfectly normal,” he says. Parents came for their child’s competition but ended up discovering something more important... their own well-being.

The club also used the opportunity to raise awareness about polio immunisation; Volunteers spoke to parents individually, distributing leaflets and answering questions, “a reminder that immunisation still requires steady community engagement.”

Trophies and certificates were distributed to all participants of the drawing competition. DG J Karthik, who attended the valedictory, called it a “rare event where creativity, public health and civic responsibility intersected so naturally.” ■



A mother at the health camp.





RC Sonkutch celebrates golden jubilee

Team Rotary News

I have seen many excellent clubs in India, but it is the level of community service that the Rotary Club of Sonkutch, RI District 3040, does that gives it global recognition,” said RI director KP Nagesh, as he kicked off the golden jubilee celebrations of the club in December. He highlighted the club’s 35 major service projects done through several global grants and other fundraising activities in Rotary’s core focus areas such as basic education, healthcare, women and child development, environmental protection, and community development.

Calling it an ideal role model club, he said: “RC Sonkutch stands among the top 10 clubs in the world.” Referring to the grand procession earlier held in the city, with the community members greeting, cheering and thanking the club members and Rotary leaders for the various services rendered to the local community, he urged the club leaders to create a short documentary film on this gesture from the community. He would like to share such a film with all the RI directors, he said.

Nagesh said that in the coming 50 years, technology, AI, and youth participation will be crucial across the

world and highlighted the importance of involving Rotaract, Interact and RCCs. He assured enhanced District and CSR funding support for future projects, appreciating the high-impact outcome of projects implemented in Sonkutch schools.

He congratulated club leaders such as charter member and PDG Satyanarayan Lathi, PDG Zamin Hussain, president Dinesh Rathore, secretary Mahesh Rathore, assistant governor Dinesh Carpenter, past presidents, members, district leadership, and the organising committee for the outstanding event.

Earlier in the day, to mark the historic occasion, the club organised a gala procession and colourful service festival, presenting an exemplary model of Rotary’s spirit of service, social harmony, and civic participation. The dignitaries, wearing colourful turbans, rode in beautifully decorated chariots accompanied by music played by a live band. This celebration became a moment of pride not only for the club, but for the entire city of Sonkutch.

Apart from the RI director, other leaders who participated in the event included DG Sushil Malhotra and his wife Ruby, DGE Sanskar Kothari, RID 3070 PDG Dushyant Choudhary and several PDGs.



RID Nagesh, DG Malhotra and club president Rathore felicitate PDG Lathi. PDG Zameen Hussain is seen second from left.

Representatives of all faiths, political parties, social, religious organisations, students and local residents, welcomed the Rotarians with rose petals, painting a picture of communal and social harmony.

Launch of impactful service projects

After the RI director unveiled a ceremonious Rotary Wheel, the group proceeded to Talod village, where with the support of Rotary Bengaluru Trust, two digital boards

worth nearly ₹2 lakh were donated to a government school. Next, with the support of RC Bhopal Hills president Harsh Mittal, a project was launched to distribute free bicycles and furniture to 10 students.

PDG Zamin Hussain read out the message of RI President Francesco Arezzo, congratulating the club for its 50-year journey and service to the community. He added that the club had just applied for another GG of \$69,000 for an education project. PDG Lathi, addressing the gathering, emphasised that through service and merit, anyone can rise to top positions in Rotary, and showed a video highlighting 50 years of service projects. A commemorative stamp was released at the event conducted by PDG Dhiren Datta, and Rtms Shalini Ratonriya and Ashish Akotiya.

Club president Dinesh Rathore and secretary Mahesh Rathore addressed the meet. ■



RID Nagesh, DG Malhotra, PDGs Hussain and Lathi with club president Rathore at the inauguration of digital boards at a government school in Talod village.

A night of Sufi music

RC Jodhpur, RID 3053, along with 11 other Rotary clubs in the city, organised a Sufi night at the Marwar International Centre. Artists from Hamsufi, a Sufi and fusion performance band, showcased their musical variety and style. The programme generated funds for the renovation of a ward at the Umaid Hospital in Jodhpur.



Rotarians enjoying the performance.

Preventing cervical cancer

RCs Bathinda and Bathinda Cantt, RID 3090, in collaboration with the City Hospital, Bathinda, and RC Bombay Pier, RID 3141, organised a cervical cancer awareness and HPV vaccination camp. Fifty girls were given HPV vaccine, along with nutritious food packets.



DG Bhupesh Mehta (second from L) and his spouse Madhu (L) at the cervical cancer vaccination camp.

55 Interact clubs installed

Marking World Interact Day on Nov 5, RC Chandausi Lakshya, RID 3100, installed 55 new Interact clubs, "one of the district's largest single-day youth expansions," said club president Ankit Varshney.



DG Nitin Kumar Agarwal (fourth from R) and club members, with members of the new Interact clubs, at the installation event.

Dialysis unit donated

Under a CSR initiative in association with Aptus Value Housing Finance India, RC Anna Nagar Madras, RID 3234, dedicated a Continuous Renal Replacement Therapy (CRRT) dialysis unit to the Stanley Government Medical College and Hospital, Chennai. Valued at ₹20 lakh, the unit will provide renal support to critically ill ICU patients and is estimated to benefit over 1,000 patients annually.



DG Vinod Saraogi (third from R) at the installation event of the new dialysis unit.

Rotaractors, the youth power bank of Rotary

For Ashutosh Agarwal, “Rotary was never a distant concept. It was a lived example.” Growing up in a Rotarian household, with his father, NH Agarwal a Rotarian since 1985, “service was naturally woven into everyday life.”

The district achieved a 180 per cent growth in Rotaract, expanding from a single club to 1,350 Rotaractors across 17 clubs, with the support of DRR Mahi Bhan. Over 100 Interact clubs are actively functioning across the district. Agarwal says Rotaractors are the “youth power bank of Rotary. They have to be taught that sustainability comes through financial discipline. So, we have to encourage them to pay their dues and remind them that Rotary offers unmatched networking opportunities, not just in one city, state or country... the world is yours.”

While a 20 per cent increase in female membership and the addition of 300 new members were achieved, retention has been a challenge. To address this, he introduced the *Ghar Wapsi* programme, under which club presidents personally visit former members, understand their concerns, and reconnect them with Rotary.

Through a tie-up with RJ Shankara Hospital, Varanasi, over 40 clubs conducted weekly eye check-up camps for six months. The initiative benefited over 600 patients and enabled 200 cataract surgeries. The district also contributed to three endowments and five global grants, worth \$320,000.



Ashutosh Agarwal
Orthopaedic surgeon
RC Varanasi Elite
RID 3120

Meet your Governors

Kiran Zehra



D Devendran
International logistics
RC Anna Nagar Aadithya
RID 3233

Service as a way of life

D Devendran joined Rotary in 2001, “inspired by the selfless commitment of senior Rotarians.

Over the years, Rotary has shaped my values, leadership approach, and sense of purpose. To me, service is a way of life,” he says.

He urges club presidents to invite professionals who exhibit integrity, social responsibility, and a willingness to serve in Rotary. He emphasises sound Rotary knowledge and meaningful engagement from the outset.

The district is actively promoting DEI, “supported by training and awareness programmes that reinforce DEI as a shared mindset rather than a mandate.”

This year’s major initiatives include the District Olympiad 2025, benefitting over 1,500 students; cancer awareness walkathons and screening drives, the Green Rotarians Movement for environmental responsibility, skill development and women’s empowerment programmes aimed at long-term economic independence.

His TRF goal for this year is \$1 million and will be focused on Annual Fund, Polio and Endowment contributions. Despite challenges, he remains confident that “transparent communication and showcasing TRF’s impact will drive donations. The district is also strengthening CSR partnerships in healthcare, education, water conservation, and digital literacy to scale community outcomes,” he says.

The district has chartered two new Rotaract and 11 Interact clubs.

Meaningful membership, not numbers

B R Sridhar's Rotary journey began in 2000 with "a simple invitation from his first client to attend a meeting. That experience introduced me to the power of collective service." He believes strong clubs are built through meaningful engagement, not numbers alone. He encourages clubs to highlight outcomes, strengthen member-experience through engaging meetings and leadership opportunities. Personal outreach, he says, remains the most effective way to grow membership.

The district is working to increase women's leadership, engage youth and differently-abled individuals, and bring in professionals from under-represented sectors. DEI is also being integrated into PETS, SETS and other district training programmes, with "equal support extended to clubs of all sizes."

Service priorities focus on healthcare, women's empowerment and the environment. Healthcare initiatives include cervical cancer vaccination, Type-1 diabetes support, medical camps, and upgrades for PHCs and government hospitals. Women's empowerment projects include providing milch cows to rural families, while environmental efforts centre on tree plantation, water conservation and waste management.

The district has set a TRF giving target of \$3.6 million. Sridhar wants to ensure every club experiences TRF's impact through effective use of global and district grants and eventually strengthening the district's overall giving culture.



B R Sridhar
Architect
RC Bangalore South
RID 3191

*I was inspired by the selfless
commitment of senior
Rotarians. Over the years,
Rotary has shaped my values,
leadership approach, and
sense of purpose. For me,
service is a way of life.*

DG D Devendran, RID 3233



**Kameswar Singh
Elangbam**
Orthopaedic surgeon
RC Shillong, RID 3240

Small contributions, large outcomes

In the early years when Kameswar Elangbam joined Rotary, professional commitments limited his participation. A defining moment came when he observed Donald Phillips Wahlang, a senior Rotarian who went on to become the chief secretary of the Government of Meghalaya. "Despite immense responsibilities, he never missed a Rotary meeting or service project. That quiet dedication inspired me to reassess my role," he says.

He strongly believes in the power of small contributions to TRF. "Even \$20 or \$30 can change lives across continents." As the district's TRF secretary in 2021–22, he introduced a culture of donor appreciation by recognising every contributor, regardless of the amount. Currently, the district has raised \$150,000 in donations towards an ambitious TRF target of \$1 million.

CSR contributions were affected due to mandatory requirements (CSR Form 1 compliance and valid 12A and 80G registrations). To ensure continuity, the district "is coordinating with compliant clubs to support the continuity of CSR projects." The district added 150 new members and chartered five new Rotary, 10 Rotaract and 11 Interact clubs.

District projects include a GG to provide 5,000 smokeless *chulas* to rural homes. CSR-funded floor at the Silchar Cancer Hospital and an electric crematorium complex in Ukhra. ■

RC Erode Nexus makes children happy

Team Rotary News

It was an unforgettable day for 50 children at the Helping Heart Trust as they enjoyed an exclusive movie-screening, followed by a series of fun sessions hosted by RC Erode Nexus, RID 3203, to mark Children's Day.

The initiative led by its chairperson Jenifer Gladious was aimed to provide underprivileged children a joyful experience, one that made them feel special and truly cared for. They were picked up from the special home in a vehicle, and welcomed at the venue with chocolate bouquets that brought smiles on their faces. The celebration was kicked off with cake cutting, followed by movie screening. At the lively DJ session, it was all laughter, dancing, and joy for the young ones. The children returned home after a

sumptuous dinner. Erode Parenting Hub was the co-partner.

To mark World Dwarfism Day (Oct 25), the club hosted an awareness rally, followed by a medical camp in an inclusive project costing ₹70,000. The unique procession of differently-abled, dwarfs and stunted persons started from the Government Hospital, Erode, with music bands and rhythmic drums and ended at the District Collector's Office. Additional SP M Vivekanandan (traffic), flagging off the rally, pointed out that Rotary through this special march has "reinforced the message of inclusion and support for the differently-abled."

After the rally, a medical camp at the CEEMA Conference Centre screened over 160 people for chronic ailments. "Those identified with

health issues were referred to hospitals for specialised treatment to ensure sustained care," said S Bharanidhar, club president.

He, along with club secretary R Madhumathi and Durairaj, president, Erode District Welfare Association for the Differently-Abled, made arrangements for the success of the medical camp.

The camp venue came alive with cultural performances staged by groups of differently-abled persons, and gifts were distributed, along with lunch and refreshments. The health camp was done with the support of Lotus Hospital, Arasan Eye Hospital and Sumathi's Dentistry.

Groceries and daily essentials worth ₹40,000 were distributed to 25 differently-abled persons in a joint initiative with the Erode District Welfare Association for the Differently-Abled at an event at the Rotary Hall.

The club built a roof over the dining hall (₹1.25 lakh) at the Government Primary School to ensure that the children can have their meals in a comfortable place. The revamped noon meal centre, which will benefit



RC Erode Nexus president S Bharanidhar (2nd from R) and secretary R Madhumathi, along with participants, at the rally to mark World Dwarfism Day.

350 students, was inaugurated by Erode MP K Prakash.

Ahead of Diwali, the club, supported by the Erode District Fire Office, conducted a fire safety awareness session through demonstration at the Government HS School, Kumalankuttai. The fire and rescue personnel gave a demo of safe handling of firecrackers to prevent mishaps.

Padma Bhushan awardee Krishnammal Jagannathan, a 100-year-old freedom fighter, inaugurated the renovated building of Sri Lakshmana Iyer Hostel, a landmark edifice that has nurtured



Children being taken out for a movie-screening.

generations of students in Gobichettipalayam, a small town 22km from Erode. The renovation work was funded by Gunasundari Thangavelu, a club member, and her family, and this hostel upgrade project will benefit 150 students. The inaugural ceremony attended by Erode district collector S Kandasamy was planned and hosted by the club.

“We also presented water bottles with the Rotary Nexus name engraved on it to all the 150 hostel residents,” added Bharanidhar. ■

Cyclone Ditwah Response Fund

Trustees of The Rotary Foundation established a new Cyclone Ditwah Response Fund in December 2025 to support immediate relief efforts for people affected by the devastating cyclone. This new fund will provide resources through disaster response grants.

The Cyclone Ditwah Response Fund will:

- Accept contributions until March 31, 2026
- Make funds available to districts through grants until December 3, 2026
- Transfer any funds that haven't been spent by December 4, 2026 to the Disaster Response Fund, to be made available for disasters worldwide

How to contribute

You can give online, by cheque, or by transferring District Designated Funds (DDF):

To contribute online, use <https://my.rotary.org/en/disaster-response-fund>

To give by cheque: Make it payable to The Rotary Foundation or to an associate foundation; include a completed contribution form; and in the designation/purpose section of the form, choose Other and write the fund name (Cyclone Ditwah Response Fund)

To allocate DDF, district leaders can use the DDF contribution form.

How to raise money to support these funds

Anyone can start a fundraiser for the Cyclone Ditwah Response Fund on *Raise for Rotary*. Please remember that: *Raise for*

Rotary currently accepts 12 currencies and is available only in English.

Donations made through fundraisers for the Cyclone Ditwah Response Fund on *Raise for Rotary* will be credited and recognised as described below:

Any fundraisers on a third-party platform such as Facebook or GoFundMe won't offer these specific fund options and aren't eligible for Foundation credit and recognition.

How contributions are credited and recognised

Gifts to the Cyclone Ditwah Response Fund:

- Count toward a donor's total cumulative giving
- Factor into Paul Harris Fellow, Paul Harris Society, Major Donor and Arch Klumph

Society recognition

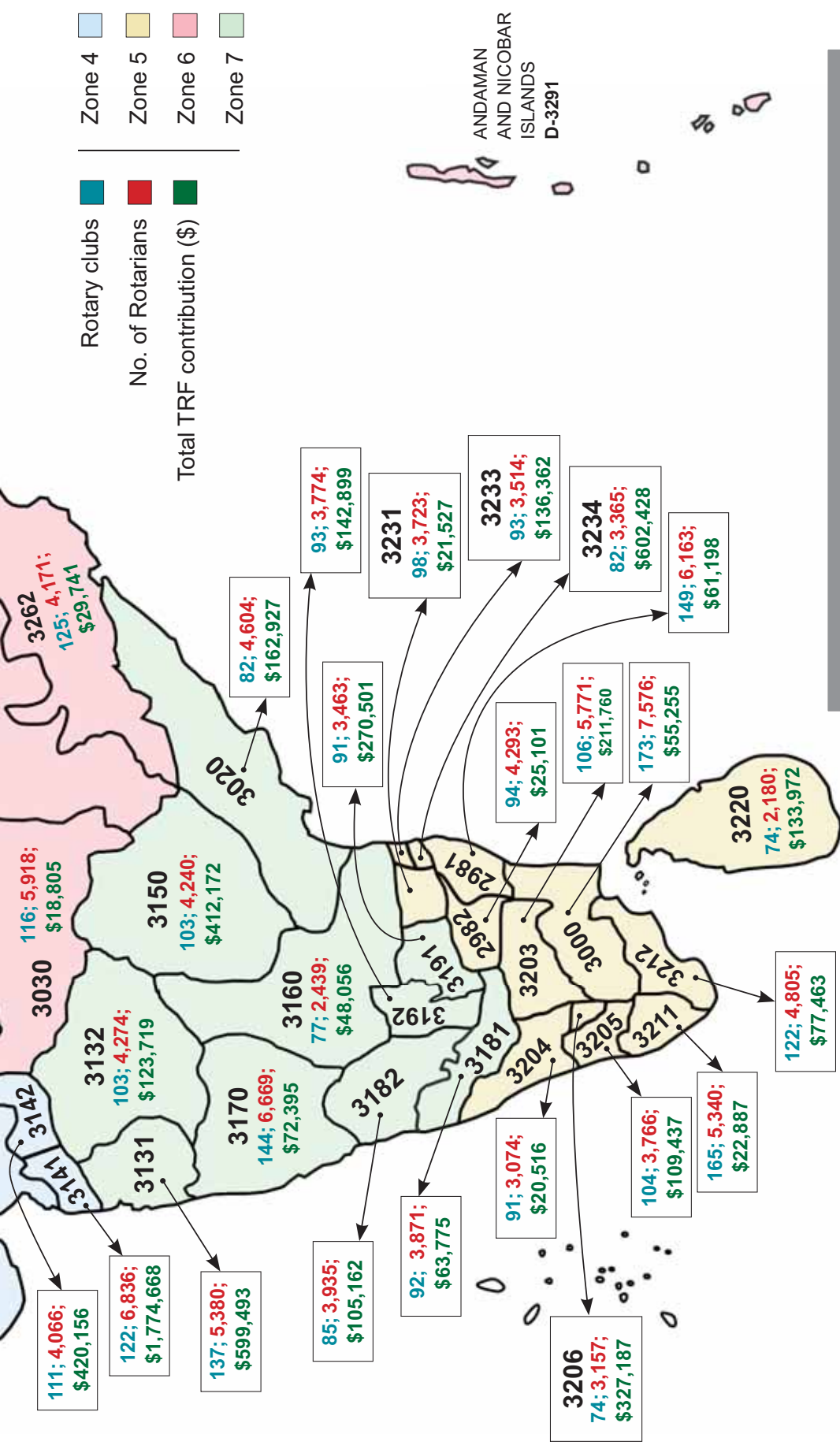
- Help the donor's club achieve the 100% Foundation-giving banner
- Are **not credited** toward a club's Annual Fund-giving, toward per capita or SHARE calculations, or toward generating DDF

How to apply for disaster response grants

Disaster response grants are available to RID 3220 to support communities affected by Cyclone Ditwah. The DG and DRFC of this district need to complete the disaster response grant application, which is available on the Grant Center landing page. The maximum grant amount is **\$50,000**, based on the availability of funds, and the district may have two open grants at a time. ■

Membership & TRF contribution summary







Look out for the tell-tale signs of tall tales

Preeti Mehra

Consumers conscious of the environment need to keep an eye out for greenwashing

There is a saying: “You can fool some of the people all the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.” Unfortunately, some individuals believe they have mastered the art of deception and think they can get away with it. They primarily target those who are aware of the state of the planet and mindful of their lifestyle choices — such as what they wear, eat and buy. These individuals strive to live in harmony with nature and seek eco-friendly products that do not harm or destroy Mother Earth.

You might be wondering what I am talking about. I’m referring to a growing trend worth monitoring in 2026: greenwashing. This term refers to the dubious practice of misleading customers into believing they are purchasing environmentally friendly products that promote health and do not harm the planet.

Here are a few examples, some of which you may have come across as advertisements or as slogans on the packaging of products you buy.

One of the most common and misleading slogans seen on products is “100 per cent natural,” even though the product contains synthetic substances. This happens across brands in India, including detergents, food, ayurvedic products, garments, and more. You have to scratch the surface and do some homework, and you’ll find that the claim is a blatant lie.

In the last few years, many such products have been called out by research and consumer organisations. But it does not deter companies from continuing to use superlatives such as “pure and natural,” “toxin free,” “eco-friendly,” “recycled” and “100% ocean plastic” (products made from plastic waste from coastal areas and

waterways, to prevent them from reaching the ocean). Many of these claims are not true or are sometimes only half-truths.

Let me illustrate this with a personal anecdote. Recently, I went to buy bedsheets for my sister-in-law. She had specified that she uses only cotton bedsheets. In fact, she preferred the truly

HOW TO NOT BE FOOL GREENWASH

“earth
friendly”

“nontoxic”

“chemical
free”

“bio”

“natur

100DaysOfRealFood.com

environmentally friendly ones made from organic cotton. As I went from shop to shop, I found all kinds of bedsheets made of different materials and kept reading the labels to make sure I was buying the right one. In several bedsheets brands, I repeatedly came across the hard sell, “As soft as cotton,” and the shopkeeper would insist that this was indeed cotton. It was, in reality, “as soft as cotton” when mixed with a certain percentage of synthetic fibre. It was not pure cotton.

It was only after visiting three different shops that I, at last, came across bedsheets made from 100 per cent cotton. Of course, they were much more expensive, but they were authentic and had the organic cotton logo. It was a tough search, but well worth it. What

I am trying to illustrate is that by the twist of a few words and an enthusiastic salesperson at hand, a consumer can be subjected to “greenwashing” without even knowing it.

So, what is greenwashing? One of the definitions says, “the act of disseminating disinformation to consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service.” According to a study by the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), 79 per cent of green claims made by organisations were proven to be exaggerated or misleading. In fact, a 2024 report by the Centre for Responsible Business, “Combatting Greenwashing in India,” quotes a YouGov market research study that found that 71 per cent of Indian consumers reported incidents of greenwashing, with 60 per cent expressing concern over these deceptive practices.

The categories commonly abused by greenwashing include cosmetics, packaged food, textiles and even shoes. So, when companies promote their “eco” range of products, they often represent only a tiny segment of their entire product lineup. For example, if a company markets its “sustainable” shoe collection, it may only refer to a limited batch of shoes made using an “eco-friendly” process. Majority of its products, however, could still be manufactured through a supply chain that disregards air and water pollution or the working conditions of its employees, such as those in well-known sweatshops in small towns in India.

You will be surprised that some of the biggest brands in the textile sector that have their presence in our malls have been called out for their environmental track record, their lack of transparency, and for choosing profit over ethics. Their names are only a Google search away.

Food is another sector that greenwashes its way into the taste buds of consumers. Manufacturers deliberately and consciously build their reputation on words such as “organic”, “pure”, “wholesome”, “good for the planet” and a host of others. However, many of these companies do not live up to their claims.

Take the case of honey. Most brands that bottle this commodity label it as “natural” or “pure,” coming straight out of the beehive. But often this is far from the truth, and some years ago, a well-known manufacturing unit had to face the humiliation of its product being tested, only to reveal that sugar had been added to the honey it was marketing.

So, what are the greenwashing tactics that you must look out for?

- * Don’t get carried away by labels that are “green,” have images of nature and say that they are “compostable” (they may be compostable after 200 years!)
- * Look at the ingredients carefully, even in packaging that calls itself “healthy” or “natural” because a lot of sugary snacks full of gluten carry such wordings.
- * If the company claims it is “sustainable,” it may be just in one tiny aspect. It would be worthwhile to check on its core practices and reputational history.
- * Keep your eyes out for certification. Certified organic products or companies always display an official approval stamp.

The moral of the story is to always be vigilant against greenwashing by companies. As the trend to seek a greener lifestyle grows, so does the practice of misleading consumers with tall “sustainable” tales!

A happy and green 2026.

The writer is a senior journalist who writes on environmental issues

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A special day for special children

Team Rotary News

It was a celebration of sports, courage and unwavering spirit as 250 differently-abled children gathered at the Khelgaon Sports Club, Agra, for a Sports Day that will be etched lifelong in their memory.

RC Agra Royal, RID 3110, joined hands with the Prayas Child Neuro Physio Centre to host this special event where the children ran, jumped, laughed and gave “their absolute best even as teachers and parents stood on the sidelines with gleaming pride and sometimes, tears rolling down their cheeks,” said Meera Gupta, president of the all-women’s club. The way the young participants embraced each sporting challenge with determination far beyond their age made



An HPV vaccination camp in progress.

this sports meet a one-of-its-kind in Agra, she said. “The event was arranged to boost the confidence

of differently-abled children and bring them closer to the mainstream society.”

From Left: RID 3110 DG Rajen Vidyarthi, IPDG Neerav Agarwal and RC Agra Royal president Meera Gupta, along with winners, at the differently-abled sports meet.



After a spirited display of their talent, Asha Special School led with 28 medals, followed by Tears Special School (25), and Alphonsa School (14) came third. “Each of the seven schools had its own heroes — children who pushed the envelope by stretching every nerve; some running their first race ever, and some winning despite limitations, while others just winning hearts.”

During the inauguration of the sports meet, deputy commissioner (Industries) Sonali Jindal lifted the mood of the special children with “encouraging words and reminded the audience that inclusivity must become part of everyday life.”

DG Rajen Vidyarthi said the event looked like a “Kumbh Mela of sorts for the special children” and motivated the participants.

IPDG Neerav Agarwal, Meera, Prayas trustee Sandhya Gupta, Khelgaon Club trustees Umesh Gupta and Mukesh Gupta, and Rotarians from other clubs cheered the winners at the medal presentation ceremony. “More than a sports competition, the event is a poignant reminder that special children don’t need sympathy, but only opportunities. They need platforms to showcase what they are capable of, and given a chance, they don’t just participate, but shine,” added Meera.

HPV vaccination

So far in the current Rotary year, over 150 girls from government schools were vaccinated in a series of awareness campaigns against cervical cancer led by Prof Surabhi Mittal, HoD, Oncology S N Medical College, Agra, and the club’s past president Sangita Agarwal.

In one such vaccination camp at the Ramved Hospital, 60 girls at Ganeshram Nagar Saraswati Balika Vidya Mandir were given the third and final doses of HPV vaccine. In her address, Meera said “the cancer vaccination by the club will continue in future.”■

Exploring careers in Defence



An exhibition of the BSF’s weapons and defence equipment at the college campus.

The Rotary Club of Tarabanahalli, Bengaluru, RID 3192, organised a career guidance session for the students of M S Engineering College in the city to help them explore career options in the Border Security Force and other uniformed services. Dinesh Kumar Yadav, Inspector General, BSF, explained the recruitment processes to join the

BSF and civil services including UPSC, SSC and CAPF. He spoke to the students about preparation strategy, work culture and career progression in the defence services.

A special exhibition of weapons and equipment used by the BSF was arranged at the college campus.■



RID **2981**

RC Pondicherry Marina

To sensitise young students on child abuse and how to take precautions, a POCSO awareness session was held at the TTSTN Government HS School, Kalmandapam, a village in Puducherry.



Club matters



RID **3000**

RC Madurai North West

Club secretary S S Sivakumar led members and their families on a fellowship meet to Karur, Prayagraj, Ayodhya, Gaya and Varanasi. The team planted saplings along with the host club members at all the cities they visited in RID 3120.

RID **3011**

RC Delhi Safdarjung

An oral hygiene awareness programme was conducted at a government school, where the students were taught proper brushing techniques and encouraged to maintain good dental habits. Toothpaste and toothbrush were distributed.





RID **3020**

RC Srikakulam

Two batches of students have completed a two-month computer training being given in partnership with the Sri Sathya Mandiram. They get hands-on coaching in computer programmes and receive career guidance from Pasagada Suryanarayana, a Rotarian.

RID **2982**

RC Salem Phoenix

DG P Sivasundaram inaugurated an RO water purification plant (₹1.80 lakh) at the Municipal Boys (Kottai) HS School, Salem. The unit will provide clean drinking water to 550 students and teachers.



RID **3053**

RC Jodhpur Midtown

A new toilet block was inaugurated at the Smt Sarla Garg Government School, a project that was announced on the first day of this Rotary year. The facility was sponsored by Manoj Agarwal.



RID **3080**

RI District

Around 1,700 girls were given HPV vaccination in a month-long drive with Rotarians visiting schools to raise awareness on cervical cancer. RCs Hardwar, Ranipur, Kankhal and Doon Ganga Chidderwala, along with RID 3030, were partners.

Numbers that matter

Gita Mathai

Many people are dissatisfied with their body image. They frequently tell their physicians that they are “too fat” or that their “shape is wrong.” They usually hope, with medical help or a miracle, to lose weight from specific parts of the body, such as the thighs, hips, arms, or stomach. The opposite also occurs: some individuals who are clearly overweight declare, “I’m fine,” and feel no need to diet, exercise, or modify their lifestyle.

A small minority, however, want to gain weight. Weight gain can be achieved by increasing the amount of food eaten at each meal and by adding calorie-dense snacks between meals. Exercise is still essential, but the focus is different: about 20 minutes of aerobic activity followed by 20 minutes of

weight training every day helps build muscle mass in a healthy way.

“Looking good” or maintaining a desirable body weight is not merely a matter of feelings or personal opinion. It is based on scientific measurements, specifically, the Body Mass Index (BMI), calculated using a weighing scale and a measuring tape. The BMI is obtained by dividing your weight in kg by the square of your height in meters. It is a quick, simple, and inexpensive method that does not require any specialised equipment.

BMI values for adults are interpreted as follows:

BMI (kg/m²) — Weight Status

Below 18.5 — Underweight

18.5 – 24.9 — Normal

25 – 29.9 — Overweight

30 and above — Obese

Despite its usefulness, BMI has significant limitations. It does not accurately classify very muscular individuals, very thin adults, pregnant women, or people who are extremely short. Muscular people may appear “overweight” despite having low body fat, while some thin adults may appear “normal” despite having inadequate muscle mass.

For children between two and twenty years, BMI must be interpreted differently using age and sex-specific percentile charts. Any child above the 95th percentile is considered obese. Childhood obesity must be taken seriously because overweight children often grow into sedentary overweight adults with increased long-term health risks.

Body fat distribution is another important factor. Some people accumulate fat uniformly under the skin



(subcutaneous fat), while others carry most of it around the abdomen. An “apple-shaped” body, with fat concentrated in the stomach area, is far more dangerous than a “pear-shaped” body, where fat is concentrated around the hips and thighs. This is because abdominal fat is often visceral fat — deposited around internal organs — and is strongly linked to diabetes, high cholesterol, hypertension, stroke and heart disease.

The waist-to-hip ratio is a simple way to assess this risk. A healthy ratio is **less than 0.85 for women** and **less than 0.90 for men**. A person may have a high BMI but still fall within the healthy range if the waist-to-hip ratio is normal, indicating lower visceral fat.

Waist circumference alone is another reliable indicator. In women, a waist circumference greater than **35 inches** and in men greater than **40 inches** is considered dangerous.

Even simple physical-function tests provide valuable information. One example is the “**stand-up test**”. The individual sits on the floor and attempts to stand up without using hands or other body parts. Each

movement (sitting down and standing up) is given five marks. A healthy adult scores **8 or more** regardless of age or weight. A score of **5 or less** suggests poor strength, balance and overall health.

The **pull-up test** is another measure of fitness. Fit men can usually perform around 10 pull-ups, while fit women may manage 2. These tests assess strength, endurance and neuromuscular coordination, factors not reflected in BMI alone.

Modern research shows that all these measurements: BMI, body fat distribution, waist circumference and functional fitness tests, must be considered together to obtain a complete picture of health. Once a person falls into the “unhealthy” category, the risk of metabolic disorders such as diabetes, abnormal lipid levels, hypertension, stroke and heart disease increases sharply. Lifespan and quality of life may also be reduced.

Weight loss has become both a medical challenge and a booming commercial industry. Numerous fad diets circulate online and on store shelves. These diets often eliminate

or drastically reduce essential nutrients such as carbohydrates, fats, or proteins. Many recommend replacing meals with shakes or powders, and some advertisements falsely claim that exercise is unnecessary. “Before and after” photographs are commonly used to promote unrealistic results.

Dieting alone can help reduce weight, but it does not improve fitness. Without regular exercise, the proportion of fat to muscle remains unchanged, and the health risks associated with obesity persist. Additionally, maintaining weight loss becomes difficult because restrictive or unnatural meal patterns cannot be sustained for long. Many weight-loss powders are expensive and may contain substances such as ephedrine, thyroid hormones, creatine, amino acids, hormones or even steroids.

Surgical procedures, such as reducing the stomach’s capacity, can also produce significant weight loss. However, they do not automatically improve fitness or muscle strength unless accompanied by exercise.

Even if you are reasonably fit, carrying excess body weight places additional strain on the heart, spine, hips and knee joints. It is ideal to approach both fitness and weight control together.

The simplest and most effective method to maintain long-term health is regular exercise. Walking, running, swimming, or cycling for **40 minutes daily** increases cardiovascular fitness, improves mental alertness, and helps preserve muscle mass well into old age, even if you do not look particularly thin. Staying active is far more important than achieving an “ideal” size on the weighing scale.

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



Making a difference

Gift vouchers for 700 children

Kolkata mayor Debasish Kumar was the chief guest at the inauguration of *Project Smile Street* initiated by RC Calcutta Mahanagar, RID 3291, at the Lion Safari Park, for the benefit of children from disadvantaged families. Shopping coupons, each worth ₹1,000, were given to 700 children so that they can enjoy the experience of choosing their own gifts at different stalls. Also, the club in partnership with seven other Rotary clubs and the Inner Wheel District 3291, distributed clothes (*Project Awarun*), chocolates, school bags, goodie bags and food packets to all the 700 children.

PRIP Shekhar Mehta, DG Ramendu Homchaudhuri, and Lions District 322B1 governor Manju Chamaria were also present on the occasion. ■



DG Ramendu Homchaudhuri and PRIP Shekhar Mehta at the inauguration of *Project Smile Street*.



RC Pune Heritage members being briefed on the high-tech equipment.

Cataract equipment for Satara hospital

A surgical equipment for cataract surgery was donated to the Sawkar Charitable Hospital, Satara, for its ophthalmic OPD centre, by RC Pune Heritage, RID 3131. The project worth ₹20 lakh was funded by Mizuki Power Products, and will benefit 1,500 patients a year. ■



Para-athletes honoured

Three para-athletes from Karnataka, who were part of the national team, taking part in the international sitting throwball tournament in Sri Lanka were felicitated by RC Tumkur, 3192, at the residence of past president Nagesh Kumar and Anitha, the club's trustee. Financial assistance was given to them to meet their tournament expenses. ■



Rotarians felicitate a para-athlete in Tumkur.



RC Delhi Mayur Vihar vice-president Umesh Sharma presents a laptop and camera to a girl as club president Vimal Agarwal (2nd from L) looks on.



Dresses, laptops for destitute girls

RC Delhi Mayur Vihar, RID 3012, recently distributed dress material and laptops to orphan girls at the Arya Kanya Sadan, a special home for destitute girls in Faridabad. Several club members participated.

Club president Vimal Agarwal and Ann Viba sponsored the clothes; past president Arvind Jain and Ann Neelam distributed woollen jackets; and Rajeev Gupta and Ann Shashi donated laptops to the girls. ■

| Membership Awards | Zone 4 | Zone 5 |
|---|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Highest Rotary membership growth | Chetan Desai (3141) | Mahaveer Bothra (3233) |
| Highest Rotaract membership growth | Rajpal Singh (3080) | Mahaveer Bothra (3233) |
| Highest women membership growth | Mahesh Trikha (3011) | N S Saravanan (3234) |
| Highest membership retention | Rahul Srivastava (3053) | Suresh Babu (3203) |
| Highest young members inducted | Mohan Parashar (3055) | Sushena Ranatunga (3220) |



IPDG Tushar Shah and his wife Nehal being recognised by RI President Francesco Arezzo. Also present, from L: RI Director M Muruganandam, PDG Pinky Patel, PRID Raju Subramanian, RI Vice President Alain Van de Poel and RI Director K P Nagesh.

Public Image Champion Awards

| Zone 4 | Zone 5 | Zone 6 | Zone 7 |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Tushar Shah (3060) | Santosh Sreedhar (3204) | Yagyansis Mohapatra (3262) | Sharath Choudary (3150) |
| Ravi Prakash (3080) | S Suresh Babu (3203) | Rajendra Man Sherchan (3292) | M Venkateswara Rao (3020) |
| Mohan Parashar (3055) | Meerankhan Saleem (3212) | Paritosh Bajaj (3120) | Suresh Saboo (3132) |
| Mahesh Trikha (3011) | - | - | - |
| Dinesh Mehta (3142) | - | - | - |

Image Awards - 2024–25

| Membership Awards | Zone 6 | Zone 7 |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Highest Rotary membership growth | Namrata (3250) | Suresh Saboo (3132) |
| Highest Rotaract membership growth | Binod Koirala (3292) | Shital Shah (3131) |
| Highest women membership growth | Namrata (3250) | Shital Shah (3131) |
| Highest membership retention | Kameswar Elangbam (3240) | Dev Anand (3182) |
| Highest young members inducted | - | M Venkateswara Rao (3020) |



President Arezzo presents the award to IPDG Mahesh Trikha and his wife Sujata. RIDs Nagesh and Muruganandam are also present.



From L: RID Nagesh, PRID Anirudha Roychowdhury, Padma Kumari, IPDG M Venkateswara Rao, President Arezzo and RID Muruganandam.



President Arezzo presents an award to IPDG Yagyansis and Arundhati Mohapatra. (From L): RID Muruganandam, PRID Roychowdhury, PDG Jayashree Mohanty, Anna, Vice President de Poel and RID Nagesh are also in the picture.



Queen bees can sting sharp

Some scary portraits from real life, a request to bookstores, and looking forward to a new year of great books.

I feel so frustrated after my latest visit to the neighbourhood bookstore — a big name, by the way. I had dropped by some weeks ago looking for *MS Swaminathan: The Man Who Fed India* by Priyambada Jayakumar. They didn't have the book. So, I placed an order for it and left on a week's holiday to Odisha. Thanks to the Indigo imbroglio, we returned home after unceremonious flight cancellations and a gruelling 29-hour road trip along the coast from Bhubaneswar to Chennai. NH 16 was smooth, but the van was cramped, the seats narrow, and our driver was nursing a toothache. Luckily



Sandhya Rao

our party comprised a doctor with medical supplies and he ministered the young man. Back home, when all the muscles, joints and bones had returned to their respective pavilions, I went back to the bookstore. Guess what? They didn't have the book! Furious, I vented: MS Swaminathan is among the most famous residents of the city, and you don't have this book. Shameful!

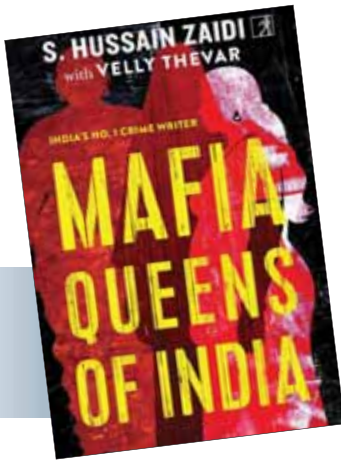
In my occasional, brief interactions with 'Professor,' as he was widely addressed, I had discovered the kind, unassuming, modest, and humane side of this renowned scientist, and I wanted to know more. I had seen the book at the airport bookshop, and I could just as easily have ordered it online. But, in a spirit of supporting neighbourhood businesses, I wanted to buy it at the bookstore round the corner. Looks like that's not to be, although I continue to wait

for a phone call. Meanwhile, here's a small request to bookstores: Do please give space to local writers, creators and books about local residents, especially if they are of the eminence and accomplishment of Prof MS Swaminathan.

While the wait continues, here's a book that I did pick up at the airport: *Mafia Queens of India* by journalist / crime writer S Hussain Zaidi, written in collaboration with his wife, Velly Thevar. The subjects featured in the book, ten of them, elbow each other not only for notoriety, but also for energy and enterprise. I had read Zaidi's book on Dawood Ibrahim (*Dongri to Dubai*) with great interest; in it he talks about other dons such as Varadaraja Mudaliar, Haji Mastan, Karim Lala. I had watched films about tough women (*Godmother*; *Gangubai Kathiawadi*), and had seen the life of bandit queen Phoolan Devi ebb, flow and end before the nation's eyes. But, women mafiosi... that was intriguing.

This collection is held together with references — in the beginning, in the middle and at the end — to a person Zaidi calls 'Cleopatra' after having promised her that he would not reveal her name. He had known her to have been a confidant and advisor of Varadaraja Mudaliar, and it took him a while to trace Cleopatra. He finally found her in Thrithala, Kerala, where she was living out the last days of her life. He called her Cleopatra because he saw similarities with the Egyptian queen in that 'our' Cleopatra "was extremely wise, beautiful to the extent of holding sway over men, and had several incidents in life in which she turned adversity into opportunity." The stories of women such as the bandit Kusuma who was a peer of Phoolan Devi, drug trafficker Iqra Qureshi, human trafficker Sonu Punjaban, brothel madam Saira, matka queen Jaya Chheda, and feared conwoman





Sivakasi Jayalakshmi are written like feature articles: they give the reader a taste of their lives, focusing more on the illegal trade they were engaged in and how they met their end. The stories, widely researched, cover money, drugs, sex, hawala, smuggling, cheating, killing and more. We see how each woman was a queen of her trade, nefarious though it was, and commanded a complex network of loyal followers until both loyalty and following collapsed.

At one level, the stories are fascinating and the ways in which people are duped intricate and innumerable. However, they also send chills down the spine for the ease and simplicity with which ordinary folk

get embroiled in their schemes. We cannot take them only for their curiosity or news or information value, they must alert us to the complex world in which we, and, more importantly, our children live, and how seriously we must guard against falling prey to their lures. This is seriously scary stuff that underlines the nexus between business and shady activities, politics and criminality, religion and exploitation. Incidentally, the film *Gangubai Kathiawadi* made by Sanjay Leela Bhansali is based on Zaidi's story about Gangubai Kothewali in his book, *Mafia Queens of Mumbai*.

I also had the privilege of meeting a dream reader at the Little Litfest conducted by the Goethe Institut (aka Max Mueller Bhavan), Chennai, this past November. During a general discussion following a panel on trends on publishing for children, a young lad about 11 or 12 years old got up to share his experience. This is a gist of what he said: 'There were boxes of books at home. About 1,000 books my mother had bought to start a business but her business failed. So I started reading the books. I read all of them.' He went on: 'I read *Goat Days*. In two days. Someone I know is doing a thesis on the book. She took three months to read it.' The audience was stunned. Those who have read *Goat Days* (originally *Aadujeevitham* in Malayalam by Benyamin) will understand why this reaction. The book is based on the true experiences of a Malayali worker in Saudi Arabia charged with tending goats. Reading the story evokes pathos, loneliness, monotony, despair, desperation... feelings even adults would find challenging to engage with. And this child had read the book!

Which brings me to a beautiful initiative set in place by Hachette which I discovered upon coming to the end of Robert Galbraith's over-700 pages-long *The Hallmarked Man* in the Cormoran Strike detective series. Robert Galbraith is the pseudonym that JK Rowling uses to write for adults. Anyway, there's a note at the end of that book, purportedly from the author, exhorting readers to encourage reading, particularly among children. Apparently, this is part of a drive called 'Raising Readers' launched to "encourage everyone to make reading for enjoyment part of children's daily lives." The appeal focuses on the positive impact of reading on academics, mental health, communication skills and so on, thus preparing children for a better life in the future. There are many free or inexpensive ways to do this, the letter points out: "...reading to them daily, visiting bookshops and libraries regularly, and giving books as gifts." What a simple yet effective way of getting out the message!

In that spirit, here are the names of some books I have waiting to be read: *Flashlight* by Susan Choi (shortlisted for the Booker and our Book Club choice for January); *A Different Kind of Power* by Jacinda Ardern (a memoir by the former PM of New Zealand); *'They Will Shoot You, Madam': My Life Through Conflict* by Harinder Baweja (another memoir, from an award-winning journalist); *Tiger Woman* by Sirsho Bandopadhyay (translated from Bengali by Arunava Sinha, the protagonist of this slim novel is a trapeze artist); and *The Convert* by MK Shankar (a gift from a friend; the author is the friend of my friend). Here's to happy reading in the new year: please make books your friends.

The columnist is a children's writer and senior journalist

I read *Goat Days*. In two days. Someone I know is doing a thesis on the book. She took three months to read it.

An 11-year-old at the Little Litfest in Chennai



RID **3120**

RC Varanasi Vrinda

Among the 220 patients screened at the eye check-up camp held in partnership with the Sankara Eye Hospital, Varanasi, 44 were chosen for surgery. All of them got their vision restored.



Club matters



RID **3160**

RC Hampi Pearls

An eye and health check-up camp was held jointly with the Rotary Eye Hospital, Hospet, and the local health department. Around 25 individuals were identified for cataract surgery.

RID **3192**

RC Bangalore Brigades

An Auto Haematology Analyser was donated to the Upper Primary Health Centre, BTM Layout, in the presence of state transport minister Ramalinga Reddy. The project was done with CSR funds from Bal Pharma.



How AI can redefine Rotary work

Rahul D Shah

This article aims to educate and engage Rotary leaders in the practical, accessible ways how AI can be integrated into their daily work, making service more efficient, inclusive and inspiring.

Rotary clubs across the globe embody service, leadership, and adaptability. Each year, new leadership — presidents, secretaries and boards of directors step forward — bringing fresh energy and ideas, yet facing perennial challenges in administration, reporting, and project planning. As expectations rise, Artificial Intelligence (AI) offers an empowering, innovative solution: enabling Rotarians to save time, maintain consistency, handle daily pain points, and scale the impact of their work on communities. This article gives some insight into AI's applications in Rotary and how it can become your partner in service.

AI tools such as ChatGPT, Perplexity and Canva have become accessible and user-friendly platforms that enhance leaders' capabilities. These systems automate repetitive tasks, foster engagement, and free Rotarians to focus on meaningful service.

Importantly, many AI tools are free or low cost, making them affordable to NGOs like Rotary clubs with limited budgets. Their bilingual and multilingual support enables clubs to easily create communication in local languages such as Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, and more, bridging language barriers and maximising inclusivity across India.

Let us have a look at a few repetitive, time-consuming activities and how AI can make these simple.

Better engagement

Engaging members for meetings and events require creativity. AI can

instantly generate customised invitations that provoke curiosity and highlight relevance using storytelling or personalisation. Leaders can provide the topic or details, and AI will produce professional invites tailored to their audience, increasing attendance and enthusiasm. The ease is remarkable: one simple prompt is often all it takes to get excellent output. If required, you can always edit it manually.

Keep in mind, when you ask the report for the next meeting, the next

sequential meeting number will also be auto-generated for you. What else do you need for text generation?

Effortless design

Compelling visual content is vital for promotion and outreach. AI-powered design tools like Canva and Vennage can help clubs quickly create professional flyers and social media visuals just by describing event themes. When combined with Rotary's brand guidelines available through



rotarybrandcenter; these tools elevate branding to new levels without requiring a graphic designer. With AI, there is no boundary to creativity, making your flyers and images extraordinary. Special note: A free version of Canva, Co-pilot can also serve your purpose.

Rotary's annual leadership renewal risks gaps in communication style and formatting. AI helps maintain consistency by learning and replicating preferred templates and layouts effortlessly, ensuring every meeting invite, report, or newsletter follows a polished, uniform style. Clubs can rely on AI to manage these formats across devices, as tools like ChatGPT sync work history seamlessly across mobile phones and laptops when logged into the same account.

Transforming daily operations

AI automates data collection and analysis turning member participation,

service hours, and fundraising results into clear visuals for BoD meetings. It drafts thank-you notes, proposals, and fundraising appeals with ease. Routine scheduling, including weekly meeting invites and reminders, is accomplished in moments, giving clubs more time to deliver projects. Sometimes clubs struggle to find fresh, engaging ideas for weekly meetings. AI can be a creativity partner to:

- Suggest topics for guest lectures or vocational discussions.
- Generate quiz questions, fun facts, or theme-based introductions (Eg - environment, youth, health).
- Maintain a digital handover summary
- Establish and align the activities to standard operating procedures (SOPs)

Rotary Foundation: Enhancing impact

The Rotary Foundation drives life-changing projects. AI can aid Foundation committees by generating donor outreach messaging, automating annual reports, and providing insights to refine fundraising strategy. There are real life cases/examples where many NGOs have increased their inflows / donations by using timely AI-generated donor communications/reports. AI-powered stewardship monitoring ensures clubs meet grant milestones efficiently.

CSR partnerships form a key pillar of Rotary service. AI helps identify compatible corporate partners, analyse beneficiary data, adhere to compliance reporting, and prepare persuasive project proposals. AI can help prepare entire reporting details once basic details are provided. No format needed. Just provide the data, numbers or information and AI will manage everything for you.

Smart data summarisation can be done by feeding raw inputs like “100 saplings planted, 50 volunteers joined,

₹20,000 spent,” and AI can format it into a professional paragraph.

Global Grant management: streamlining complexity

AI can simplify global grant work by researching eligibility, preparing applications, facilitating partner communication, and managing milestone reporting.

AI can simplify the creation of monthly newsletters and club magazines by automating draft preparation and allowing club teams to prioritise project execution rather than paperwork.

Saving just one hour each week on preparing meeting agendas, reports or communication may appear small in isolation. But over a year, that's 50 precious hours — an entire workweek regained. Now, picture this multiplied across thousands of Rotary clubs, each saving time through simple AI-powered efficiencies. Suddenly, we're not just saving hours — we're reclaiming collective time for service.

That reclaimed time can translate into more fellowships that strengthen bonds, more projects that touch lives, and more ideas that inspire change. This is where the true magic of AI lies — not in the technology itself, but in how it returns time and creativity to Rotarians, enabling us to serve with greater heart, focus and innovation.

In essence, AI doesn't just make Rotary work faster; it helps Rotary work deeper, reach wider, and impact stronger — turning efficiency into empathy and productivity into purpose.

AI tools require no advanced technical skills. We should be using AI as a digital assistant, with a human touch, not as a replacement — a tool that multiplies our ability to serve, not a substitute for our values.

The writer, a member of RC Pune East, is an AI and cyber security professional





Publishing textbooks, the Gujju way...

TCA Srinivasa Raghavan

LBW



In early 1976 I got my first job. It was in a publishing house. I was appointed as what is now called a commissioning editor. My remit was economics and management. One important part of the job was to find authors who could write textbooks for undergraduates. This involved visiting universities all over India. It was the best part of the job. In those days management was a fledgling discipline in India. So the managing editor told me to pay special attention to it. That meant one trip each year to Bombay, Ahmedabad and Calcutta where the management institutes were located. And thereby hangs a tale.

Once, in Ahmedabad, I decided to also visit the university, rather than just the IIM, in case I found an author who would write a textbook in economics. I was in for a shock. The faculty members told me that they would write only in Gujarati. That was clearly out of the question because ours was a British company, very *pukka*. When I narrated this to our local representative, he laughed and told me what's probably an apocryphal story.

He said he had once gone to a printing press to get something printed. There he found two gentlemen busily scribbling something on notebooks, tearing off the filled pages, and handing them to a man who took them to the compositors. There was an air of urgency because the university was to reopen in four days after the summer break and the book had to be ready by then. One of the writers, our man in Ahmedabad said, was the professor who would prescribe his own book, thus guaranteeing sales. The printer was also the publisher, so peer reviewing etc were not needed. It was a tidy arrangement in which everyone except the students benefitted. But who knows, maybe they did too.

I bring up this old story because it seems to fit modern, western pharmaceutical companies quite well. They produce a whole variety of drugs which they then proceed to get prescribed by creating well-designed media campaigns that 'persuade' doctors. The method is exactly like the one used for textbooks — prescription based. Like the students in the above story, patients have to accept whatever nonsense they are handed out. In the case of the textbooks, it was usually a whispering campaign by the professor himself. It was quietly rumoured by the author that those who used his book would get high marks and those who didn't would get low marks — and could even fail. In the case of the pharmaceutical companies, the message is "this drug will cure your patients. If you don't prescribe it, the consequences can be very dire."

The modern drug equivalents of the textbooks are medicines for diabetes, high BP and triglycerides. These two ailments afflict huge numbers of people but in differing degrees. So the market is massive and, if a company can popularise its drug, it can make very big profits. And this is what's happening. You have doctors prescribing drugs at the drop of a hat. They scare the patient into submission.

This happened to me recently because the doctor who did my annual checks not only prescribed some new medication, he also referred me to another doctor who also did the same thing. I went from three tablets to six taken in confusing combinations throughout the day. I got so confused on Day 1 that I have not consumed the new medicines after one, probably wrong, dose. I have preferred to take a risk like the students who chose to read Paul Samuelson's classic textbook on economics rather than local textbook writers, Pervezbhai or Rasheedaben or, if they were really unlucky, both! ■



Yadhumanaval

EMPOWERING GIRLS

Rotary strongly encourages partnership with like-minded Institutions and Corporates which support Rotary's programmes. Empowering girls has been a major focus of Rotary in the recent years.

Therefore the coming together of Rotary District 3212 and IDHAYAM, to empower young adults through a confidence building Programme specially designed by an illustrious life skills facilitator, Dr. Jayanthasri Balakrishnan, titled 'Yadhumanaval', is a great blessing indeed.

No. of Occurrences **125**

No. of Beneficiaries **1,60,376**

Get in Touch



Yadhumanaval

Project Chairman
Rtn D.Vijayakumari
+91 94887 66388

The voice of Yadhumanaval is a war cry against women illiteracy, gender inequality, gender bias and sexual harrasment. Yadhumanaval is the voice of the voiceless and voiced less. It is for the women, by the women and of the women.



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

IDHAYAM
PROMISE OF HEALTH AND HAPPINESS

LEKHA ads/Jan 26



RJ MANTRA ENGLISH SCHOOL

(Idhayam Rajendran Charities)

Affiliated to CISCE -TN082,Virudhunagar



ADMISSIONS OPEN
2026-2027



Our engaging curriculum, experienced educators, and vibrant learning environment empower students to grow academically, socially, and emotionally.

- ✓ Every classroom activity is a learning adventure
- ✓ Every competition is a chance to grow
- ✓ Every event is a community experience
- ✓ Every celebration is a moment of unity



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