

April 2026

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India

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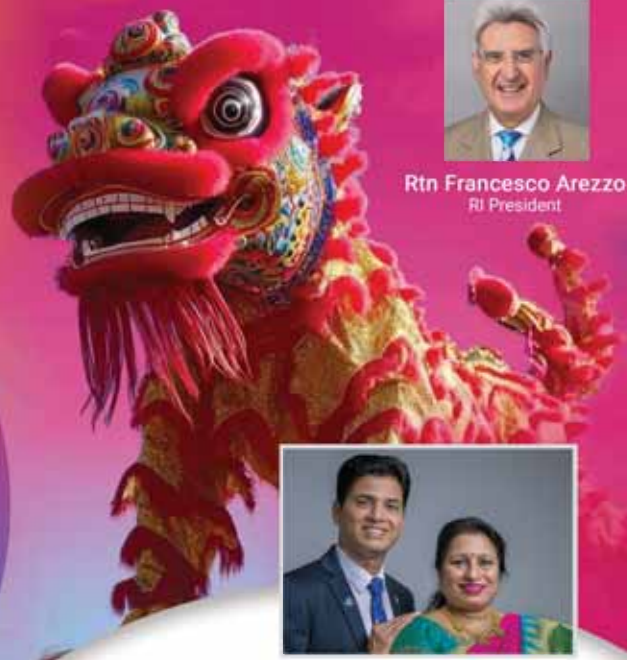


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Rotary 

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Pune Peace Centre, a great moment

I concur with your views in the editorial titled *Pune's Peace Centre offers hope*; it is indeed a splendid moment for Indian Rotarians. The selection of such a peace centre is historical and the presence of RI President and trustee chair in the event is setting a precedent in itself. Symbiosis University has proved its importance as rightly pointed out in your article.

The future scholars of this centre will hopefully play a pivotal role as ambassadors of peace carrying the message of a land where a great apostle of peace and nonviolence, Mahatma Gandhi, was born.

Arun Kumar Dash, RC Baripada — D 3262

A Rotary Peace Center being inaugurated at Pune's Symbiosis International University is a divine gift. I feel blessed to have passed out of Symbiosis, with a BCom and Masters in Computers in 1998–2002. I can't wait to pay a visit to this new peace centre and bathe in its glory. I will make special efforts to take Rotarians to this centre from RID 3170.

Kudos to all the team members who made this Peace Center a reality. Such a wonderful article with apt pictures in the *Rotary News*, that summed up in detail the grand inaugural. Cheers to Rotary and Symbiosis.

Satyajeet Morey, RC Dharwad Heritage — D 3170



The inauguration of the Rotary Peace Center in Pune is a welcome step in the context of geopolitical tensions and conflicts we are witnessing now. The content of the March issue was unput-downable. The RI President's message focused on the importance of data and explained how it can be used to deliver measurable change. It is gratifying to note that TRF has invested more than \$230 million in supporting thousands

of water-related initiatives since 2013. The anecdote from Erica Gwynn provides a first-hand account of the changes from sustained efforts.

*N Anthri Vedi, RC Hyderabad
Mega City — D 3150*

The cover picture depicting the need for instilling peace is a timely one given the current global conflict. Also, the cover story on India getting a Rotary Peace Center is a happy news for us all. The message from RI President Arezzo, and RI director Muruganandam's call to keep commitments are excellent. The feature on entrepreneurship RYLA by Rasheeda Bhagat with detailed interviews of Rotaractors is very inspiring to read. All other articles are interesting to go through.

G Kannan, RC Dindigul West — D 3000

I read with admiration the article *The Game Changer* featuring RI President Elect Olayinka Hakeem Babalola. His journey from a Rotaractor to the current post is both inspiring and transformational, reflecting Rotary's spirit of leadership development, service and perseverance. That he raised \$80,000 for TRF through a simple text message campaign demonstrates that leadership is not about power, but purpose, connection and credibility.

His humility is deeply moving; "I am called a game changer, but the ideas that changed the game were not mine."

His message for 2026–27, *Together We Create Lasting Impact*, is not just a slogan, but a philosophy that reminds you that sustainable change is possible through unity, collaboration and shared commitment. As the second RI President from Africa, he also symbolises Rotary's growing global inclusiveness and diversity in leadership. His powerful words — "Don't be afraid to fail; be afraid not to try" — will continue to inspire Rotarians to act boldly, serve fearlessly, and lead with compassion.

*D Mohan
RC Salem Mid-Town — D 2982*

I read the article on Dr TS Chhabra (99) who is marching towards his golden century filled with relentless service in the army. A member of RC Nilgiris, his service is praiseworthy. Every Rotarian should note his thought-provoking words.

RI director M Muruganandam being appointed RI Vice President is a proud moment for every Rotarian of RID 3000. Starting as a Rotaractor, he has come so far with his dedicated spirit, and is a role model for all, especially youngsters.

*S Mohan, RC Madurai
West — RID 3000*

LETTERS

I am a voracious reader of your wonderful magazine, beautifully designed and loaded with knowledge covering all aspects of life. The editor's powerful writing touches our hearts. I eagerly look forward for the postman to deliver *Rotary News*.

My compliments for the unique cover picture of two pigeons, conveying love, peace and positivity. Today the world faces many conflicts and more can erupt. Rotary plays the role of creating a peaceful environment by setting up peace centres teaching how to build trust and reduce conflict.

Raj Kumar Kapoor
RC Roop Nagar — D 3080

The magnanimous donation of ₹500 crore by DGE Ravishankar Dakoju and his wife Paola is amazing. What a gesture, and indeed a world record in TRF-giving which should inspire all Rotarians to enhance their contribution to TRF. May god bless their family.

Robert Franklin Rego
RC Bajpe — D 3181

The article on heart attack by Dr Gita Mathai is a timely one as more and more young people are affected by chest pain due to a stressful lifestyle. She has clearly explained who are all vulnerable to heart attack, its symptoms, preventive measures, and the exercises to prevent such attacks which will be useful to the readers. I benefitted from it; more such articles are welcome.

Sivaperumal Subramani
RC Walajapet — D 3231

I liked the article by Rasheeda Bhagat titled *A leadership journey like no other...* in the Jan issue. One para in the address of Capt Raghu Raman from the Indian Army was heart-wrenching. It was about the letters our soldiers get; while some can bring smiles,

others have to be held back, because the soldier's morale must never be broken. Suppose a soldier's daughter has died; the commanding officer will not inform him. But just imagine the burden he has to carry. Reading this, I closed my eyes for a moment... It was like watching a movie, a pain that tore through my heart. Now this is quality of writing that truly touched the soul. Thank you.

Suresh Menon
RC Parur — D 3205

In his column, Muruganandam says that while making a commitment to a noble cause is an expression of humanity, keeping it despite challenges and obstacles is an expression of something higher. Citing Ayn Rand, a reputed philosopher and novelist who said "the question is not who is going to let me, but who is going to stop," he says self-confidence and leadership are critical in achieving all goals.

Niranjana Kar
RC Bhubaneswar — D 3262

Correction: In *A living link to history at RC Madras* (Mar' 2026), read Sir F E James as the first RI Director from India. John Armstrong's wife's name is Penny, not Betty.

An irreparable loss

With the sudden demise of PDG VR Muthu (RID 3212), we have lost a dynamic Rotary leader. His projects were outstanding — *Yadhumaanaaval* (for female students), *Kalam* (youth career development), *Focus* (public speaking skills), *Punch* (leadership skills), and *Premkumar* (leadership development).

He was a shrewd business man (Idhayam Group) but at the same time, never failed to focus his attention on community service and youth development. His memories will remain evergreen. His strong leadership qualities with a humanitarian approach to life and philosophical views will continue to guide us.

As a fellow Rotarian closely associated with him in RID 3000 and RID 3191 for over 40 years, I mourn his loss; may his soul rest in eternal peace and his memory serve as a guiding force for all of us.

R Srinivasan, RC Bangalore
JP Nagar — D 3191

On the cover:
A cancer patient and her family
at the Rotary Dharmashala
in Mumbai.

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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Photo: Monika Lozinska

Count on preparation, not luck

Not long ago, in a small health centre in the village of Aaye in southwest Nigeria, a woman arrived in labour carrying twins. The facility was short-staffed. The nurse midwife in charge was not present.

A community health worker stepped forward. She had participated in *Together for Healthy Families in Nigeria*, a Rotary Foundation Programs of Scale initiative. And though she was not formally trained as a midwife, she was equipped with essential emergency obstetric skills.

Hours later, both babies had been delivered, one at the health centre and the other at a general hospital, where the mother had been referred after complications were quickly identified. The newborns and their mother were alive and safe.

Women around the world face similar circumstances every day — moments when the difference between life and loss depends on well-trained medical staff and reliable systems and procedures.

Together for Healthy Families in Nigeria exists to increase the chances that those moments end in hope. By strengthening health systems and training frontline workers, this programme helps communities protect mothers and children even when circumstances are difficult.

This work reflects the very heart of Rotary service. Service is not only what we do when conditions are ideal. It is what we do when systems are strained, resources are limited, and the need is urgent. It is the commitment to prepare people before a crisis arrives and to stand with communities when it does.

Maternal and child health is not an abstract goal. It is deeply personal. It is a mother who survives childbirth. It is a newborn who takes a first breath. It is a family that remains whole because someone was trained, ready, and cared enough to act. Rotary understands that service means investing in people and systems long before they are tested.

Programmes like *Together for Healthy Families in Nigeria* show what is possible when Rotary brings together local knowledge, global partnerships, and sustainable solutions. By working alongside health professionals and local leaders, Rotary helps ensure that lifesaving care does not depend on luck or location.

The story of the mother and her twins is at its core a story of service. It is a reminder that Rotary's impact is measured in human moments when people step forward to help others in their most vulnerable hours.

When we *Unite for Good*, service becomes more than an ideal. It becomes a lifeline for families, a source of strength for communities, and a promise that Rotary will continue to go wherever help is needed most.

Francesco Arezzo
President, Rotary International



Wanted... a peace maker to heal our world

Barely had the ink dried on the paper on which an MoU was signed between Rotary and the Symbiosis International University, Pune, India, and the world was embroiled in yet another conflict, not chosen or desired by 99 per cent of the countries. The US-Israel military attacks on Iran, and its strong response has put in grave danger the citizens and civic infrastructure of even once-friendly neighbouring countries of the Arab world.

At the time of writing this edit, the war in West Asia rages unabated, destroying homes, killing or crippling people and devastating not only human lives but raising fear and unanswerable questions about whether we humans, who have always considered ourselves superior to other species on Planet Earth, are fit to inhabit it. Our unending greed, wanting to grab as much as possible of the earth's resources for ourselves, coupled with lust for power which we believe only the most sophisticated and destructive military equipment can fetch us, is rapidly destroying our planet.

A lot has been written about the strategic position of the Strait of Hormuz which Iran controls and has virtually closed it, except to some of its longstanding friends, including India. Roughly 20 per cent of the world's energy (oil, LNG, etc) moves through this critical waterway, and for countries in the Persian Gulf region, it is also a vital food supply route. It is estimated that Saudi Arabia imports over 80 per cent of its food, the UAE, about 90 per cent and Qatar 98 per cent! As the conflict chokes this strait, food will have to come into the region through alternate routes, sharply increasing food costs, and driving shortage.

In India LPG supply has already been disrupted as we are facing a huge cooking gas shortage, and as Prime Minister Narendra Modi told the Indian Parliament, nearly 1 crore Indians live and work in


the Gulf. With missiles flowing around and bombings continuing, concern for their safety is rising.

What this accelerating conflict in West Asia needs is a serious and credible peace broker, who can calm frayed nerves, quieten shrill and angry voices and facilitate dialogue. Several analysts of geopolitics have suggested that India and its leadership are well suited to play this role as it has enjoyed cordial relations with all the three nations involved. One is certain that backchannel diplomacy efforts for some calm and serious efforts to bring all the sides on the negotiation table are already on.

In this background and the emergence of highly volatile pockets in a world where acrimony and animosities are multiplying at an alarming rate, Rotary's Peace Centers acquire so much more meaning. To my ears the core message of RI President Francesco's address at the inauguration of the Pune Centre continues to ring true.... fear of the other and failure to understand the other side's point of view is the root of all problems. Trust and understanding to build little bridges between people, and freedom from "poverty, hate and prejudice," can usher in a more peaceful world... only if we have the heart and mind to look for them.

But how do you move closer to the lofty goals he spelt out... shedding fear of strangers who have been portrayed to you as evil and dangerous... is the million-dollar question. We are in an era where each warring side digs in its heels and holds steadfast to its position, which is invariably filled with fear, prejudice and hatred.

Can we hope for a messiah who can heal wounds, melt away fear and prejudices, and gently coax strangers to embrace each other? Can Rotary evolve into one....?


Rasheeda Bhagat

Get your iconic projects featured in **Rotary News**



Rotarians and Rotary clubs, or districts, that undertake well-planned and meticulously executed projects that benefit the local community, transforming people's lives, naturally want them known to other Rotary clubs. What better way to do this than to showcase the project in *Rotary News*, which is circulated to **over 1.5 lakh Rotarians, about 1,000 public libraries, educational institutions, doctors' waiting rooms, clinics,** etc and read by over 4 lakh readers every month?

We at *Rotary News* would like to feature good service projects the Rotary clubs implement. But our problem is lack of information about the good projects, while routine projects keep demanding space. While most of the times we are flooded with routine welfare projects, which we don't deny are required by the community, such as blood donation events, gifting a vehicle, medical equipment or cataract screening, **we often miss out on the bigger, better, or smaller but unique projects** for the simple reason that the club do not share them with us.

So here is an invitation to get your communication right; assign somebody in your club to tell us about your major projects. If you think they need to be shared with the rest of the Rotary world, please document, or make an info sheet of

the different stages of the project, keeping in mind the fundamental criteria of journalism.

- **Genesis** — When was the project conceived.
- **Cause** — Why was it planned; obviously to fulfil the needs of the local community. Describe this need.
- **Cost** — How was the money raised; was it a TRF grant?
- **Challenges** — Was finding the money a problem? Were government clearances required; how were these obtained? Other challenges and finding of solutions.
- **Execution** — The timeframe in which the project was completed; the different stages.
- **Beneficiaries** — You will have the best chance of getting your club's project in *Rotary News* if you give us **human interest stories... pictures and interaction with the beneficiaries.**
- **Pictures** — Take **good, action photographs** of the project and its beneficiaries, send them in **high resolution, original size.**
- **Project heroes** — Highlight the Rotarians who were passionately involved in the project, even if they are not the club leaders and are silent workers.
- As Rotary is keen to get more **women and younger members, give us projects done by this group.**

Once you have all this in place, invite us to visit your project. Do remember we have only one magazine a month and there is a lot of demand on this space. So, as one RNT trustee pointed out at a recent Board meet, differentiate between that which is fit for the GML, and that which can go into the national magazine for Rotarians.

Give us your best project for the magazine, rather than sending all kinds of activities, such as distribution of blankets, books or benches.

Finally, remember that we are not looking only at mega projects which cost hundreds of thousands of dollars in global grants. **Even a small project that has a unique idea, and gives a simple, out-of-the-box solution to the local community,** is welcome.

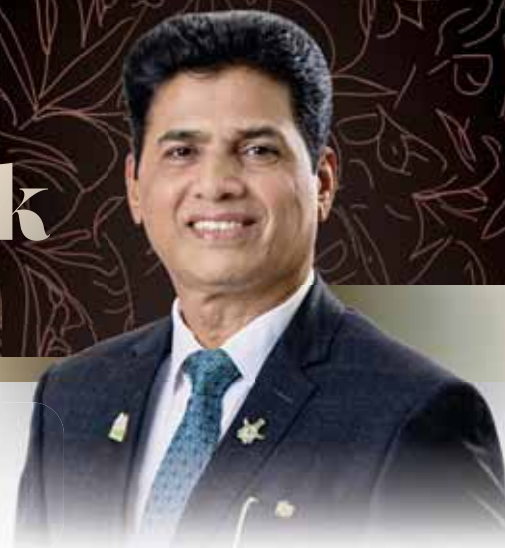
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Director speak



From preparation to purposeful impact

April reminds us of a responsibility that goes beyond immediate service — the responsibility to protect and sustain our environment. Environmental stewardship today is inseparable from health, livelihood, and the long-term wellbeing of our communities. Whether through water conservation, waste management, renewable energy, or restoring green cover, even small, consistent efforts across clubs can create meaningful and lasting change. What we preserve today will define the quality of life for generations to come.

In recent weeks, we have seen the energy and intent of our future leadership through Disha, held in Goa for Zones 4 and 7, and in Coimbatore for Zones 5 and 6. Incoming leaders and their teams came together with clarity of purpose, setting ambitious goals for membership, TRF-giving, and impactful service. More importantly, these platforms created alignment — of vision, priorities, and the collective effort required to deliver results.

At the same time, we remain firmly anchored in the present. Our districts have made encouraging progress across key areas. This momentum reflects the commitment of district governors, their teams, and Rotarians at the club level who work tirelessly, often without recognition.

The months ahead are about sustaining this progress —welcoming new members, strengthening TRF, and ensuring we achieve the goals we have set for ourselves.

This is also the most important phase of preparation. Across districts, structured learning programmes are underway for presidents-elect, district team, and club-level orientations. Learning is not merely a calendar requirement; it is where leadership is shaped and confidence is built. It brings clarity to roles, sharpens execution, and ensures that plans translate into meaningful outcomes. Well-trained teams anticipate challenges better, collaborate more effectively, and deliver with consistency.

The difference between intent and impact often lies in how well we prepare. When leaders are aligned and equipped early, the year ahead becomes less about managing uncertainty and more about creating opportunity.

As we move forward, let us combine readiness with responsibility. Let us care deeply for our environment, prepare our leaders with intent, and sustain the momentum we have built. If we do this well, we will not only meet our goals — we will strengthen Rotary's relevance and impact.

Let us continue to *Unite for Good* and *Create Lasting Impact*.

KP Nagesh
RI Director, 2025–27

2026
Convention

A few of my favourite things

All attendees have a favourite Rotary International Convention experience — or two or three. A sampling of what members are looking forward to most in Taipei:



- In-depth learning about Rotary, including directly from the RI President and RI general secretary
- The flag ceremony that represents Rotary nations and territories. Goosebumps!
- The House of Friendship — Rotary Fellowship booths and peace exhibits are two faves
- The chance to make friends, pursue your passion, and explore an exciting city
- Top-notch entertainment and inspiration — renowned speakers and a spectacular stage
- That feeling of what's possible with Rotary's global reach

For Pauline Leung, a member of the Rotary Club of Taipei Pei-An, one thing RI makes possible is the chance for international service. “Through Rotary, our helping hands can grow very long, and the world feels like a small village because Rotary unites us as one,” she says. Leung, a host committee member, hopes you will come to Taiwan when the village of Rotary unites June 13–17.

Learn more and register at convention.rotary.org.

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Magazine

Message from TRF Trustee Chair



Your impact partners

Rotary's environment area of focus offers clubs and districts the chance to make a truly lasting impact in their communities.

One possibility is through the Community Action for Fresh Water partnership between Rotary and the United Nations Environment Programme, which launched the initiative in 2024 to protect, restore, and better manage freshwater resources worldwide.

Through the programme, Rotary and Rotaract clubs identify a local water body — a river, a lake, wetlands, or groundwater — and commit to its long-term protection and restoration. Members can draw on UNEP's technical expertise.

Salvador Rico, a member of the Rotary Club of South Ukiah, California, and a technical adviser to the partnership, tells us more:

The partnership is deeply personal to me.

My passion for clean rivers comes from a painful family experience during my childhood in Mexico: We believe my older sister died of polio she contracted from swimming in a polluted river there. Unsafe water is not an abstract environmental issue; it is a matter of life, health, and dignity for families and communities.

This experience drives my work as a member of The Rotary Foundation Cadre of Technical Advisers, where I ensure Rotary members have access to proven technical knowledge so their global grant-supported projects deliver lasting impact through permanent, scalable solutions.

Today, Community Action for Fresh Water supports Rotary clubs globally by providing a shared platform to upload projects, learn from other clubs, and access technical and financial support through global grants and club-to-club collaboration.

The impact became tangible in 2024, when the environmental chair of District 4170 in Mexico shared a critical challenge: Small, family-owned textile factories were polluting the upper Lerma River watershed. Rotarians lacked clear solutions. Through the freshwater partnership, I connected them with UNEP experts who provided guidance on bioremediation strategies. That collaboration led to a global grant application and, we hope, cleaner water for this community.

The partnership among Rotary clubs, family-owned textile companies, and government authorities ensures shared responsibility and long-term stewardship.

Every Rotary club can amplify this impact by registering freshwater projects at communityactionforfreshwater.org.

Look around your community — I bet you'll find a water body in need of protection. The Rotary Foundation can support your project through Community Action for Fresh Water and a global grant.

Holger Knaack

TRF Trustee Chair

RC Bombay reaches a healing touch to cancer patients

Rasheeda Bhagat

The Rotary Club of Bombay, RID 3141, one of India's premier, most admired and oldest clubs (chartered in 1929, is in a class by itself when it comes to doing striking, meaningful and massive community service projects. Recently in Mumbai I visited its iconic Dharmashala project, which operates a 100-flat temporary housing facility in Bhoiwada-Parel for cancer patients who come to the Tata Memorial Hospital, an advanced cancer treatment centre. Here, as though in a fairy tale, each patient and his/her attendants are given a simple, but neat, clean, comfortable and furnished one BHK for one month at a throwaway average monthly rent of ₹300.



Project chair Miral Shah with cancer patient Krishna Mukhopadhyay and his wife Swati.

At this facility, complete with swanky and spacious elevators, freshly cooked, delicious and healthy meals are offered at a nominal price to the attendants and patients who are undergoing chemotherapy or radiation at the nearby cancer hospital. In addition to the accommodation and food, a laundry service and shuttles are also available to take the residents to the hospital and bring them back.

The project, which has completed three years, is executed from a multi-storeyed building that belongs to MHADA (Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority) and is known as a transit camp, which is used to temporarily house slum dwellers when their slums are taken over for redevelopment by the state. The club has taken over 100 flats located from the 16th to the 21st floors on a 30-year lease, and converted them into basic 1BHK units. Roping in HDFC as a CSR partner this

project has got a 10-year commitment from HDFC for an annual amount of ₹1.5 crore to meet expenses for maintenance, staff and state levies.

Project chair and club member Miral Shah explains that all the 12 apartments on a higher floor of this multi-storeyed building have been done up as 1 BHK studio units and given to doctors of the Tata Memorial Hospital who need accommodation. These are similar to those occupied by the patients, except for an AC unit.

From the remaining, 84 flats house patients and their families, one is converted into Shah's office, another given to the Tata Memorial hospital for its office, and two have been converted into a kitchen which prepares food for the residents.

Tracing the genesis of the programme RID 3141 PDG and club member Sandip Agarwalla said that prior to heading the district in 2022, he was in touch with the Tata Research Centre (TRC), the umbrella organisation that runs all Tata cancer hospitals, to carry out oral, cervical and breast cancer camps in the tribal district of Palghar. "In our meetings, they requested several machines for cancer patients. During Covid, the Rotarians had helped with special vaccinations to be administered to cancer patients. "We were able to help with a sizable contribution. But every time I passed the roads leading up to the Tata Memorial hospital, I was disturbed by the sight of so many cancer patients actually living on the footpaths or under the flyover. We know that cancer is a debilitating disease that bankrupts middle and lower-class families because of high recurring expenses."

That set him thinking about what Rotary could do to make comfortable

the underprivileged cancer patients who come from far-flung places all over India to Mumbai for treatment, but cannot afford accommodation. A breakthrough came when "we were offered via Tata Hospital itself, 100 flats of MHADA, within striking distance of this hospital, just a 10 to 15-minute walk. These were bare-shell flats; they requested us to furnish them with all amenities, and also run them. We were very happy to take on this commitment and with lightning speed, equipped and furnished all the flats."

About ₹4.5 crore was spent to renovate and refurbish them. This lumpsum was also given by HDFC from its CSR funds. "We made sure that the accommodation was nothing less than a three-star hotel grade, because regardless of the class or strata of society the patients came from, we wanted them to feel at home." Each flat was given a double bed, one sofa-cum-bed, so, three people could stay, the Indian bathrooms were converted to western closets for convenience, and water heaters and tanks for water storage for over 600 litres were provided. In addition, a refrigerator, writing table and TV with a cable connection were given. A fully-equipped kitchen with induction cooking facilities, utensils, etc, was also provided.

Agarwalla adds that once this was done, TRC director Dr Sudeep Gupta "asked us that as you have so many cancer patients staying here, can we have the upper floor of 12 flats for doctors to reside in, so that they can take care of any emergency should it arise? This was done, with an extra facility to express gratitude for the doctors' service. Their units were air-conditioned!"

Gradually more services were added to all the flats; laundry is done on alternate days and the bedsheets and towels changed. Within six



months the Rotarians realised that for cancer patients even a 15-minute walk to the hospital is challenging if not impossible. “So, we bought our own vehicle and started a free transport shuttle service between the hospital and the Dharamshala at periodic intervals.”

Expectedly, the demand for accommodation for patients who come from all over India to the Tata Memorial Hospital is overwhelming, so the club goes strictly by the referrals from the hospital. “We allow them to stay only for one month, unless in an exceptional case where the treating doctors recommends extension of stay.”

The patients who are housed here are not critical and don't need emergency medical treatment. “Most of the patients referred here have already undergone surgery and require follow up chemotherapy or radiation sessions. Almost 70 per cent of the people housed here come from Kolkata and the rest of Bengal and cannot afford accommodation at market rates. The Tata Memorial Hospital, which is just 10 minutes from here, refers the patients to us after deciding what they can afford to pay,” says Shah.

Those who cannot afford to pay anything are given free accommodation, while others are charged ₹300 a month, and those who can afford to pay a little more at ₹600 a month. Though two relatives are allowed with each patient, the average occupancy is two people.

Most patients are in the 35-55 age group, though they do see younger patients, including an odd teenager. The most common cancer among women is breast cancer, he adds.

Around 12 housekeeping staff and 12 security personnel are stationed at the Dharmashala floors; the security personnel are here mainly to ensure that if something happens suddenly to a patient, there is help available on the premises to shift that patient to the hospital.

The employment of the housekeeping staff explains the spanking clean corridors; the kitchen too is neat and clean. At the end of our visit, we have a surprise waiting... the most delicious and ubiquitous Mumbai's *batata-vada* and mouth-watering tasty *poha*, complete with seasoning. When we lap it up, Shah smiles and





says, “Every time Rotarians visit this project, they love to have our food. It is so tasty!”

Agarwalla recalls that once the flats had been readied and all the amenities, including a kitchenette, were given, the project team realised that the patients and caretakers were not eating wholesome and hygienic food, as most of them were ordering from outside, and very few were cooking on the induction stoves apart from preparing breakfast, tea or coffee.

So, they decided to start a full-fledged kitchen, taking two of the four units for this purpose. “We started offering subsidised wholesome meals with different menus through the week; the food includes chapatis, vegetables, rice, pulses, and yoghurt. For breakfast, on different days there is poha, idli, dosa, upma and a glass of milk. Fruits are also given often as donors come forward to offer the cost. And all this for a princely sum of only ₹25 — ₹5 for breakfast and ₹10 each for lunch and dinner. Our cost is ₹150 a day.”

The food, which has less oil and spices, is yet very tasty as we found. Those who can’t afford even ₹25 a day, are given free food, with WeCare their partner, or some club members picking up the tab.

Shah adds that the kitchen is being run in partnership with a wonderful couple Sheetal and Vikrant Bhatkar, who run a food service called *Don Ghaas* (two bites), near the Tata Memorial Hospital, to provide affordable and nutritious, home-cooked meals to cancer patients and their relatives at a heavily subsidised price.

Clockwise from left: Shah with cancer patient Roma Bhaumik (centre) flanked by her son Vishwajeet and daughter-in-law Shivli; PRIP Kalyan Banerjee with PDG Sandip Agarwalla and Shah; a view of the pantry; Members of RC Bombay with a cancer patient and his family; PDG Agarwalla and RC Bombay President Bimal Mehta with a cancer survivor.



PRIP Kalyan Banerjee with a cancer survivor.

In one of the small flats, I meet Roma Bhaumik from West Bengal; she is 51 and two months ago, after a lump was found on her appendix after a CT scan, she was referred here for further diagnosis and tests. She is here with her son Vishwajeet and daughter-in-law Shivli. They all live about 3 hours away from Kolkata. Sadly, Shivli too was diagnosed with cancer in 2024. “We came to the same hospital; she had a problem in her thyroid gland, took the treatment and is completely cured now,” he says.

While his wife was undergoing treatment they had to stay in Mumbai for four months and also stayed here. As the rules permitted stay at this Dharmashala only for 30 days, they had to find another accommodation. “We found a very ordinary room for ₹700. It was nowhere near this; we had to share the room with a couple of other people and pay much more...”

Even the food was more expensive, and nowhere the quality offered here, he adds. But he is on tenterhooks about the 30-day deadline fast approaching. He is sure the doctor is

going to recommend an extension of their stay. “We may have to stay for 15–20 days extra, but the rules won’t allow it, and once again, I’ll have to find another place. There is no way we can find something like this at that price,” he sighs.

Shah, who is listening to the dialogue assures him that if he gets a recommendation from the Tata Memorial Hospital, he will try to extend their stay here.

Another patient I interact with is Krishna Gopal Mukhopadhyay, who is from East Mirzapur, West Bengal, and has a lung problem. His tests have been completed and his chemotherapy will begin shortly. A former state government employee, he is now a pensioner and is staying here with his wife Swati and a nephew. She is very happy with the accommodation and says the food is hygienic and tasty. As I glance into the little kitchenette and see the induction stove, she says, “Oh yes, I use it to make tea and coffee and some *sabji*. Everything is fine, but if they can give us an exhaust fan, it will be good because after I cook, there is smoke in the kitchen and

the smell of the food lingers in the apartment.”

As we walk out, Shah smiles and says, “we give them vegetarian food and many Bengalis yearn for fish, so they cook it in their flats. We will examine the possibility of putting in exhaust fans.”

Recently past RI President Kalyan Banerjee visited the Dharmashala and spent two hours going around the place and interacting with the patients.

Till mid-February, this facility had benefitted 2,530 cancer patients; every Wednesday the project chair is here for a few hours to ensure that the facility is running smoothly and without any glitches.

After getting rave reviews and gratitude of the patients and their families, RC Bombay is now looking to expand this project. “We hear that in the next 10 months, this building will get vacant and we are planning to expand our Dharmashala from 100 to a 300-flat facility.

What about the funds? Shah smiles and says, “Sandip (Agarwalla) has given me that huge task... to find a donor!”

Agarwalla himself admits, “By no means have we taken all the people off the footpaths and the flyovers, but we’ve at least alleviated the suffering of some of them. There’s need for many more such Dharmashalas. Of course, RC Bombay is very happy to look at even more Dharmashalas, but keeping in mind that real estate in Mumbai is very difficult to come by. We are paying over ₹50 lakh annually to BMC and MHADA for taxes and other levies, even though they don’t charge us any rent. But we are determined to do our best.”

Pictures by Rasheeda Bhagat

An environment care event for children

Team Rotary News

The Rotary Club of Chennai Anchorage, RID 3234, hosted Rotakidz, a vibrant inter-club event that brought together young Annettes aged 3 to 13 years. Competing across three categories, the children explored the theme ‘Environment — Project Planet’ with enthusiasm, blending creativity with awareness on pressing environmental issues.

Whether it was a tiny tot dressed as a tree or an older participant articulating the need for renewable energy, each child demonstrated a genuine concern for the planet. “Their energy transformed the event into more than

a competition; it became a celebration of young voices committed to change,” said Bharati Saravanan, the event chair.

The contests included painting and fancy dress, with topics ranging from nature and water conservation to recycling, wildlife protection, renewable energy and pollution control. The children expressed these themes with imagination and clarity.

Adding to the festive atmosphere was an environment-themed photo booth that welcomed children and parents alike, offering instant framed photographs as cherished keepsake. Every participant received a goody bag and a certificate, while parents were



From R: Club president Vinita Venkatesh, Usha Saraogi, DGND S Ravi and event chair Bharati Saravanan with a participant and his mother.

also acknowledged with tokens of appreciation for their encouragement and support.

A magician’s lively performance kept the excitement high, engaging the children with interactive magic and mentalism between sessions, ensuring there was never a dull moment.

“The young participants impressed everyone with their confidence, costumes and thoughtful presentations, truly reflecting the spirit of Gen Z — the future custodians of a sustainable planet,” said Bharati.

The event was judged by Seshu Sai, a member of RC Madras; entrepreneur Kavya Reddy; and Divya, a teacher from the National Public School, Chennai. Meticulously planned by club president Vinita Venkatesh, Rotakidz was a seamless blend of competition and joy; “a heartening reminder that the future of the planet is in capable and caring hands.” ■



Members of RC Anakapalle, along with DG Y Kalyan Chakravarthy (centre), after distributing sewing machines and accessories to village women.



Rotary Shakti empowers tribal women

Jaishree

Around 1,250 women from Gathum village and its surrounding hamlets in Visakhapatnam district are currently receiving training in tailoring and embroidery through a three-month course under *Project Rotary Shakti*, an initiative of the Rotary Club of Vizag Surabhi, RID 3020.

Gathum is a tribal settlement classified under the 'Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Community' category, located deep in the hilly interiors of Hukumpeta mandal on the Andhra–Odisha border. "It is a challenging terrain infested with anti-social activists and there is no proper transportation," says Srinivasa Rao Vuggina, Vocational Services chair of RI District 3020. He is also the nodal officer of the Government of

India's Skill India Mission (SIM) and programme officer of the Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS), Visakhapatnam.

Vuggina, a member of RC Visakhapatnam since 2022, helped the club design and implement the project. "I have been working with the villagers for the past two decades, and that's how I've earned their trust. Otherwise these tribals do not trust outsiders easily," he says.

RC Vizag Surabhi has supplied sewing machines and training material such as cloth and thread to enable the women to practise their skills. An instructor walks nearly 25km through the hilly terrain to reach the village. Through the SIM and JSS programmes, Vuggina ensures that the trainer's salary is taken care of.

Around two lakh women from 500 villages have been identified for vocational

training under the district's *Rotary Vocational Mission* programme, with Rotary clubs across RID 3020 supporting the initiative. So far, around 2,000 women have been trained through various Rotary clubs in the district. "Another 1,000 women will be trained in the next phase beginning in April," he says.

Even before joining Rotary, he had personally invested ₹2 lakh from his own pocket to train around 2,000 women in tailoring and embroidery in East Godavari district. "These women are now successfully earning money through job work. My club and other Rotary clubs help connect them with opportunities," he notes.

One such transformation story stands out for him. He remembers Lakshmi, a young tribal woman who joined a

These women are now successfully earning money through job work. The Rotary clubs help connect them with opportunities.



DG Chakravathy visiting an expo organised by RC Anakapalle.

tailoring class with little confidence and no independent income. Within months of completing her training, she began stitching school uniforms and simple garments for nearby villages. “Today she earns enough to support her family. When I visited the village recently, she proudly showed me the small tailoring corner she has set up at home. That moment made all the effort worthwhile.”

The Rotary Club of Anakapalle has similarly supported the training of 1,000 women in another remote village, Garudapalle. The club donated six sewing machines to the village panchayat so that trainees could practise regularly. It now plans to establish a production unit equipped with advanced, high-speed sewing machines to manufacture frocks, skirts and women’s nightwear. The club has also undertaken to market the finished products stitched by the

village women and provide the necessary raw materials.

Apart from tailoring, village women have also been trained in other vocations such as making cleaning material, jams, agarbathis and candles. District Governor Kalyan Chakravathy visited an expo organised by the club at the Rotary Skill Centre in Anakapalle, where the rural women showcased the skills they had acquired.

Vuggina also recalls how the initiative proved its worth during the pandemic. “Within two days of the declaration of Covid in 2020, 200 rural women trained under this project stitched and distributed two lakh cloth masks through Rotary clubs across the district,” he says.

He hopes to leverage his official role to create an online platform to market

the products made by these women. He is also exploring the possibility of securing recognition for their work at Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi. The Union Ministry of Skill Development has recognised this Rotary project as a model programme that aligns with the nation’s vision of inclusive development and last-mile empowerment, he adds.

“It is deeply satisfying to see these women gradually transform into financially independent individuals. When a woman becomes self-reliant, the impact spreads across the family — children receive better education, households get healthier food, and the entire family moves towards a more secure future,” he smiles.

His home club, RC Visakhapatnam, also focuses on basic literacy for the tribal trainees. “Whenever a vocational programme is introduced for women in a village, our club conducts basic literacy classes for the first two weeks. We ensure that women and children learn English and Telugu alphabets, numbers and basic arithmetic. This helps safeguard them from being cheated,” he explains. After completing their training, the women are guided towards self-employment opportunities through the Government of India’s Livelihood Cell.

Rotary clubs also organise periodic medical camps in these villages, followed by continued healthcare support. ■



RC Vizag Surabhi president Sathyasree Lakshmidevi presents a sewing machine to a woman. District Vocational Services chair Srinivasa Rao Vuggina is on her left.

Work in a group... to achieve the impossible

Kalyan Banerjee

Rasheeda Bhagat

“**D**uring our childhood, he was a very busy man. In Rotary and United Phosphorus Ltd. He spent much less time with us than an average dad. But whenever he spent, he made it count. At UPL, they have lunch break for an hour. He would

come home during that time. Before eating, he would play cricket with us for 15–20 minutes in our compound. And it was fun. He appreciates good humour and includes it in his speeches. His own sense of humour is impish and wicked. And it comes out

occasionally. As a father, as a person, he is solid and larger than life. Our family revolves around him and his work at UPL. And later his work in Rotary. He is ever dependable. Even today, I think we as children depend upon him more than he on us.”

This excerpt was read out by RID 3141 PDG Sandip Agarwalla at a recent meeting of RC Bombay where a biography of past RI President Kalyan Banerjee titled ‘Tirelessly Yours’ was unveiled. He was quoting Rama Chatterjee, Banerjee’s daughter.

Written by Ganesh Vancheeswaran, the book sums up this Rotary stalwart’s long years in both UPL as well as Rotary.



Engaging Banerjee in a Q & A session, Agarwalla said that from the industrial hub of Vapi to RI presidency, Banerjee's journey had been exceptional and "a roadmap of a life dedicated to service," which had been captured in this book.

At the outset, Banerjee clarified that the book wasn't his but his club members' idea, and to write it the author had interviewed him a few times, as also his two children, friends, Rotarians and business associates. A central message of the book and his life's story was that "if you work with a group, you can do the impossible... and achieve whatever you set out to do."

The two underlying mantras of his life and work were best

The growth of members from India is absolutely amazing. And we have maintained it year after year.

PRIP Kalyan Banerjee

summed up in the themes of two RI presidents... imagine — "a lot of imagination goes into all Rotary leadership — and once you've imagined, 'make your dreams real'". *Make dreams real* was the theme of Dong Kurn Lee, while *Imagine Rotary* was the theme of Jennifer Jones.

On Rotary's progress in India, the past RI president said, "India has evolved unimaginably. The US may have the largest number of members and give more money each year to TRF, but we are number two in both, and the growth of members from India is absolutely amazing. And we have maintained it year after year. Sometimes I feel we need to control this a bit because, sometimes it gets out of hand... but I don't want to get into that."

Recalling his year as TRF trustee chair, Banerjee said TRF-giving that year had gone up from \$230 million the previous year to \$300 million for the first time. "The number might be going towards \$500 million in the next couple of years, if not earlier."

On the polio legacy and what next, Banerjee said that till there was total elimination, Rotarians would have to "keep immunising children of the world without fail on a regular basis as we have been doing. Because if Pakistan and Afghanistan still have polio, it can come back at any time."

Other important Rotary goals are of course literacy, water management and healthcare, where a lot of work was already happening, and "Rotary



From L: Members of RC Vapi Krushit Shah, Praful Dawani and Ram Janam Singh; PDG Sandip Agarwalla, RC Bombay president Bimal Mehta, PRIP Kalyan Banerjee, TRF Trustee Elect AS Venkatesh and DG Manish Motwani at the book release event.

High praise for RC Bombay

When RID 3141 PDG Sandip Agarwalla asked past RI President Kalyan Banerjee on the role that individual clubs like theirs (RC Bombay) can play in advancing Rotary's global cause and mission, the senior leader smiled and said: "Well, that's a very simple question to answer. I've said it around the world that the best Rotary club in the world is the Rotary Club of Bombay. And I'll say that anywhere! You have some of the most outstanding and committed members... members who are absolutely and totally dedicated to the job on hand. They are there in every meeting.

You don't have the largest membership, but the support you give to The Rotary Foundation is the highest in the world, year-after-year. The projects that you

do, the homes you have built... small homes, shelters, maybe a few years ago, perhaps not very recently... they are all amazing. I know that you're doing both small and big projects... your work with the students, the youth, the next generation, is amazing.

I have seen the enthusiasm of the youth over here; so, what other clubs can do are the same things that you do, maybe on the scale which suits them and the circumstances around them. That's all they have to do... follow your commitment, your dedication, your engagement, that's what Rotary requires."

Incidentally, RC Bombay is one of the oldest clubs in India, was chartered in 1929, and will be celebrating its centenary in a couple of years. ■

PRIP Kalyan Banerjee in conversation with PDG Sandip Agarwalla.



is now looking at peace initiatives all over the world."

Asked by Agarwalla to describe his most difficult moments as RI President, he said these included going to Pakistan and Afghanistan to ensure that the children would be given polio drops as there was opposition to this in several quarters. Once in Pakistan, after he had met the President, "he said go and meet the Leader of the Opposition." But the latter was not available, and would come in only at 2am. "So we waited for him; met him at 2am and told him you have to immunise all your children. He said: We have no problem. But what are you going to do about America throwing bombs on us? Why don't you give us some peace first? After that, we will listen to you."!

But the most dangerous thing he did as RI President was to visit Afghanistan to meet President Hamid Karzai. He was advised



From L: PDG Agarwalla, Ganesh Vancheeswaran (the author of PRIP Banerjee's biography *Tirelessly Yours*), club president Mehta, past TRF trustee Gulam Vahanvaty, PRIP Banerjee, PRID Ashok Mahajan, Trustee Elect Venkatesh and DG Motwani.

against the visit, and clearly told by the RI staff at Evanston that he would have to go alone and nobody from Rotary would accompany him. "I said, ok, I'll go alone, but how will I meet him. I was then told that the American army stationed in Afghanistan would help me meet President Karzai. They sent Binota, my wife, back to my home in Bombay, saying we don't know what will happen in Afghanistan! Of course, she didn't know why exactly she had been sent back! Anyway, I managed to go via Pakistan to Afghanistan. And I tell you, it was pretty scary over there."

Banerjee recalled that he stayed in a guest house "which was far from a normal hotel. It was just a room, and they said keep the door and windows closed, and don't open them even if somebody knocks and don't go out. On the third day, they took me to the army headquarters, where a brigadier put me in a jeep and we drove through

You don't have the largest membership, but the support you give to The Rotary Foundation is the highest in the world, year after year.

**PRIP Kalyan Banerjee
on RC Bombay**

Kabul. All the shops were closed, and there were gunmen... army people... standing on top of every building with their guns drawn out. It was a war-torn city. We had to go through three gates with a security check at every point. Finally, we reached Karzai's room. He walked in, and said, welcome and thank you for coming over here. And that was it." Promises were made, but they haven't been kept, he added wryly.

On the younger generation of Rotarians, Banerjee said that the more senior Rotarians have to understand that the younger members will act a little differently, and should be given the space to do so. But younger Rotarians also need to understand that "after coming into the club, they cannot start something entirely different and new on their own. They need to continue to follow what the clubs have been doing and the traditions that have been set up. Please don't think that as a new club president, you have to start a new project of your own.

Because after you go, nobody will remember what you did. Do something that continues what your club has been doing, and will continue to do long after you have gone."

Club president Bimal Mehta welcomed the gathering. DG Manish Motwani participated in the event.

Pictures by Rasheeda Bhagat



From L: Disha secretary Akhil Mishra, event chairman P Gopalakrishnan and his wife Neelavathy, Sumathi and RI Director M Muruganandam, PRIDs C Basker and P T Prabhakar, RIDEs Gurjeet Singh Sekhon and Basu Dev Golyan, PDG Anandtha Jothi and TRF Trustee Elect A S Venkatesh.

Setting the course for **impactful leadership**

Jaishree

The beauty of Rotary stands in the transition of leadership. Even after 120 years, we are relevant,” said RI director M Muruganandam, inaugurating Disha, a three-day goal-setting seminar held in Coimbatore for incoming district leaders of Rotary zones 5 and 6.

Tracing his journey from a 16-year-old Rotaractor, he highlighted that Rotary’s strength lies in empowering individuals. “Taking responsibility is the only way to lift yourself... you are lifting your club, your district and your community,” he said.

Presenting a data-backed approach through an RAG (Red-Amber-Green)

analysis, where clubs with less than 25 members were marked in Red, 25–50 members in Amber, and above 50 members, in Green, he noted, “We are living in a myth... we think we are growing. But according to factual data, in India, 42 per cent Rotary clubs are in Red category; 35 per cent in Amber, and 33 per cent are in Green.”



He urged the district leaders to “work to move clubs from red to amber, and amber to green.” He also proposed a simple but scalable 1:2:3 formula — “Every Rotarian should add 1 Rotarian, 2 Rotaractors and 3 Interactors; and every Rotary club should aim to charter at least two Rotaract and three Interact clubs.” Noting that many clubs have not chartered even a single Rotaract or Interact club, he said, “If we want to see Rotary grow for the next 50-plus years, we must introduce youngsters into our organisation.”

Muruganandam urged the delegates to motivate Rotarians to contribute liberally to TRF. “Execute more projects, but ensure strong stewardship,” he said and suggested collaboration with government organisations and building strong relationships with corporates. He cautioned against unhealthy comparisons. “Don’t compare yourself with other districts... compare today’s district with yesterday’s and tomorrow’s.”

RI director KP Nagesh suggested the incoming leaders to consider bifurcation of districts for better management of the clubs. He urged them to increase women membership and weed out clubs with less than 15 members. “Such clubs are bad for Rotary’s public image. For a club to be vibrant and productive, it should have at least 40 members,” he said. RI has set the global membership target at 1.25 million by 2030 when Rotary celebrates 125 years and for that “each of our contribution is vital.”

TRF trustee-elect AS Venkatesh reframed leadership saying, “In Rotary, titles mean nothing, but they give you an opportunity to make a difference, to do something worthwhile.” Drawing from former US president John F Kennedy’s famous moon mission statement in 1961, he said: “JFK did not say we *hope*... he said we *will* land on the moon before the end of the decade.” He connected this clarity to Rotary’s greatest success. “Rotary did not say we will try to eradicate polio... we said we *will*. If you have clear goals and a timeline, everything else will fall into place.”

Recalling his visit as RI director to a club in Uganda, he said that the club, “with just about 20 members, took pride not in scale but in ownership.” After years of modest efforts like sponsoring a few students, they came together with a shared sense of responsibility to provide clean drinking water to 10 schools in their

community. “What made the difference was not resources but collective ownership: every member aligned on one goal, set an ambitious target, and committed to a clear timeline.”

Capturing the essence of focus, he said, “Set your eyes on one rabbit... otherwise you will spend 30 minutes chasing all and catch none.”

Describing Disha as “a preparation platform for leadership,” PRID C Basker emphasised that Rotary leadership is not about individuals; “it is about teams working together.” He added a crucial reminder: “Setting goals alone is not enough... what matters is how consistently we review and monitor them.”

Through the story of a Mumbai-based social entrepreneur Harakhchand Savla feeding 1,000 cancer patients daily, PRID P T Prabhakar challenged leaders: “If he could do so much with limited means, imagine what can we Rotarians do? Let’s set impossible goals and make them possible.”

RIDE Basu Dev Golyan stressed sustainability and retention. “We should not count how many projects we do; we should count how many lives we changed. Membership growth without retention is incomplete,” he said, and called for collective ambition. “Let us think bigger, work together, and increase our impact.”

RIDE Gurjeet Singh Sekhon outlined six dimensions of expansion that will decide Rotary’s future — membership, demographics, geography, partnerships, digital presence and leadership pipeline.

“Membership is not just a number; it is Rotary’s capacity to serve.” He warned against stagnation: “For decades, Rotary clubs have looked the same, but the world has changed. If Rotary does

not reflect modern society, we will become irrelevant.”

He urged the district leaders to charter Rotary clubs at unrepresented regions. “There are still thousands of cities and towns without Rotary clubs. Rotary must meet people wherever they are, and we must embrace new club models. Rotary was designed to adapt and grow. At times we tend to become prisoners of our traditions.”

Highlighting the need for visibility, he said, “In today’s world, visibility equals influence. If Rotary’s work is invisible, our impact will be limited. We have come through the ages where we said let our work speak for itself. Those times have changed. Every club must learn to tell powerful stories. Use social media effectively.”

On expanding Rotary’s leadership he said, “The most successful clubs are those that empower young lead-



From L: Disha chairman Gopalakrishnan, RI Directors K P Nagesh and Muruganandam.

ers, encourage innovation, allow new ideas to flourish, mentor future presidents and district leaders.” Rotary’s future, he said, “will not be decided by the members we have today, but by the people we invite tomorrow.”

Welcoming the delegates, Disha chairman PDG P Gopalakrishnan said, “Disha is to understand roles, analyse status, and set meaningful and ambitious goals. Great achievements always begin with great goals.” ■

Rotary  PEOPLE OF ACTION

Fluoride for strong teeth

Team Rotary News

The Rotary clubs of RI District 3011 are organising special fluoride application camps to help prevent dental caries in children. “Many people are unaware of the vital role fluoride plays in oral health. It strengthens teeth, prevents cavities, and even helps repair early tooth decay,” said DG Ravi Gugnani, highlighting how these awareness and application initiatives have become a focused and impactful effort to safeguard young smiles across the district.



A child being screened at a dental camp in Delhi.

At a recent camp conducted by the Rotary Clubs of Delhi Heights and Delhi Safdarjung at the Social Vision Special School, Najafgarh, 65 children with special needs benefitted from the programme. Topical fluoride was applied directly to the teeth to strengthen enamel and reduce the risk of cavities. The camp also included oral screening,

caregiver counselling, and demonstrations of proper brushing techniques.

“For children who are unable to brush effectively, fluoride acts as a protective shield, significantly lowering the likelihood of invasive dental procedures in the future,” said district dental hygiene and awareness chair and dental surgeon Dr Priya Oberoi. ■

Mobile ophthalmic clinic to benefit students in North Kerala

Team Rotary News

RC Payyanur, RID 3204, launched 'Vision on Wheels,' a mobile ophthalmic clinic supported by RC Metro Kuala Lumpur, RID 3300, through a global grant, to provide eyecare services to students and underserved communities in Kasaragod and Kannur districts in north Kerala.

The fully-equipped van, valued at ₹38 lakh, was handed over to the Payyanur Eye Foundation and the first screening camp was conducted for students at the Government Upper Primary School, Perumba.

The initiative is expected to cover 778 schools in Kasaragod and 1,608 schools in Kannur, reaching out to around 5.2 lakh

students. The mobile clinic, staffed by a team of ophthalmologists, optometrists and support personnel, is equipped with advanced diagnostic tools and a spectacles dispensary to provide prescription eyewear. In addition to school screenings, the van will also be used to conduct free eye camps for senior citizens in rural areas.

The project was executed under the leadership of the club's past president P Sajith, with club member CR Nambiar heading the implementation team. "The initiative marks a significant step in addressing preventable vision issues among schoolchildren and expanding access to eyecare

services in rural Kerala," said Nambiar.

DG Santhosh Sreedhar and Payyanur MLA TI Madhusudhanan handed over the van keys to Dr K Sukumaran, director of the Payyanur Eye Foundation in the presence of municipal officials, Rotary leaders and healthcare representatives.

Since its launch in August 2025, over 63 screening camps have been executed and it has benefitted around 15,000 students. Around 15 to 18 camps are organised each month, coordinated by a joint implementation committee comprising members of RC Payyanur and the Payyanur Eye Foundation. ■



Students undergo eye checkup in the Vision on Wheels mobile clinic stationed at a school.

Tête-à-tête with **Venky**

Rasheeda Bhagat

TRF may take time to move and make decisions but acts quickly in times of crises, emergencies or urgent needs, incoming TRF trustee A S Venkatesh said in a freewheeling chat with RID 3141 PDG Sandip Agarwalla at a meeting organised by RC Bombay.

Sandip Agarwalla: How is TRF adapting its funding priorities of global grant structure to address emerging world challenges such as climate change or post-pandemic recovery, that might not fit neatly into the current seven areas of focus?

A S Venkatesh: Adaptability is one of our Action Plan's focus areas; we are capable of adapting to emerging needs and requirements. However, let's not forget that The Rotary Foundation is

an elephant which takes time to move. It's not a cheetah that can turn around quickly. It takes time to move because we are a large establishment present in over 200 countries with our 12 lakh membership. So, it takes time to make some changes.

But we've never been found wanting in times of crisis, emergencies, or urgent needs. For example, post-Covid, we had Covid grants dispersed immediately. Almost 175 districts got Covid grants immediately. So, we were quick

to adapt. Similarly, we had created a fund for Ukraine on humanitarian and not political grounds. So, we have demonstrated our ability to adapt in the past, and will do so in the future as well.

Coming to your point on areas of focus, honestly, till date, I have not come across a project, other than building/construction, which they could not fit into an area of focus because these are so all-encompassing, including what you mentioned about climate change, which fits into Environment.

From L: PDG Sandip Agarwalla, PRIP Kalyan Banerjee, TRF Trustee Elect A S Venkatesh, DG Manish Motwani and RC Bombay president Bimal Mehta.



If you do come across any project which doesn't fit into an area of focus, except building/construction, I will be happy to take it to the trustees and create another area of focus if need be. Our aim is to ensure humanitarian needs are met; whatever it takes to do so, we will do.

SA: What is the Foundation doing to make the impact of grants more visible and accessible to new and younger members who may be more digitally focused, helping them connect local fundraising efforts directly to global results?

ASV: Fundraising efforts are not the starting point for any Rotarian's engagement in Rotary or TRF. Engagement should start with being a part of a project, not necessarily fundraising, which will come automatically the moment you are engaged and have an experience of what a project does to the community, the beneficiaries, and the difference it makes. So starting point should be engagement in some activity.

Let me relate a story from my IIM days, about Betty Crocker's cake mix. In the 1950s, when she launched this cake mix, it was a beautiful and tasty product, was placed on every supermarket, but the sales didn't take off. Then somebody had a bright idea. They removed the egg from that mix and the manual said: Crack an egg, add it to this mix and then bake it. Now the sales zoomed. The only difference was that without the egg, it became my cake. Before that it was Betty Crocker's cake. That was the difference.

This is applicable to Rotary. It will become my Foundation only if I get involved, not just by giving money, but through a hands-on experience of a project. So give the younger generation a chance to play a part in a project. Let them experience the joy of making a difference personally... through "my project". Fundraising will come later.



SA: How can TRF help Rotarians to articulate better its value to potential new members and the general public? And what are the trustees' favourite success stories other than Polio?

ASV: Polio is Rotary's success story, but not an individual success story. What bothers, affects me, or what I will want to tell my children or grandchildren is what affected or influenced me.

Before global grants there were matching grants; at a small event my club donated 50 school benches to students in Chennai. It was early days of my Rotary career; I had no clue of TRF or a matching grant. I just attended meetings and enjoyed the fellowship. As sergeant-at-arms for that programme, my job was to collect the banner once the programme ended.

After the event, everybody ran out for samosas and *chai*. But one girl

remained seated, and as she refused to leave, I had no choice but to sit next to her. I told her unless you come along, I'm not leaving this room. What she told me, in Tamil, hanged my perspective of Rotary.

She said, "In all these years, this is the first time I am sitting on a bench and not the ground. Let me experience this for some more time... you are God because you have given me this opportunity."

I felt ashamed that I was taking credit for something in which I had no role. I had not paid any money to TRF, but here a girl was calling me God. I found from my club president about TRF and PHF and wrote out a cheque for \$1,000 @ ₹32 or 33 a dollar. That night I felt I can take 1 per cent credit the girl had given. This experience changed me and made me a TRF advocate. My suggestion to youngsters is to play a part; don't be a spectator, be a player.

SA: Beyond PolioPlus, are there plans for another signature campaign?

ASV: Till we are completely out of polio, it is not fair to talk about other projects and dilute our efforts towards this cause, for which we have been struggling for over 35 years.

Once Polio is done... and here I can only guess... the way I see TRF's functioning in the last few years, there is more emphasis on moving towards regionalisation. What works in the US may not work in Japan, what works in Japan may not work in India. Rotary realises that one size doesn't fit all. I'd think in the future there may be a menu of options for different regions.

SA: Coming to your Rotary journey, what inspired you to join Rotary, and kept you engaged to become a governor, RI director and now trustee-elect?

ASV: To be honest, I did not join Rotary to do any service; that was the last thing on my mind. I joined Rotary to make friends outside my profession, outside my business. That is why I

joined Rotary. But the difference that I personally make to people's lives is what keeps me in Rotary. My IIT fees were less than ₹2,000 for the entire BTech course, which means thousands of taxpayers have paid to educate me; they didn't know who the beneficiary was. If I have the right to take advantage of several people's contribution, I have a duty to give back to the community, when I am in a position to return that favour. And TRF has given me an opportunity to donate without knowing who the beneficiaries (of my donation) are. I thought that was the best form of clearing my debt to the community.

SA: Can you tell us what the peace programme means to TRF and why it goes out of its way to support it?

ASV: Fantastic question! Peace does not mean absence of war. Many of us have not seen a war at all, but are we at peace? Is the community around us at peace? May or may not be.

Peace is when I know I can sleep without worrying about where my next meal is going to come from... that I will wake up tomorrow morning hale and

hearty, and not worry about what disease has affected me. These are the elements of peace, not just absence of war.

Rotary's idea of peace is a safe ecosystem for people around the globe and their existence without worries. Recently our latest peace centre opened in Pune at the Symbiosis University; I was there. The people who graduate from these peace universities will go around the globe providing solutions to conflict-affected areas so that these community can live in peace.

The reason why Rotary is spending so much money on peacebuilding and conflict resolution is that this is the mother of all projects. A few years ago, Vinita and I visited a school in Barbados which a Rotary club had opened. Six or seven children held on to my legs and told me the school also hosts a small dispensary and a canteen where the meal is provided by the Rotary club. These kids were coming here mainly for medicines and food, and because they had come so far, they were also attending the school. Their happiness came from the medicines and the food... they are at peace today. Not because there was no war in that region. Because food and healthcare were provided. These are reasons for Rotary devoting more and more resources to peace.

SA: How can Rotary bridge the gap between CSR and the grassroots service model of our clubs?

ASV: For any organisation to grow, not by small margins but exponential growth, partnerships are essential. You can't hope to double what you are doing all by yourself in a short span of time. In corporate world, they call it mergers and acquisitions, in Rotary we call it partnerships. You need to join hands with like-minded people or people who fill the void



in your plan of things. Here corporates come in; they complement our strengths. Together we can do wonders. They don't have the foot soldiers that we have. We don't have the kind of money that they have. So if we join hands and there is a beautiful marriage, both can meet our aspirations. Corporates want to make a difference. They don't have the foot soldiers, and we don't have the kind of resources.

As it was possible to raise more money through CSR in India, TRF made an amendment to make it India's specific activity, and adapt to emerging needs.

SA: We often talk about attracting younger members. Beyond flexibility, what fundamental change do we need to make to do this?

ASV: In a focus group (20–35 years) feedback, the youngsters (below 35) said they don't want speeches or fixed time commitment. Often, we mistake attendance for engagement, which has to change. Attendance does not mean engagement. If everyone attends all club meetings, the club subscription will have to be doubled. Because every Rotary club today runs on the cross subsidy provided by absentee members. The cross subsidy provided is a financial fact.

Coming back to the young; they don't want speeches, they get these on Google, Meta or any AI platform. We still talk about networking through physical meetings. But the next generation networks 24x7... even when they have a cup of coffee, by posting a picture on Insta. So these are not our selling points anymore and we need to change our mindset. To attract youngsters, give what they want, suit their requirements. They may be remote and not come to meetings but they will champion a project in their neighbourhood. Encourage them.

Over a period of time, they will come back. When they come back to



their neighbourhood, they will come back to where we are. But to initiate them, help them to actualise their dreams, not to be a part of our dreams. They will be part of our fraternity in years to come.

SA: How do you balance the business of running a multi-million dollar Foundation, which the TRF is, with the heart and volunteer spirit that defines Rotary?

ASV: TRF as an organisation has only funds. RI and its districts and clubs provide people. So actually there is no competition. TRF has the money, RI has the people; the more the availability of funds, more people will get engaged. TRF is there to help people. It is not an independent body but part of RI to assist in our endeavours to make a difference. We all know how it works. People who have, give. People who need, take. By 'people' I mean some regions in the world.

Going forward, I believe, TRF should get out of small projects. Let the districts and the clubs handle small projects on their own. We should be focusing on large impact projects through TRF grants. That will make a difference; sustainability comes with scale and that scale is possible if TRF starts focusing more on larger

projects such as Programs of Scale in Zambia for malaria, cervical cancer vaccination in Egypt, or for the farmers in Maharashtra and Gujarat. That kind of impact has to be leveraged and scale carried forward in the years to come.

SA: We have many aspiring leaders in the audience; what advice would you give Rotarians who feel they have the potential to lead at the zone or international level?

ASV: Advice is a very big word. I don't think I am there yet to be able to give advice to anyone. But I can share my experience; right from day one, I have never said no to any assignment given to me at any level. Be it at club, district, zone, or international level, it doesn't matter. I might have already held a higher position and was offered something lower, but I have never said no to anything. So to anybody aspiring to grow in Rotary, I'd say, don't say no. Accept anything that comes up. If you think you are extremely skilled and talented, make a difference in that role. Tell the world: 'Boss, I can do much better than what you think I can.' Show the world with your unique talent.

Pictures by Rasheeda Bhagat

Rotary leaders felicitate **RIDE Sekhon**

Jaishree

Warm applause and fond anecdotes marked the felicitation of Gurjeet Singh Sekhon in Amritsar, on his election as RI director for Zones 4 and 7 for 2027–29. Rotary leaders from across India described him as a thoughtful, analytical and humble leader who will represent India with distinction on the global Rotary stage. Sekhon served as governor of RID 3070 for 2014–15.

Congratulating him, PRIP Kalyan Banerjee said that serving on the RI Board “would expose you to some of the finest leaders from around the

world and provide you with perspectives that broaden leadership thinking. A country like ours will give you the best of times, and the most difficult times as well, during your two years. But your leadership should ensure that India is always on balance, and Rotary will depend on it.” He added, “If your spouse is by your side, it will enhance your ability and multiply your successes tremendously.”

Offering a personal glimpse into their journey, his wife Amandeep spoke warmly about her husband’s life and values. The son of a soil

scientist, Sekhon studied agriculture in Ludhiana before beginning his career in the corporate sector and later turning entrepreneur in Amritsar. His Rotary journey began in 1994 as a charter member of RC Amritsar Civil Lines. She said, “the opportunity to serve as an RI director will allow him to apply his leadership abilities for Rotary’s larger good.”

Recalling discussions on membership strategies and organisational data, PRID and TRF trustee-elect

Leadership is not
about managing a year
or a tenure. It is about
strengthening an institution.



From L: PRIDs Anirudha Roychowdhury and Mahesh Kotbagi, TRF Trustee Elect AS Venkatesh, RIDE Basu Dev Golyan, Amandeep and RIDE Gurjeet Singh Sekhon, TRF Trustee Bharat Pandya, DG Rohit Oberoi, PRIP Kalyan Banerjee and PRID Raju Subramanian.

AS Venkatesh said Sekhon's hallmark was "meticulous preparation and analytical thinking, and his willingness to listen, learn and unlearn — a trait that distinguishes strong leaders."

For PRID Raju Subramanian, Sekhon's defining traits are precision, discipline and passion for training leaders. He recalled his role in organising learning programmes for governors-elect, where "his attention to detail and relentless follow-up ensured excellence. Leadership for Gurjeet is not about personal importance but about collective success."

Drawing parallels with athletes who achieve extraordinary milestones, TRF trustee Bharat Pandya said Sekhon possessed the "three Cs" necessary for leadership — commitment, competence and courage. Pandya urged him to remain focused on strengthening Rotary clubs, emphasising that Rotary's real strength lies at the grassroots level.

Through a video message, PRID C Basker said Sekhon's journey



Sekhon with PRIP Banerjee, DG Oberoi and PDG Avinash Mohindru.

reflected a blend of compassion and competence. From strengthening membership and service initiatives to nurturing youth leadership, his work has consistently inspired Rotarians around him, he noted.

PRID Anirudha Roychowdhury expressed confidence that Sekhon would bring thoughtful leadership and ethical governance to Rotary at a time when it is redefining its role in a rapidly changing world. PRID Mahesh Kotbagi emphasised his dedication to membership development and unanimous selection for the role, calling it a recognition of years of committed service.

RI director M Muruganandam highlighted the need for membership growth, stronger collaboration with governments, and greater global visibility for India within Rotary. RI director KP Nagesh said Sekhon's passion for membership development would contribute to the long-term goal of expanding Rotary's presence in India.

RIDE Basu Dev Golyan (Zones 5 and 6) from Nepal was present at the event. Sekhon's batchmate governors wished him good luck. "Gurjeet's election as RI director

is not just a personal milestone, but a proud moment for the entire district," said DG Rohit Oberoi.

Responding to the felicitations, RIDE Gurjeet Sekhon expressed deep gratitude to PRID Raju Subramanian and trustee Bharat Pandya for encouraging him to take up the new assignment, and his mentor PDG Avinash Mohindru.

"Leadership is not about managing a year or a tenure. It is about strengthening an institution," he said, noting that while Rotary's leaders change every year, the organisation's systems and values must remain stable and enduring. He outlined eight structural shifts that he believes will determine whether Rotary grows intentionally or "drifts comfortably."

The first, he said, is moving from individual-dependent functioning to process-driven systems. While Rotary often celebrates dynamic leaders, institutions cannot rely on individual brilliance alone. "We must move from individual brilliance to institutional excellence, and the processes must outlast people," he said.

Next, he called for "professionalising learning and leadership



From L: RI Directors KP Nagesh, M Muruganandam and RIDE Sekhon.

training. Stronger training will ensure that Rotary develops capable leaders at both club and district levels.”

Another shift he highlighted was prioritising content over crowd. “Attendance alone does not create impact. Value does. We must re-look at Disha and re-examine our zone institutes.”

Sekhon also stressed the need to broaden participation in TRF-giving. Rather than focusing only on total contributions, Rotary must increase the percentage of members who give. “Every non-giving member is not an untapped donor;

he is an untapped believer,” he said, calling for a culture where giving reflects shared commitment.

On projects, he emphasised stronger stewardship and time-bound global grants, ensuring that initiatives remain sustainable long after funding ends. “Clubs and districts must remain in touch with the beneficiaries much after the global grants are over. Long-term sustainability must become a mantra for us.”

Rotary must also invest more seriously in leadership development and club viability, he cautioned, warning that without nurturing new

Members give their time, resources and trust. We must respect that.

leaders, “we will decline. As top leadership, we need to ask ourselves, are we preserving Rotary’s reputation or quietly diluting it?”

He further advocated structured mentorship across districts and clubs and highlighted member engagement and belonging as the core of Rotary’s sustainability. Retention, he said, is not merely numerical but emotional. “Members give their time, resources and trust. We must respect that. Membership satisfaction cannot be an annual exercise; it must be a continuous engagement. Then we will not need to chase the growth; it will happen organically,” he said. ■



The Sekhons with their family and friends. Their daughter Mannat is on the extreme right.

A Rotary-public connect at Navi Mumbai

Team Rotary News

Happy Streets, a celebration of fitness, community bonding and fellowship, was organised at the Jewel of Navi Mumbai, a park in Nerul, by RC Navi Mumbai Samaritans, RID 3142, in partnership with RCs Navi Mumbai Industrial Area and Navi Mumbai Palm Beach. The event brought together Rotarians, fitness buffs, artistes and people of all age groups for an inclusive gathering.

School students performed two skits on environment protection and the importance of *Panchabhuta*, the five elementary forces in the universe. This was followed by a Lavani dance performance.

NGOs Tisser Artisan Forum and Scrapji gave a presentation on solid waste management by explaining the need for recycling old clothes, toys and electronic waste, and adopting a sustainable lifestyle. Dr Ankita Sawant spoke on physiotherapy that focused on physical wellbeing and habits for a healthy life.

DG Harsh Makol appreciated the clubs' efforts in this initiative



DGN Srijit Poothen presents Vocational Excellence Award to Shakti Foundation chairperson Vimala Nandakumar. RC Navi Mumbai Samaritans president Abhijit Chaudhury is on the right.

that boosted Rotary's connect and bonding with the community. RC Navi Mumbai Samaritans president Abhijit Chaudhury said, "Happy Streets reflects Rotary's commitment towards promoting community wellbeing while strengthening fellowship among Rotarians and citizens alike." Mohan

Deshkar was the project chair. PDG Mohan Chandavarkar was also present.

Vocational excellence

Educator Vimala Nandakumar from Shakti Foundation, child educator Rajneesh Karu (Nanhe Kadam) and Dr Sucheta Kinjwadekar, gynaecologist, were presented with Rotary's Vocational Excellence Awards for their selfless contributions to society.

The club also felicitated promising national-level athletes — Trisha Bhonsle (lawn tennis), Sanvi Shinde (gymnastics) and Mayuresh Bhutki (badminton). Known as the 'Water hero of India,' Subhajt Mukherjee was honoured under the Jal Shakti Abhiyan. Abhijit Chattopadhyay, wildlife photographer and environmental activist, was also felicitated. ■

A Zumba dance session at the Happy Streets event.



Let us all own Rotary

V Muthukumaran

While there is much to celebrate in Rotary, “we also need to introspect on our stagnant membership of 1.2 million for over 25 years, in fact 50,000 less now, a cause for concern. An organisation that fails to grow will start to die, and the numbers suggest a rethink,” said TRF trustee-elect A S Venkatesh.

Speaking at the inaugural session of RID 3234’s district conference titled *Utsav 2026*, he said with 122 years of history, Rotary’s war against polio, and the good work done by clubs across the world are all reasons for celebration. “But we have to ask ourselves how many of us take pride in ‘my organisation’. Do most Rotarians get a hands-on feel about their membership and being engaged actively by their clubs? Ask what is there in Rotary for me, choose what you want to do, and make it your own organisation,” he said.

Venkatesh said a US survey on dental hygiene in 1916 found that only 16 per cent of people brushed their teeth daily. Following this, Colgate

and Pepsodent embarked on a marketing drive. By 1925, new users were buying Pepsodent more than other brands, which got Colgate worried. It found the competitor was using citric acid and mint oil, which had nothing to do with oral hygiene, but gave the users a feeling of being clean. Making consumers feel good is sometimes more important than doing good.”

Rotary can also learn a few things about growth in membership. India zones have 1.8 lakh Rotarians with a “huge potential for growth as we have 1.4 billion people.”

Addressing the discon, RIPR Siti Subaidah Mustaffa, a PDG from RID 3300, Malaysia, said, “in a world fractured by politics, ideologies and geography, RI President Francesco Arezzo’s annual theme, *Unite for Good*, is a mantra that creates hope with a mission to heal humanity and uplift communities.” It is not just projects or activities, “but the range of experiences that we create for humanity through care, by providing dignity, of being seen and recognised that will make a difference in the world,” she said. If you ask a Rotaractor or a young leader, ‘What Rotary means to you?’ the answer will be: it is the first place that we feel empowered to do good in the world.

RID’s targets met

Listing out the achievements of RID 3234, DG Vinod Saraogi said, “we will

meet all the targets set by RI director Muruganandam for our district, execute service projects worth ₹50 crore (₹20 crore work done) this year.” Half of the TRF-giving target of \$2.5 million had been met; 1,000 new members would be added; and 10 new Rotary clubs and 15 Rotaract clubs with 650 new Rotaractors will join RID 3234.

While 50 dialysis machines were installed (₹6 crore) at charitable and government hospitals, “50 more units will be set up by year-end. The district clubs had spent ₹2.5 crore in lake and water body restorations; 100 houses were built (₹6 crore) for tribal families, 50 more houses are under construction.” In a mega project led by RC Madras, 10,000 girls were given HPV vaccination (₹2.2 crore) against cervical cancer. Through a GG project, 100 Ugandan children had undergone heart surgeries at city hospitals; and 750 free heart surgeries for children were done at Apollo Hospitals under *Project Healing Tiny Hearts* (CSR fund: ₹3 crore) till now.

While 100 pink autos were given to women for livelihood support, 100 more would be added; 100 Happy Schools were already done (₹5 crore).

Lively sessions

India is poised to become the third largest economy in the next few years, said Krishnakumar Thirumalai, CEO,





DG Saraogi felicitates Vineet Saraiwala, founder-CEO, Atypical Advantage. Also seen is RC Global Nexus president Anjali Anand.



Chess prodigy A S Sharvaanica is conferred with Rotary's Young Achiever Award by DG Saraogi and RIPR Siti Subaidah.

Reliance Consumer Products. By 2050, more than 70 per cent of the population (over a billion) will be in the working age group and the per capita income will cross \$21,000 by then.

But there are issues of concern — a skewed income distribution as top 10 per cent control 65 per cent of the wealth; agriculture is still the largest employer; most of the jobs are still in unorganised sectors. “Education and health are two pillars of economic growth. But India spends only 6 per cent and 1.9 per cent of its GDP in both these critical sectors”. Thirumalai was given Rotary’s Corporate Icon Award.

In his talk on ‘A new world disorder,’ corporate advisor and former diplomat Ajay Bisaria said there are multiple shocks as “we are in a global

flux. India has to leverage geopolitics with multilateral engagement, secure its borders, ensure access to energy supplies, build tech capability, keep calm and negotiate with global powers to navigate the choppy waters,” he explained.

Major General (retd)

H Dharmarajan spoke on how the Indian army is mentoring local farmers and traders on the border districts of Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh. Over the years, the army has cultivated a good rapport with “local farmers and small entrepreneurs who are giving us regular supplies which are sent to the forward troops.” The MSME sector in Tamil Nadu can deliver a range of engineering goods for the army on the border through proper exploration and understanding our supply needs, he said.

In a speech on the evolution of Indian women, Jayanthasri Balakrishnan, a former English professor, recalled some anecdotes with her former students who are now guarding the nation’s borders. “Every woman should be a nurturing individual. In the course of evolution, one should transform from being a dreamer to the dream itself, always

looking ahead with a rolling benchmark of yourself,” she explained.

Recalling her travel with *Project Yadhumaanaval* (you are everything) of RID 3212, led by late PDG VR Muthu, she said they had completed 113 programmes across Tamil Nadu reaching 1.68 lakh school girls. “I draw energy and positivity from Rotarians,” she smiled.

Vineet Saraiwala, founder-CEO, Atypical Advantage, who is also visually challenged, said

his company hired over 500 people with disabilities (PWDs), and has embraced tech solutions to overcome physical limitations. “We have given livelihood and jobs to over 5,000 PWDs and 400 disabled artists have sold their art work valued at ₹4.5 crore through our exclusive platform,” he said.

India has got around 70 million PWDs, and in the last five years, his company had upskilled thousands of them and found gainful employment for them. Much of the daily challenges faced by PWDs can be overcome through AI technologies and interfaces, “so that they can be gainfully employed,” he said. Chess prodigy AS Sharvaanica, an under-10 FIDE world champion, was presented with Rotary’s Young Achiever Award.

Discon counsellor PDG Abirami Ramanathan was presented with Rotary’s Legacy of Giving Award. So far, he has given \$626,000 to TRF, thus joining the AKS Chair’s Circle. Past and future governors of RIDs 3234, 3233 and 3231 were felicitated. Around 1,800 Rotarians and 50 Rotaractors were present at the one-day discon. There were 42 product stalls from the sponsors.

Pictures by Muthukumaran

PRID AS Venkatesh and RID 3234 DG Vinod Saraogi present Rotary’s Legacy of Giving Award to PDG Abirami Ramanathan and Nallammai in the presence of PRID PT Prabhakar, RIPR Siti Subaidah Mustaffa, a past governor from Malaysia, her husband Kamarul Ariff, Discon mentor AVM Balasubramanian and PDG J Sridhar.

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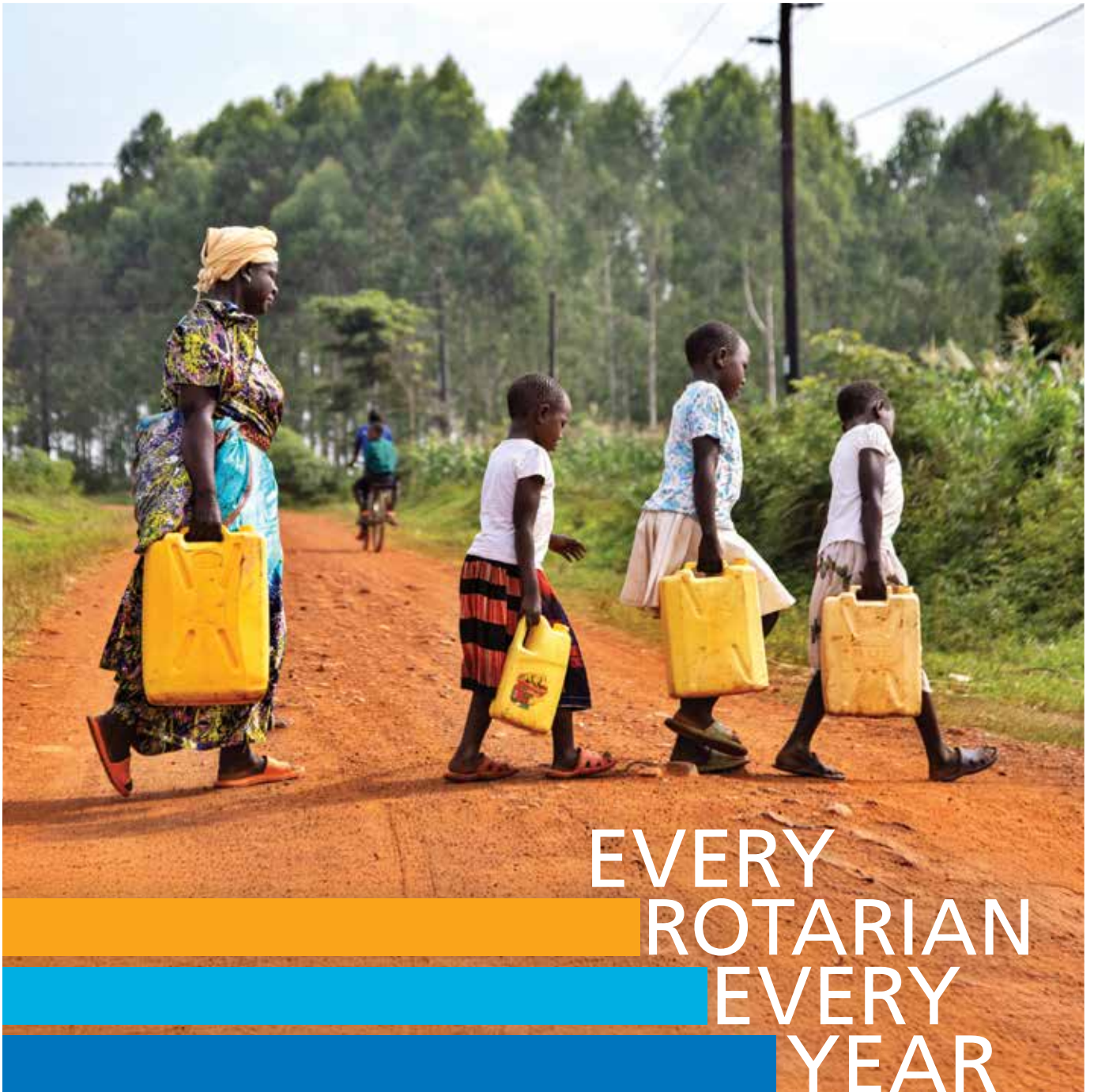
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16. We regularly verify our subscribers' list that clubs share with us with that of RI's data to detect missing subscribers.
17. If a member has not received the magazine for a month, inform us **immediately** so we can resolve the issue. Magazines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

Non-compliant clubs face termination by RI

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

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

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



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TRUE OR FALSE

ROTARY'S MOST SUCCESSFUL CLUBS SET GOALS — AND NOT JUST FOR THE UPCOMING YEAR.

TRUE.

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CLUB GOALS ARE ONLY THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CLUB LEADERS.

FALSE.

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ROTARACTORS CAN'T USE ROTARY CLUB CENTRAL.

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TRUE.

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RC Pune Sports City celebrates 30th birthday

Rasheeda Bhagat

Kicking off RC Pune Sports City's 30th birthday celebrations, just on the eve of the inauguration of Rotary's eighth Peace Center at the Symbiosis International University (SIU), RI President Francesco Arezzo said the completion of "30 years of a Rotary club is a wonderful moment to reflect what

was done in these 30 years, even though 30 for a Rotary club is not a great age. Yours is still a very young club!"

But this "young club" already had two district governors and one RI director, "so it's clearly a club that has grown very quickly and very well."

While congratulating them for the great work already done, he said, "we have to always look to the future.

What we have already done might be wonderful, but more important is what we will do in the future." He said it was a "wonderful coincidence" that the club's 30th anniversary came just a day before the setting up of Rotary's new Peace Center in Pune. "This means that in the future of this club there will be peace. And another coincidence is what PRID (Mahesh)



Kotbagi said that today our world is broken by a lot of wars. And peace at this moment is one of the great challenges of our world.”

Even though he had a short time... all of two weeks... to plan for his presidential year, Arezzo said he had zeroed in on peace as one of his main goals. Because the world around us was changing so rapidly, Rotary clubs would also have to change too, he said. “To guide this change, we need young people, we need the Rotaractors. Because, the changes in society are a mystery for people like us. We are too old to see, feel and understand where society is going. But they, the youth can feel the change. They see the change when it is just beginning. They smell the change of society, and know how to change our clubs. They know where we have to go to be relevant and an important part of our society.”

Along with peace, evolving and elevating Rotaract, and integrating it into Rotary were important features going ahead, he added. “I also believe that this cooperation between our Peace Center and Symbiosis University will bring a lot of wonderful results to Rotary.”

He urged the club members to do more work on peace and to integrate Rotaract into Rotary in order to remain relevant to their community.

Both Arezzo and TRF trustee chair Holger Knaack were present at the event during which a Rotary Peace Pole was put up at one of SIU’s campuses in Pune city.

Knaack congratulated the club for its 30 years of service and said he was delighted to note how it was

supporting so many programmes for the youth as well as Rotaract. Addressing the large number of Rotaractors in the hall, he said even though Rotary had adopted ‘elevate Rotaract’ 10 years ago, “there is a lot more we need to do to bring Rotaract to the level we all want to see it. We need you and you need us; we need you Rotaractors, because we want to know how the future Rotarians and donors to the TRF would look like, and why they donate to the Foundation.”

He told RC Pune Sports City members that he was delighted to know that “you are celebrating diversity, equity and inclusion in your club. We all know how important this is to show the world where Rotary is headed. And we all know that clubs and societies, who are open, will be the most successful societies in the future.”

Coming to giving to TRF, he said while both the small and the big donors were very important to the organisation, money is just one part. Projects is the other part, and along with big donors, we are also looking at bigger projects because we’ve learnt that bigger projects are more successful, and make more impact and can be measured better. That’s important. TRF really puts emphasis on measurement because we want to know how our projects work and if they work.”

Knaack added that it didn’t make any sense to put money into something that didn’t work. He was aware that sometimes the application process for GGs were “complicated, but there is a good reason for that. We want to ensure that we are doing the best projects ever, and measure their impact after 5 and even 10 years, because we don’t want to waste Rotarians’ money.”

It was a miracle that “we found Symbiosis as a partner for this first Peace Center in South Asia, because our values fit so well. And also because

RI President Francesco Arrezzo, Anna Maria, Trustee Chair Holger Knaack and Susanne, PRID Mahesh Kotbagi and RID 3131 DG Santosh Marathe with members of RC Pune Sports City.



we want to integrate our Peace Fellows more and more into Rotary. We need your (Rotarians in Pune) commitment to make sure that our Peace Fellows are integrated into Rotary, because there are so many opportunities to do so.”

He urged the assembled Rotary family to not only celebrate the new Peace Pole which had been put up at that campus, but also remember the pledges they had all put on the white board beside it. “A Peace Pole is a wonderful thing, but a Peace Pole just alone is nothing. A Peace Pole should always be a reminder to us to do even more for peace.”

The trustee chair urged all Rotarians to imbibe the spirit of past RI President Sakuji Tanaka’s theme *Peace through Service* in 2012. “Because every single service project we do is a commitment to peace. I love these colourful cranes, which have been put up in the hall as they symbolised peace in the Japanese PRIP’s theme.”

But he cautioned them that just “talking about peace is not enough. We have to work for peace, and the service projects, supported by TRF, are definitely a pathway to peace.”

TRF trustee Bharat Pandya said that it was a privilege and pleasure for Indian Rotarians that a Rotary Peace Center was being established in India, and that too in a prestigious institution like the Symbiosis International University. Out of 17 institutions in 6 countries invited to submit expressions of interest by TRF in Feb 2024, there were 2 finalists; a university in South Korea and this one in Pune. After a lot of evaluation and consideration, SIU was chosen to host this Peace Center.

He congratulated Rotarians of RI districts 3131 and 3141 which would host and co-host this centre. As the



(Above) Lighting peace torches: (From L) PRID A S Venkatesh, Susanne and Trustee Chair Holger Knaack, Anna and President Arezzo.



(Top left) RI President Francesco Arezzo, Trustee Chair Holger Knaack and Symbiosis Founder S B Mujumdar unveil a Peace Pole. PRID Mahesh Kotbagi is on extreme left. **(Above)** Arezzo and Anna Maria write on the Peace Board. Knaack and Kotbagi are also seen. **(Below: from L)** Past Trustee Gulam Vahanvaty, and PRIDs Raju Subramanian, Venkatesh and Anirudha Roychowdhury.



institution was in Pune, RID 3131, “it will be the primary responsibility of the district’s Rotarians to make the Peace scholars who come from across Asia feel both welcome, wanted and at home, with the spirit of cooperation, friendliness and tolerance.”

Referring to Symbiosis founder Dr Mujumdar’s comment that earlier he had found foreign students in the city facing conflict, intolerance and so many other problems, he said this proved that “the real way to peace is to have a spirit of live and let live.”

He complimented members of RC Pune Sports City for completing 30 years of service, and DG Santosh Marathe for the “tremendous work your district has done in the last seven months.”

PRID Mahesh Kotbagi, who is a member of RC Pune Sports City, said that we all live in extremely troubled times and “today, I see so much instability, polarisation. Whether it’s Ukraine and Russia, Sudan, Myanmar, Haiti, or Venezuela, all of it makes one feel very sad.”

The ubiquitous image of a little Syrian boy drowned in the sea while trying to escape with his family from his country, had stirred the conscience of world some years ago. “These are not geopolitical problems. They are failures of trust, harmony and opportunity.”

As his club celebrated 30 years of its existence, “we honour the legacy that we have always had a dialogue on all kinds of issues.”

Founder of Symbiosis S B Mujumdar said “we at SIU are inspired by the values Rotary stands for, and grateful to Rotary in Pune which always came to Symbiosis’s rescue when we were facing teething problems. We are grateful to Rotarians in the world that they thought it fit that SIU gets their new Peace Center.” He was confident this Peace Center would turn out scholars who would work effectively on conflict resolution.

Giving an overview of RI District 3131, its DG Santosh Marathe said this was one of the topmost performing districts, “whether it is in the growth of Rotaract and Interact membership or service projects. Right now, our clubs are doing 3,000 different service projects, and the number of global grants we do every year keeps going up. It’s not so much about the number or the value of the grants; our endeavour is to see that 100 per cent of our clubs get involved in the GGs... whether in finding funding or implementing partners or playing a role in the execution of the projects. We are also working on peace.”

Addressing the meet, DRR Dwijesh Nashikkar said Rotaractors of the district had been “performing consistently in Zone 7. We have 111 Rotaract clubs and over 2,300 Rotaractors.” This year, their primary focus was on professional development; they were also doing a big CPR training which could save many lives. Their *Drishiti* project was portrayed in *Rotaract News*, a matter of pride for them, and they would be signing an MoU to become a community partner of Amazon.



From L: Anna and President Arezzo, Trustee Chair Knaack, Trustee Bharat Pandya, Susanne, Trustee Elect Venkatesh and RID 3234 DG Vinod Saraogi.

Dr Rajiv Yeravdekar, dean and faculty of Health and Biomedical Sciences, SIU, thanked Rotary and PRID Kotbagi for always supporting the health services offered by SIU, particularly to poor patients, specially its dialysis centre. The 900-bed SIU

Hospital and Research Centre provided top quality clinical services free of cost to the neighbouring villages.

Dr Vidya Yeravdekar, Pro Chancellor of SIU, welcomed the university partnership with Rotary. Club president Sushrut Sardesai said for the club members,

the completion of 30 years were more moments of “reflection, gratitude and pride, not just a celebration.”

Pictures by Rasheeda Bhagat

Designed by N Krishnamurthy



A computer lab at Mumbai school

Team Rotary News

A computer lab, with 27 laptops and accessories, was inaugurated by DG Harsh Makol at the Matoshri Rakhmabai Gaikwad Vidyalaya, Kalyan. The facility, set up by RC Ulhasnagar, RID 3142, under *Project Saksham*, will benefit over 800 students.



RID 3142 DG Harsh Makol (2nd from R) and PDG Chandrashekhar Kolvekar (L) at the new computer lab.

In another initiative, the club organised a Rotary Youth Programme of Enrichment (RYPEN) programme at the school with sessions on career guidance, LPG safety awareness and wellness.

It also included topics such as digital empowerment and value education,

thus reflecting Rotary’s commitment to shape responsible citizens.

Project chairman Gul Adwani was supported by club president Raju Uttamani and secretary Harish Shahadpuri. PDG Chandrashekhar Kolvekar was also present. ■

Reusable menstrual kits for 60,000 girls

Kiran Zehra

The Rotary Club of Hyderabad East, RID 3150, in partnership with the State Bank of India and the Unipads Foundation, has launched *Project Shakti* aimed at promoting menstrual hygiene and supporting the education of girl students across Telangana.

The project, with an outlay of ₹2.5 crore, distributed reusable sanitary napkin kits to around 60,000 girls in 2,000 schools and colleges across the state. The first phase of the project was inaugurated at Veeranari Chakali Iamma Women’s University, where 7,000 students received the sanitary pad kits. Hyderabad district collector Hari Chandana Dasari, DG Raam Prasad and University vice-chancellor Surya Dhanunjay were present at the distribution event.

Speaking at the event, club president Govind Putta said the

MHM initiative went beyond distribution and focused on long-term impact. “*Project Shakti* is about dignity, education and sustainability. By providing reusable sanitary pads, along with proper training, we are ensuring that young girls do not miss school due to lack of access to menstrual hygiene products. This is a step forward in ensuring that they continue their education with confidence,” he said.

Each kit is designed to last 12–16 months with proper care, offering a cost-effective and environment-friendly alternative to disposable sanitary products. Along with distribution, the programme includes awareness sessions and practical training on usage, washing, drying and storage of the pads.

The club is coordinating with government bodies, schools and local

NGOs for implementation, while SBI is supporting the initiative through its CSR programme. The Unipads Foundation is providing the products and training material.

Rekha, a Class 9 student and beneficiary of *Project Shakti*, from a government school, who received the kit during the launch, said, “Sometimes we miss school during our periods because we don’t have proper facilities or products. The reusable pads will really help us, and the training showed us how to use them safely. I feel more confident now.”

The project also aims to reduce menstrual-related absenteeism and reduce disposable sanitary waste. Progress will be monitored through distribution data, user feedback, and periodic surveys to assess its impact on students’ attendance and well-being. ■

DG S V Raam Prasad (second from L), along with members of RC Hyderabad East and its president Govind Putta (third from R) at a sanitary pad kit distribution event.



RID 3212 uses a sports event to increase women's engagement in Rotary

Rasheeda Bhagat

In order to increase women's involvement in Rotary, RI District 3212's leadership used an innovative approach — engage and enthuse more women by participation in a throwball tournament designed exclusively for women Rotarians, and the spouses and daughters of Rotarians.

The unique sporting initiative, titled 'Sheroes Throwball Tournament,' has created a powerful ripple effect across

the district — socially, culturally and organisationally. In order to put "RI's vision of DEI, our DG Dhinesh Babu envisioned a Rotary year where women's participation would not only increase in Rotary but they would also become meaningful contributors to our activities such as service projects. To make a symbolic gesture of inclusion and recognition of the importance of women in all Rotary activities, at the throwball games, the official attire of

the DG and assistant governors was designed in pink, sending a clear message that women would be at the forefront of the district's engagement efforts," said M Balamurugan, Rotary News coordinator for RID 3212.

The throwball tournament for women was organised by Malarvizhi, a member of RC Tuticorin Trailblazers. But to get the women from within the larger Rotary family in the district to embrace this event wholeheartedly



Winners from RC Tuticorin Trailblazers with the trophy.



The enthusiasm was palpable; some teams even engaged professional coaches for training.

successful project. Balamurugan said the enthusiasm displayed in the first tournament was remarkable. “Participants followed rules diligently, competed with energy, and embraced sportsmanship. More importantly, the spirit of friendship far outweighed the focus on winning.”

The results were astounding; women who had lived in the same town for years — yet had never interacted — formed meaningful connections through the tournament. The playing field became a platform for bonding.

Encouraged by the positive response, the core team expanded the event and took it to seven revenue districts including Virudhunagar, Ramanathapuram, Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi, getting participation from 200 women in the age group 12–60 from 27 Rotary clubs. “The enthusiasm was palpable; some teams even engaged professional coaches for training. Custom-designed team jerseys added a vibrant, competitive atmosphere reminiscent of national-level sporting events,” he said.

A welcome feature of this tournament was that it soon transformed into a sort of celebration with family



was easier said than done. She recalls that when the first tournament was announced in August 2025 for clubs in Kanyakumari district, mobilising women to participate was a challenge. Club leaders were personally contacted and urged to generate an interest and build confidence among the female fam-

ily members of Rotarians to participate. To ensure accessibility, no entry fee was charged, matches were held only on weekends to accommodate various responsibilities that women shoulder.

The DG’s wife, Ramyaappriyaa, was personally involved from the beginning helping to make this a

members turning up to support the players. Husbands, fathers and children cheered from the sidelines, creating a festive environment.

Balamurugan added that at the grand finale of the tournament RC East Coast Ramnad faced RC Tuticorin Trailblazers, in which the latter walked away with the trophy.

But the impact of this sporting event went beyond the stadium; not only did the women feel a sense of belonging to Rotary, many of them also felt that thanks to this event, they had returned to a sport they had once loved.

The trickle-down effect, thanks to connections made and friendships forged, was that members of RC Sivakasi Pyrocity collectively sponsored a water purification unit for a local school, “demonstrating how fellowship can translate into service. In several clubs, women participants went on to formally join Rotary as members,” said DG Dhinesh Babu.



DG J Dhinesh Babu and his wife Ramyappriyaa interacting with young players.

Expressing happiness that his primary objective to “strengthen friendship among women within the Rotary family, something that I strongly believe in, was achieved,” he hoped that future district leaders will continue with this initiative and build upon its success, because “we can strengthen and expand Rotary through innovative leadership

and fresh ideas. This tournament was proof of how sports can serve as a powerful tool for membership growth, engagement and community impact.”

He hoped that this would be the beginning of a movement — celebrating women’s strength, fostering unity, and reinforcing Rotary’s spirit of fellowship and service. ■

Obit

A life of generosity and service

Team Rotary News

VR Muthu, past governor of RI District 3212, passed away on March 4, 2026, leaving behind a legacy marked by generosity, leadership and an enduring commitment to TRF. A member of RC Virudhunagar since 1981, he became the first AKS member from his district in 2021. As End Polio Now Coordinator for Zone 5 (2025–28), he continued to champion Rotary’s global mission with dedication. A member of the Paul Harris 711 Club, he also contributed to preserving

Rotary’s historic roots. To many, he was not just a leader, but also a friend and mentor. Affectionately known as ‘Muthu Annachi,’ he was widely loved for his warmth and humility. During his tenure as DG in 2022–23, his district contributed a remarkable \$800,000 to TRF. The 10 district projects he promoted were largely centred on uplifting girls and youth, leaving a meaningful and measurable impact.

Through initiatives such as *Project Prem Kumar*, *Yadhumaanaaval* and *Project Punch*, Muthu empowered hundreds of rural girls with confidence, communication skills and the ability



PDG VR Muthu

to make informed life choices. His RYLA programmes further inspired young people to explore entrepreneurship.

As managing director of V V V & Sons Edible Oils, he made the Idhayam brand synonymous with healthy cooking in households across India and among the global Indian community.

At *Rotary News*, we experienced his warmth and generosity firsthand. He was a passionate supporter of the magazine — unstinting in his praise for well-written stories and advertised his products in the magazine on a regular basis. ■

The gift of mobility

Team Rotary News

For many who arrive at the Jaipur Mega Limb Camp in Bengaluru, “the experience begins in uncertainty. The journey is often marked by years of physical limitation, economic hardship and quiet resignation. By the time they leave, some are walking again,” says Meenakshi Sarath, president of Rotary Bangalore Peenya, RID 3192, which has been organising the initiative for nearly three decades.

Now in its 28th year, the annual camp has become a consistent intervention for those who might otherwise lack access to assistive care. Beneficiaries, largely from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, seek help for limb loss caused by accidents, congenital conditions, and diabetes-related complications. This year, the camp cost ₹1 crore, funded through multiple donations and individual contributions, and benefitted over 2,400 people.

A child standing unassisted for the first time, or a daily wage worker taking steps toward earning again, these moments stay with you.

Meenakshi Sarath
president, RC Bangalore Peenya



A young boy tries to write with his LN4 arm fitted at the mega limb camp of RC Bangalore Peenya.

At the camp, prosthetic technicians from Jaipur work with physiotherapists and Rotary volunteers to provide artificial limbs, calipers, crutches and LN4 prosthetic hands, free of cost. “While the work is clinical, the outcomes are often deeply personal. A child standing unassisted for the first time, or a daily wage worker taking steps toward earning again, these moments stay with you. They bring us a sense of fulfilment that is hard to describe,” she says.

Over the years, the camp has evolved into a sustained collaboration between medical professionals, volunteers, donors and partner

organisations. Project chair Gautam Chand Nahar describes it as “a deeply human experience, where the true impact lies in moments of regained mobility and dignity.”

Vasanth Kumar G, who is leading the project, says, “For beneficiaries, the change is immediate. I remember a beneficiary who had lost his limb to diabetes saying, ‘I thought my life had ended. Today, it feels like it has restarted.’ In a healthcare system where access to prosthetic support remains limited, the camp offers something simple but powerful: the ability to walk again and regain independence.” ■

A Big Bang boost to science

V Muthukumaran

Is science a reliable guide for mankind to explore, set foot on other planets, thus expanding the human habitat across galaxies? Do the endless inventions, discoveries and innovations make the Earth a better place for us all? For all these existential questions, and more, around 600 students (Class 6–12) grouped into 150 teams from 130 schools across India gave stunning answers through project models, experiments, design charts and tech prototypes at the *Big Bang 3.0*.

This third edition of science exhibition, a flagship programme of RC Coimbatore West, RID 3206, attracted 712 project submissions from school teams, each having four students and a mentor, across 22 states. “In the first-tier scrutiny, a 20-member jury from India, Sri Lanka, South Korea and the US shortlisted 157 teams for the *Big Bang 3.0*, held for two days in January at the National Model Schools in Coimbatore.

During the exhibition, “a 10-member expert jury drawn from industry, academia, government and research bodies visited each stall and interacted with the students to understand their project concepts and innovative ideas,” said R Navaneethakrishnan, convener, *Project Big Bang*.

In the last three years, 6,000 students from 1,200 schools have made

online presentations of their scientific projects, “among them 450 teams from 350 schools were chosen for the Big Bang exhibition,” he said. Adds club president CV Devadas, “we started in a humble manner in 2024 when it was decided at our club meeting by the then president Durai Narayanasamy to organise a school programme that kindles scientific temper and innovative



Left: Scientific projects being showcased by students.

thinking among students. This collective decision led to the idea of the Big Bang science expo for schools across the country.” The first edition had 120 online project submissions from schools in Tamil Nadu, and finally 80 teams displayed their scientific concepts at the Coimbatore school.

However, in the second edition (2025), “Big Bang grew across South India with 120 project teams, and also one from Maharashtra, selected from over 300 online submissions. The first two Big Bangs were one-day events; and later we stretched it to two-day exhibitions thanks to the good response,” said the club president.



Above: From L: RC Coimbatore West president CV Devadas, Wealth-I CEO (UAE) Vignesh Vijayakumar, Major General (retd) Rajiv Krishnan, past AG CK Sashi Kumar, past president Durai Narayanasamy and Asha Devadas.

It was PDG AV Pathy who coined the event name ‘Big Bang’ with the tagline: The great Rotary innovation challenge, that caught the imagination of students.

The contesting teams are required to have innovative concepts offering solutions that meet the needs of communities, and how their products (or services) will contribute towards UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals,” said Navaneethakrishnan, also a director of iExplore Foundation, the knowledge partner of *Big Bang*. “Our exhibition has created an impact on government schools across Tamil Nadu as some of them were selected under the Best 20 Performing Teams category which has cash prize of ₹2,000 and a trophy each,” said D Gowtham, project secretary.

Trip to Indonesia

The Army Public School, Delhi, emerged winners and their team will travel to Indonesia for taking part in the IEEE Junior Einstein Competition in August 2026. “Their flight, accommodation and other logistics will be sponsored by our club with a travel grant of ₹5 lakh. In addition, they will get a cash prize of ₹40,000,” said Navaneethakrishnan.

Last year, the winning team was sent to Malaysia with funding support of ₹3.5 lakh to compete in this global event for school students, and they won the first prize.

Sharing her experience, Richa Pathania, a team mentor from the Army Public School, Jammu, said, “It was really inspiring to see many young minds thinking creatively and working hard to solve real-world problems. The mentoring sessions with the judges helped the students to further develop their innovative ideas and presentation skills.”

Elated with her Big Bang experience, T Divyadharshana (Class 10), from Devangar Girls HS School, Aruppukottai (TN), said, “I had a great time presenting our team’s project, and interacting with students from other states. We learnt many new ideas by sharing notes with the teams from North India.”

As a parent, Anushka, mother of Devesh Gupta from Balvantray Mehta Vidya Bhawan, Delhi, said, “I didn’t



RID 3206 DG Chella Raghavendran and PDG A V Pathy at a display stall.

realise the knowledge and creativity of my son, till he presented his ideas with confidence. That made me really proud.” With a pan-India impact of its science fair, “our club is expecting over 1,000 project submissions for the next year’s edition which may attract a large number of students from North

India. In the last edition, 40 per cent of project teams were from Tamil Nadu, and the rest came from other parts of India, some even as far as Kashmir,” said Devadas. Around 5,000 educators, students, domain experts and parents visited the two-day project exhibition. ■

Pink Auto empowers women

Team Rotary News

As a single mother at very young age, Savita Chindarkar had to struggle hard to take care of her two small children, and also look after her parents. But she did not lose hope... and RC Deonar, RID 3141, came to her rescue with its *Pink Angels* programme.

She underwent intense training in autorickshaw driving, was tutored on road safety and after completing the programme, she got her licence to drive her pink auto. Already 60 women have hit the roads with their pink autos,

“while 200 are being trained by instructors. The programme involves a four-day classroom session, followed by 20-day on road driving session,” said club president Alka Murlu. Turning adversity into an opportunity, “Savita now stands tall with confidence that comes from self-assurance, financial independence and dignity,” said Alka. At the heart of her transformation is Rotary’s unwavering support.

Women who once hesitated to step forward, begin to lead, inspire others and become role models within their



DG Manish Motwani in an autorickshaw driven by a beneficiary.

communities, thanks to the club’s Pink Auto project. Rotary is not merely facilitating livelihoods; “it is leading the way for real empowerment through the Pink Auto initiative that demonstrates how thoughtful intervention and sustained support can create lasting change,” said Alka. ■

Mobile dental clinic in Ghaziabad

RC Ghaziabad Smart City, RID 3012, handed over a dental care van worth ₹55 lakh to ITS Dental College, Murad Nagar, under a CSR initiative supported by Ferolite Jointings. The van will provide free dental treatment to nearly 2,500 underprivileged patients every month across Ghaziabad, parts of Delhi and nearby rural areas.



Members of the club, along with the hospital staff, in front of the dental van.

Hepatitis B vaccination drive

RC Thane, RID 3142, completed the third and final phase of a Hepatitis B vaccination drive for paramedical staff at Shivaji Hospital, Kalwa. The project was carried out jointly with RCs Thane Creekside and Thane Mid Town. A total of 300 beneficiaries — 100 from each participating club — received vaccinations. The project cost was around ₹24,000 per club.



A nurse receiving the Hepatitis B vaccination.

Para table tennis tournament in Indore

RC Indore Royal, RID 3040, organised a para table tennis tournament at Acropolis Institute, with around 50 differently-abled players participating. Eight players qualified for a national ranking tournament, while the event promoted inclusion, confidence and recognition for para-athletes.



Winners with the club members.

A waste management drive

The Interact Club of Guru Nanak Public School, Sambalpur, in association with RC Sambalpur, RID 3261, and the Municipal Corporation, conducted a waste management drive under Swachh Survekshan. Students collected plastic waste and filled bottles for safe disposal, promoting environmental awareness and preventing harm to animals.



Interactors with the plastic bottles they collected.

Rotary houses for 100 Irula families

V Muthukumaran

In a mammoth transformative project, 76 Irula tribal families are being given concrete houses at the Eureka Nagar in Irumbedu village, 40km from Chennai at Chengalpattu district, in a phased manner. RC Madras, RID 3234, and AID India are building well-planned, neatly spaced out 360 sqft dwelling units consisting of two rooms, a kitchen and bathroom, along with a front yard with a tiled bench (*thinna*) for social gathering.

Speaking at the handover ceremony for 22 houses under phase-2 of *Project Homes for the Homeless* at the Irula village, PRID Anirudha Roychowdhury said, “I was amazed to see the meticulous thought

process and the nitty-gritty planning that has gone into providing houses for tribal families. A township is under development with the involvement of Rotarians from RC Madras and their partners.” While it was a dream come true for the tribal families, “there are also emotional aspects involved in building houses for them.” Noting that CSR-funded Rotary projects are seeing an exponential growth in India zones, he said, from the next Rotary year, a new zone (Russia region) is being added to India region. He was confident that in the next three years, there will be comprehensive growth in this village.

Roychowdhury urged the RCM team to set up a medical centre, along with an ambulance, at





Above: From L: RC Madras secretary Prasanna Rajagopalan, RID 3234 DG Vinod Saraogi, PRID Anirudha Roychowdhury, club president Nikhil Raj and project chair N Prakash at Irumbedu village.

the village. Rotary is empowering the Irula families as “their children are the first-generation school goers, and I am sure they will make the best use of the vocational centre being set up here. It touches our hearts to see that RCM donors, including green Rotarians, are sponsoring individual houses,” said DG Vinod Saraogi.

Recalling the genesis of an Irula township as RCM Rotary Village over the past five years, project chair N Prakash said in the first phase 31 houses were completed and handed over in Feb 2025. This was supported by CSR funding of ₹1.3 crore from Access Healthcare, apart from RCM donors. “In the second phase, 22 houses are being handed over to the beneficiary families, and another five houses are under construction.”

Each home has a small plot for a kitchen garden in the front and the families are being helped by members of the Eureka Tree and Eco-Club on choosing the right tree species. The Eco-Club is planting over 690 diverse trees along the mud roads dividing the houses.



Data-driven, tracking impact

In an AV presentation, AID India founder-CEO Balaji Sampath, who monitors the daily progress of this housing project, recalled that 76 homeless Irula families living across seven villages in Chengalpattu district were identified as prospective beneficiaries in a 2021 study.

But they didn't have Aadhaar, voter ID and ration cards, nor community certificates. "We helped them to get these ID cards, and then applied for *pattas* (title deed) for land allocation at the tahsildar office. After we got the *pattas* in 2023, a government surveyor team visited the four-acre barren land in Irumbedu, and marked it out for each beneficiary. We built 62 huts in October 2023, and shifted the families to their new dwelling units, followed it by installing a dozen solar streetlights, and applied for power supply from the Electricity Board."

AID India dug a borewell and installed six water tanks (5,000 litre, ground level) in Nov 2023. "Heavy



Club president Raj, PRID Roychowdhury and DG Saraogi interact with an Irula shop owner.

Below: Irula children launch Eureka Tree and Eco-Club at the handover event for completed houses in Irumbedu village.



rains in Dec 2023 created hardships for the families, and hence, we used an earthmover to dig open canals for draining the flood water,” explained Sampath. “As men could not go to work due to floods, we provided rations for six months to all the families.” At this delicate stage, past president Chella Krishna (2024–25) visited the site in Feb 2024, and decided to pitch in Rotary as a partner in the housing project.

Before Rotary could formally join the township development in July 2024, Sampath had built eight houses (each ₹4 lakh) with the help of his IIT Madras alumni friends. “After RCM joined as a partner, we speeded up the work, and got approval from the district collector for phase-1 — 31 houses — which was completed last year.” So far, 61 houses have been completed in two phases, and five are under construction. Vara Future LLP has chipped in as a CSR partner with a contribution of ₹1.2 crore for the second phase.

RCM has set a target to complete 39 houses under phase-3, thus reaching 100 dwelling units, by its centenary year 2029. The club plans to build 500 houses at various sites



PRID Roychowdhury and club president Raj distribute school bags to Irula children. Club’s community services director Suresh Amirapu is seen behind. AID India coordinator D Vimala is on the left.

We are ensuring a better tomorrow for the tribal families with healthcare, and education of their children as the RCM Rotary Village offers a stable place for Irulas.

Nikhil Raj
 president, RC Madras

in Gummidipoondi taluk, Tiruvallur and Chengalpattu districts, all near Chennai, under *Project Homes for the Homeless*, by 2029. At present, it has built 160 houses across revenue districts near Chennai. “All the project work is being data driven, and the impact is being studied by AID India volunteers and Rotary members before proceeding further,” said Prakash.

Together with Rotary, “we are not just building *pucca* houses, but also providing livelihood, education and healthcare for tribal families. We have applied for piped water supply at the district collectorate. We will be adding two more borewells and eight new tanks to meet the needs of the new households,” said Sampath. The panchayat office has promised black-topped roads (₹40 lakh) soon. A primary school and a community centre

which would offer vocational training are being run by AID India with the support of RCM, and an artificial pond (20x20 feet) is being dug up. “All the 60 Irula children are going to school, and the women will also be trained in vocational skills in due course,” said D Vimala, coordinator, AID India.

Club president Nikhil Raj said, “we are ensuring a better tomorrow for the tribal families whose lives are now secured with healthcare and education for their children. Rotary Village offers dignity to the Irulas through a stable place to lead a life of confidence and hope.”

More Irula families have been identified, and all the 24 are awaiting *pattas* from the district collector for land allocation.

Pictures by Muthukumaran

Making a difference

Baby ventilators for Pune hospital

Two non-invasive ventilator machines worth ₹10 lakh, got through CSR funding, were donated by RC Pune Sarasbaug, RID 3131, to the Deenanath Mangeshkar Hospital, Pune, to support newborn babies who have difficulty in breathing. The machines will provide respiratory support to infants, eliminating putting tubes down their tiny throats.

The club has nominated Dr Shilpa Kalane, neonatologist at the hospital, for Vocational Excellence Recognition Award for her service to newborn babies. ■



Rotarians at the handing over of high-tech machines to the Deenanath Mangeshkar Hospital, Pune.



Participants at the Sari Walkathon in Dharashiv, formerly known as Osmanabad, in Maharashtra.



A Sari Walkathon at RC Dharashiv

DG Sudhir Lature flagged off a ‘Sari Walkathon’ for cancer awareness organised by RC Dharashiv, RID 3132, at the Tuljabhavani Stadium. Around 1,600 women participated. The aim of the walkathon was to promote early detection of cancer among women. At the venue, blood check-up was done on 300 women with the support of an Ayurvedic medical college. A vehicle with Rotary’s theme *Unite for Good* went around the city to boost public image.

Dr Shruti Gandhi, cancer specialist, spoke about the importance of detecting early symptoms and timely screening. A street play was staged by college students. Club president Ranjit Randive and secretary Pradeep Khamkar led the initiative. ■

Mobile eyecare screens 5,000 students

With the help of a mobile eyecare unit, RC Pilathara Mathamangalam, RID 3204, screened around 5,000 school students over three months. This satellite club was chartered in May 2025.

The Vision on Wheels, a GG project of RC Payyanur, enabled the Rotary team to visit each school and provide high-quality eye testing and diagnostic services to the students. Satellite club chair Jaya Haridas and its advisor Sunil Kottarathil took care of the logistics. ■



An eye-screening camp at a school.



RID 3142 DGE Nilesh Jaywant gives a commendation certificate to a participant at the Happy Streets. To his left his PDG Kailash Jethani.



Happy Streets near Badlapur lake

To promote fitness among people, Happy Streets, a gala event of music, singing, dance, yoga, running, plays and fun exercises, was conducted by RC Badlapur Industrial Area, RID 3142, at Katrap Talav, a scenic lake in Thane district of Maharashtra. Badlapur Municipal president Ruchita Ghorpade and her husband Rajendra Ghorpade, former president, DGE Nilesh Jaywant and PDG Kailash Jethani were present at the venue. More than a thousand people from all age groups attended the event, apart from institutions engaged in various fine arts pitching in. Club president Amit Padhya coordinated the event with the support of his team. ■

A health ambassador

As president of Alliance for Health Promotion, Geneva, that works closely with the WHO, Elizabeth Cherian is keen to rope in multiple stakeholders in Rotary projects “so that we do impactful service with better reach among communities,” says this grassroots health ambassador.

With 3,700-plus Rotarians in 94 clubs, her aim is to induct 1,000 new members. “We’ve inducted 520 new members already. Rotary needs passionate and committed people. My priority is to strengthen existing clubs, with efforts to add at least 20 new clubs,” she explains. Twelve new clubs were formed already with a minimum of 20–25 members each. She is focused on chartering 9–10 cause-based, satellite clubs, “for in this metro city, an IT hub, young professionals find it difficult to attend regular, weekly meetings. Satellite clubs with flexibility offer the right platform.” Already four such clubs have been chartered.

Some of the big-ticket GG projects are: RC Bangalore West will support eye surgeries (GG: \$100,000) at city hospitals; RC Bengaluru Orion Gateway will flag off mobile cancer screening unit (GG: \$89,000); and RC Bangalore North will set up a dialysis ward (\$89,000) at a charitable hospital. On the CSR front, high-tech equipment to Sri Madhusudan Sai Hospital (₹2.53 crore) from Rotary Manyata; a greenfield school with RO plant at Ramanagara (₹3.5 crore) and heart surgeries (₹60 lakh) by RC Indiranagar, are among the corporate-funded projects worth \$1.6 million. For TRF-giving, the target is \$3 million.

Elizabeth joined Rotary in 2001 after “I found that my services can be bigger, better and more impactful through RI with the involvement of professionals and business leaders.”



Elizabeth Cherian
Global healthcare
RC Bangalore
RID 3192

Meet your Governors

V Muthukumaran

Focus on school toilet blocks

Education at the government rural schools is “good with efficient teachers, but they lack basic amenities like sanitation and classroom facilities. I will be focusing on building and renovating toilet blocks and installing handwash stations in rural schools across my district,” says V Suresh.

With 3,700 Rotarians in 98 clubs, he wants to add 1,000 new members and charter 10 new clubs by June 30. Gender-segregated toilet blocks will be built at the Government Primary School, Tiruvallur (CSR: ₹15 lakh), and two government high schools in Vandavasi (GG: ₹30 lakh) and Ambur (GG: ₹25 lakh). Around 25 toilet blocks will be renovated at primary and high schools through a district grant of ₹30 lakh.

On the medical front, three dialysis machines (GG: ₹30 lakh) will be installed at the Jain Dialysis Centre, Tiruvallur; while a mammography bus (GG: ₹1.6 crore), which was flagged off by RI director M Muruganandam, will screen rural women for breast cancer at mobile camps by RC Gudiyatham.

Around 500 eye check-up camps were done by the clubs, especially in remote villages, and “by year-end we will complete 750.” His target for TRF-giving is \$200,000. He joined the home club in 2011, inspired by the polio eradication efforts of Rotary.



V Suresh
Real estate finance
RC Vellore Mid-Town
RID 3231

Rotary is all over Mysuru

When 9-year-old Basamma got her sight after a free cornea transplant surgery, “she came out with a broad smile, euphoric to see the world for the first time. That incident, over 20 years ago, changed my perspective of life, making me take an active role in Rotary projects,” recalls Ramakrishna.

He is confident of adding 500 new members, having inducted 318 already, and form at least 10 new clubs to add to the existing number of 4,000 Rotarians in 91 clubs. A human milk bank (CSR grant: ₹40 lakh) was inaugurated at the Cheluvamba Hospital, Mysuru, to take care of 3,500 babies delivered each year here; around 1,000 eye surgeries (GG: ₹41 lakh) will be done by RC Ivory City Mysuru; laparoscopic equipment will be donated (GG: ₹52 lakh) to Vivekananda Memorial Hospital, Mysuru; and surgery equipment (GG: ₹31 lakh) will be given to the Government Eye Hospital, Sullia.

Smart boards (each ₹1 lakh) are being installed at 86 government schools; and two pink toilets (CSR grant: ₹20 lakh) will come up at Chamarajanagar and Gundlupet in a couple of months. He aims to collect \$1 million for TRF. Ramakrishna enjoys doing service projects, “as I have many special Rotary moments.” When he joined Rotary in 1986, there were just four clubs in Mysuru, “now we have 23 clubs, and Rotary is on a tremendous growth path across our district,” he says.



Ramakrishna P K
Fragrance chemicals
RC Mysore Mid-Town
RID 3181



Ravinder Gugnani
Academician
RC Rohtak
RID 3011

New cardiac unit at Rotary Hospital

Having joined Rotary in 2008, “it has been an amazing journey in service and fellowship for me as the organisation has taught me so many life principles,” says Ravinder Gugnani. “Of all the qualities, being compassionate towards the less privileged is the key takeaway for me.”

Gugnani has already inducted 600 new members; his target is 1,200 Rotarians for this year. At present, there are 5,800 members across 143 clubs in the national capital region. He has adopted the mantra of RI Director KP Nagesh: ‘10-20-30’ in chartering new clubs across Rotary-Rotaract-Interact families. “So far I have formed nine clubs, and will fulfil our objective well before June 30.” A cardiac unit (CSR fund+GG: \$1 million) will be set up at the Rotary Hospital, Faridabad. RI President Francesco Arezzo inaugurated the Prem Sagar Goel Heart Centre at the Rotary Hospital, Gurugram, in November.

RC Delhi Southend Next is doing 200 paediatric heart surgeries (GG: ₹1.25 crore); district clubs are distributing 200 smart glasses to visually challenged people identified by the National

Association of the Blind, and 1,000 bicycle are being given to girl children at government schools (both CSR grant: ₹1 crore). Two Happy Schools are being done at the Govt Senior Secondary School, Faridabad (CSR: \$50,000) and Govt Primary School, Gurugram (CSR: \$35,000). He has set a TRF-giving target of \$4 million, and is confident of meeting this “challenging target”. ■

200 paediatric heart surgeries are being done, smart glasses for 200 visually challenged, and 1,000 bicycles are given to girl students. Two Happy Schools are coming up.

DG Ravinder Gugnani
RID 3011

With bigger service projects, like the Programs of Scale, driven by data-based study having a measurable impact on the communities, “Rotary is transforming the world. In India, Rotary clubs have taken up CSR-funded projects in a large scale which other countries like Brazil and the Philippines are trying to adopt, but without much success,” said TRF trustee chair Holger Knaack.

Delivering his address after inaugurating the IIT Madras Rotary Centre for Social Development at the Humanities and Sciences Block of IIT Madras, he complimented the partner clubs and the premier institute for setting up this joint initiative “which will create lasting change through clubs across India in the years to come.” RCs Madras Mid-Town and Madras Central Aadithya, RID 3233, are in the process of arranging ₹30 lakh as corpus for the Rotary centre which “in due course will generate income by taking up project assessment studies, impact reporting, project consultancy, creating white papers on sustainability, and helping the Rotary clubs across South

IITM-Rotary Centre a shot in the arm

V Muthukumaran

India to design need-based global grant and CSR-funded projects. This will make the new centre a self-sustaining resource body for Rotary,” said PDG Muthu Palaniappan.

Global grant projects have touched millions of lives in India, “as Rotary clubs take up around 275–300 global grant programmes worth ₹180–190 crore every year,” said trustee Bharat Pandya. Now IIT Madras joining with Rotary will become a transformative initiative in the next 10 years with clubs doing research and data-backed projects, he noted.

DG D Devendran said RID 3233 clubs are doing annual projects worth \$1 million, and “during the Covid

years, we did service initiatives worth \$2 million including *Project Orange* that fought against preventable blindness.” While the annual CSR-funded projects stood at ₹30 crore, “with the help of IIT Madras, we can scale this up to ₹300 crore in the next 4–5 years,” he said.

DGND M Ambalavanan, the project chair, said “it was a dream come true moment for me with the setting of the IIT Madras Rotary Centre. As businessmen, we lack knowledge of ground realities and situations at the grassroots of our communities. But it is imperative, that our projects are backed by raw proven data with studies on the needs of our communities,



TRF Trustee Chair Holger Knaack and Susanne with RC Chennai Capital president Apoorva Modi, DRFC L Neelakantan, DG D Devendran, Trustee Bharat Pandya and DGE Shiram Duvvuri after inaugurating a medical equipment at Sri Ramachandra Hospital, Chennai.

and the new centre will fill this gap for Rotary clubs.”

In the last five years, Rotary clubs in Chennai have done global grant and CSR-funded projects worth \$14 million; and across the country, CSR projects alone would be \$1 billion last year, with majority of funding from the MSME firms, he noted.

UN's 17 SDGs

The IIT Madras Rotary Centre will design social growth projects for global grants and CSR-funding by involving the faculty and students who will create a knowledge data bank across Rotary's seven areas of focus, said Ambalavanan. As a resource centre, it will “assess, design and execute critical humanitarian projects in TN, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra and Puducherry to begin with.”

For the first time, the Rotary centre would create a “dashboard of information related to the UNDP's 17 SDGs (sustainable development goals) aligned to Rotary's areas of focus.” PDG Muthu Palaniappan said the centre will be a powerhouse for social change across Tamil Nadu. The centre will take up the state government's pilot health project on hearing-impaired babies in Thoothukudi district, and “see how it can come out with effective solutions for treatment, and scale up the treatment model for the entire state through Rotary clubs.” Prof Rajesh Kumar, HoD, Humanities and Sciences, IIT Madras, said they are looking forward to work through the new centre in “tech innovation for visible impact in rural communities.”

Recalling the work done since the MoU was signed with Rotary in October 2024, followed by a soft launch by IIT Madras director V Kamakoti in Feb 2025,



Trustee Chair Knaack, Trustee Pandya, PDG N Nandakumar, DGND M Ambalavanan, PDG S Muthu Palaniappan, DG Devendran and DGE Duvvuri at IIT Madras.

associate prof Santosh Sahu pointed out the IIT Madras Alumni Charitable Trust was generous in giving resources and donations. “We will hold certificate courses on SDGs, publish white papers on social, rural issues, offer internships, conduct hackathons to brainstorm on specific problems, create a wide database for Chennai, and then gradually engage with rest of India,” explained Sahu.

The IITM-Rotary Centre will design social growth projects for global grants and CSR-funding by involving the faculty and students who will create a knowledge data bank across Rotary's seven areas of focus.

To begin with four IIT professors led by Sahu will be involved in the Rotary centre's activity, and they will be guided by a three-member advisory board. Similar Rotary centres will be set up at the IITs in Hyderabad, Mumbai, Delhi, Bhubaneswar and Guwahati with the help of respective Rotary districts and clubs.

In his video address, Kamakoti said the IIT Madras Rotary Centre will be a “policy umbrella body for SDGs in Tamil Nadu with interventions through Rotary clubs for TN Green Mission (mangrove restoration), children's healthcare, and other state rural schemes.” The centre will strive for industry-academia linkage for sustainable growth, which will be taught as a curriculum in schools and colleges with the help of state government, he added.

IIT Madras is developing a 100-acre sustainability

campus at Auroville village near Puducherry, where the centre's best practices would be acted upon and showcased as model growth parameters for the entire nation, said Kamakoti.

Hi-tech medical equipment

In the medical front, RC Chennai Capital handed over ultrasound and HFNC (high-flow nasal cannula) equipment to the paediatric ICU ward at the Sri Ramachandra Hospital through a global grant project of ₹45 lakh. RID 5330, US, and RC Melawati, RID 3300, Malaysia, were the global partners.

Knaack and his wife Susanne inaugurated the project in the presence

of trustee Pandya, DG Devendran, DGE Shriram Duvvuri, DRFC L Neelakantan, and club president Apoorva Modi. PDGs N Nandakumar and Palaniappan, and Ambalavanan were also present.

Ultrasound and HFNC device would reduce the treatment period of critically-ill babies, said Modi. With these high-tech donations, "the hospital can do life-saving critical interventions without moving fragile infants, a critical factor in neonatal mortality," he said. In March, the club had donated two C-arm x-ray machines (GG: ₹40 lakh) to the orthopaedic ward at the Kilpauk Medical College and Hospital; and apply for a global grant of ₹50-60

lakh for donating either a mammogram or Echo cardiogram to a charity hospital.

In his speech, trustee chair Knaack said the "long lasting cooperation between the hospital and Rotary has looked into the needs of the communities." Since inception, TRF had funded global projects of over \$4 billion through global grants and other programmes. "Ending polio is still our main priority and it is now endemic in only two countries — Pakistan and Afghanistan. Being a neighbouring country, India must ensure that polio is eradicated from the world," he said.

Pictures by Muthukumar



Medical camp benefits 1,000 in Beed

Team Rotary News



In a mega healthcare camp conducted by RC Beed Mid Town, RID 3132, over 1,000 individuals suffering from various ailments and chronic diseases were examined and medicines were distributed.

The seven-day medical camp was held across villages in Beed taluk in Marathwada region of Maharashtra with the support of the CM's Assistance Fund Cell, Charitable Hospital Cell (Beed), St Anne's Social Centre and the

district health department. Rotarian doctors from various specialties rendered their service. Club president Rahul Bora, secretary Prakash Konka, project chair Amol Talekar and Nilesh Jagdale took care of logistics.

Taluk health officer Dr Naresh Kasat and volunteers from St Anne's Social Centre, Bahirwadi, along with medical officers, ASHA and Anganwadi workers, played a significant role at the week-long camp. ■

Medical projects at Chikkaballapur

Team Rotary News

Two CSR-funded medical projects were done by RC Bangalore Ulsoor, RID 3192, at the Sri Madhusudan Sai Institute of Medical Sciences and Research, Chikkaballapur in Karnataka.

As part of its community health outreach, the club has done 107 cardiac surgeries at the hospital with a CSR grant of ₹37.45 lakh from TTP Technologies and Rajamane Industries. “This financial assistance benefitted underprivileged patients who cannot afford life-saving procedures,” said club president P Vijaya Kumar. The CSR grant provided ₹35,000 for every surgery.

After the surgery, patients were given proper nutrition, medication, and regular check up to ensure full recovery. The medical teams at the hospital gave timely guidance and support for the recovery of 107 patients. The beneficiaries included children suffering from congenital heart diseases.

In another initiative, the hospital administered HPV vaccines to 943 school girls to ensure protection against cervical cancer. The club partnered with Commvault Systems to provide vaccine doses to the girls.

Each student received two doses of the HPV vaccine, given with a six-month gap. “The vaccination drive aimed to protect young girls and women from cervical cancer through timely intervention, awareness creation, and community engagement,” said Kumar. ■



RC Bangalore Ulsoor president P Vijaya Kumar (L) gives a cheque to Dr Raghupathi, medical superintendent of the hospital, for cardiac treatment of the less privileged.



School students after getting their HPV vaccination.

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Membership & TRF contribution summary



A VTT mission from India to Nigeria

Team Rotary News

A Vocational Training Team (VTT) comprising 14 surgeons and two volunteers from across India provided medical and surgical treatment during a 15-day mega health camp held in Nigeria in January. The team represented diverse medical specialties and was led by dental surgeon and RID 3204 PDG Dr Santosh Sreedhar, while PDG Lawrence Okwor served as the project coordinator in Nigeria (RID 9127).

The camp was organised at the State University of Medical and

Allied Sciences and Teaching Hospital at Igbo-Enu in Enugu district. Over 1,800 underprivileged patients suffering from various ailments received advanced medical care, including surgical interventions for around 800 individuals. For many patients, this mission marked the first time they had access to specialised medical and surgical treatment, said Sreedhar.

“Having participated in VTT programmes in Nigeria in 2020 and 2023, I had witnessed first-hand the transformative potential of this

initiative — both for the communities served and for the professionals involved,” he added.

The VTT mission was submitted as a global grant proposal in January 2025 and was approved by TRF in June. The programme received generous support from the district designated funds of RIDs 3203 and 3234 in India, and districts 9127 and 9142 in Nigeria.

The grant covered international travel and logistics of the VTT members; procurement and donation of



essential medical, surgical, dental and ophthalmic equipment; the establishment and upgrading of operation theatres; and capacity building for local doctors and medical students.

During the mission, the visiting team installed dental chairs, extraction and scaling instruments, digital portable X-ray machines, cataract surgery instruments and operating microscopes for ophthalmology procedures. They also provided complete surgical and anaesthesia equipment for general surgery, ENT, gynaecology and orthopaedics.

Local doctors, interns, medical students, nurses and paramedical staff participated in surgical demonstrations conducted by the Indian team, and attended training sessions and clinical



The VTT members after setting up an operation theatre at the state hospital in Enugu district, Nigeria.



PDG Santosh Sreedhar (centre), along with his VTT members, handing over medical equipment to Nigerian doctors.



Local doctors and interns learn a dental procedure as dental surgeon Dr CK Asokan treats a patient.

discussions aimed at strengthening their decision-making skills.

“Certain instruments and procedures across various specialties were new to the medical professionals

there, and they were eager to learn. By providing advanced equipment and demonstrating their use, we hope to help them deliver better healthcare to patients,” said Sreedhar. ■



Summer of 2026: Make the world a cooler place

Preeti Mehra

Above normal temperatures and heatwaves are predicted.
You could play an active role in mitigation efforts.

There are too many warnings that summer is going to hit us badly this year. The magazine *Down to Earth* reports that IMD's (India Meteorological Department) seasonal outlook for March-April-May has warned that the summer season of 2026 could be hotter than normal for most of the Himalayan region, north-eastern states and some parts of the Western Ghats region.

This means that we will have to put up with above normal maximum temperatures in most parts of the country. And worse still, night temperatures are also predicted to be above normal, making the summer extremely uncomfortable.

An alert from IMD also speaks of "above-normal number of heatwave days over most parts of east, east-central, many parts of the southeastern peninsula and some parts of north-west and west-central India during March to May."

This brings us to the question of how we can manage the summer months and yet be able to curtail our carbon footprint as much as possible. But first, my heart and mind go out to all those who have no choice but to work outdoors during these cruel months. There are a whole lot of workers I can think of — gardeners, gig workers, delivery agents, traffic police, security guards, street food vendors... the list seems endless. Far

from the luxury of an air-conditioned office, many people are unlikely to even have a fan over their heads. Working under direct sunlight with little rest and no shade can lead to heat exhaustion, dehydration, or even fatal heatstroke.

Unfortunately, our Indian cities are hardly planned, and not much thought has been given to issues like heat mitigation. It is now recognised that congested urban areas trap heat, a phenomenon known as the Urban

Heat Island (UHI) effect. In our city slums, where most of the workers live, the roofs are largely made of asphalt, metal, or concrete, and these materials absorb and radiate the sun's heat.

In fact, scientists have found that in these informal housing colonies, indoor temperatures often exceed outdoor temperatures by 8–10°C. This proves to be as devastating as the outdoors and creates a terrible health risk for children, women and the elderly who stay at home and have no access to cooler



conditions. Illness due to excessive heat leads to loss of working days, increased medical expenses, loss of income and drives many to the brink of poverty and helplessness.

It is good that the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has recognised the nature of the danger the population faces from rising summer heat and has declared heatwaves a national disaster. The World Health Organisation also recognises that the urban poor are a climate-vulnerable population and requires adaptation interventions as a priority.

But this official recognition is not enough. We, as aware and responsible citizens, also need to do our bit to see that, along with our comfort and progress, we can do our bit for a large proportion of the population that is vulnerable and in need of large-scale mitigation measures.

So, first, let's look at what we can advocate for in our cities to make the

summer months bearable for the entire population.

The most important aspect is ensuring that our city administrations are proactive in implementing our Heat Action Plans (HAPs). These include implementing early warning systems, developing water bodies and parks (blue and green infrastructure), ensuring that there is passive cooling in building designs, and focusing on our vulnerable populations.

As citizens, it is important for us to take action in our communities to expand greenery. We should advocate for the creation of parks, planting roadside trees, and establishing green belts. This will provide adequate shade for people to rest during the afternoon and help reduce local air temperatures.

We must insist that the pavements built have light colours and are made of porous materials to reduce surface heat absorption and allow rainwater to infiltrate. If there is a lake, pond, well, pool, or a strip of wetland in our vicinity that needs rejuvenation, we should take the initiative and see that it is restored to its original state so that it can serve as a natural coolant and improve the urban microclimate of the area.

If we advocate for shaded shelters, hydration facilities, and rest breaks for outdoor workers, it will help us move forward. Additionally, preparing for heat-related medical contingencies in the city is essential.

We should promote a movement for implementing cool roofs in homes. Affordable methods can be used for this purpose, including lime wash, reflective coating materials, rooftop gardens, and bamboo shades. These approaches can reduce roof surface temperatures by 15–20°C and indoor temperatures by 8–10°C.

Now let's see how we can reduce our own energy footprint. On the personal front, first stick to cool summer attire that absorbs sweat and keeps us

As citizens, we should advocate for creating more public parks, planting roadside trees, and establishing green belts.

cool. Try to keep air conditioners at 24 degrees or higher, as that is the most energy-efficient and helps keep electricity bills in check, too. Put off fans when you are not using them to cut down on unnecessary electricity use, as energy is in short supply and in high demand in the summer months.

The most important thing is to stay hydrated. Drinking buttermilk, coconut water, and lime juice to keep you going is a great idea. We also have some well-known traditional drinks: *sattu sharbat* (made with black channa and Bengal gram flours), lassi, *kanji*, *aam* and *bael panna* (mango and wood apple juice). People swear by their cooling properties. Food too should be light, both the southern and northern states have some famous curd-based preparations popular in summer. If you can cook using solar energy, nothing like it.

In summer, several people start swimming for fitness or recreation, take several baths a day and avoid the outdoors during the hours of intense heat. All of this is effective, but like I said at the start, pushing for a better city environment and advocating for change that can impact many more people who are not in a position to advocate for themselves would make your contribution that much more special.

The writer is a senior journalist who writes on environmental issues



RID **3011**

RC Gurgaon Qutab Enclave

An eye check-up camp was held for students at the Government Middle and Primary School, Sikanderpur, with Dr Dinesh Saxena, an eye specialist, and community director, health, coordinating the project.



Club matters



RID **3040**

RC Sagar

Sweaters were given to 25 children from underprivileged families at the Saraswati Shishu Mandir, Patkui. Rotarians distributed 5,000 cloth bags to shopkeepers at a local fair in a drive against single-use plastic.

RID **3053**

RC Ajmer Metro

Around 250 students from three nursing colleges took part in a polio awareness rally flagged off by JLN Medical College principal Dr Anil Samaria. DG Nisha Shekhawat, club president Jyotsna Chandwani and CMHO Jyotsna Ranga were present.





RID 3056

RC Sikar

Monthly surgery camps are being held in which free procedures are done across specialities at the Rath Hospital, Sikar.

At the latest camp, 10 free surgeries were performed by a seven-member medical team.

RID 3030

RC Nagpur Metro

Over 600 patients were examined at a diagnostic camp in Talodi village. The camp was done in partnership with Dhanashree Nagari Sahakari Patsanstha.



RID 3060

RC Baroda Sayajinagari

An eye check-up camp screened 275 students at the Nutan Vidyalaya, Sama, and those who needed spectacles were assured of the same. The camp was part of the Comprehensive Paediatric Eyecare project.



RID 3070

RC Kapurthala Downtown

An e-learning station was installed at the Government Senior Secondary School, Kanjali. School principal Manjit Singh gave a certificate of appreciation to club president Yogesh Talwar. Also, handwash stations were donated to many schools.

Understanding gout

Gita Mathai

As many as 0.5–1 per cent of middle-aged men wake up in the middle of the night with agonising pain in the big toe, ankle, knee, elbow or wrist. The affected joint may be swollen, warm and red. This often causes bewilderment, as there is no fever and no preceding injury to the joint. People may try home remedies such as hot water, ice, or painkillers. Unexpectedly, the pain subsides in a day or two as suddenly as it appeared. A few weeks or months later, however, a similar incapacitating attack may occur, again at night and seemingly out of the blue.

These attacks are typical of gout. It was once considered a disease of aristocracy and the wealthy,

as attacks often followed overindulgence in a rich, high-protein meal (especially red meat, which has a high purine level) accompanied by alcohol. We now know that gout occurs due to elevated blood uric acid levels.

The incidence of gout is increasing worldwide, with some of the fastest rise seen in India, China and Thailand. It now affects about 0.3 per cent of the Indian population. Modern lifestyle, with abundant food, lack of exercise, and an epidemic of obesity and diabetes have contributed to this increase.

Men are more commonly affected, while women are relatively protected by their hormones, mainly oestrogen, until menopause.

Dietary excess and alcohol are not solely responsible for gout. The tendency to develop gout is largely

genetic. The inheritance is polymorphic with several genes involved rather than just one. If you have a first-degree relative with gout, you have about a 30 per cent chance of developing the disease. However, whether genes are actually expressed depends greatly on lifestyle and environmental factors.

Uric acid levels may also increase even without dietary excess if there is increased cell destruction in the body. This occurs in conditions such as leukaemia and sickle cell disease. Levels may also rise as a side effect of certain medication such as diuretics, low-dose aspirin, levodopa (Parkinson's drug), immunosuppressants, and cancer chemotherapy.

Most of the time, the kidneys efficiently filter uric acid out of the body. However, when levels rise above the normal range of about 6–7 mg/dL, the excess may begin to precipitate in the joint fluid. Uric acid crystals are sharp and needle-like. They damage joint cartilage and increase pressure within the joint. The body reacts to these crystals with redness, inflammation and severe pain.

If left untreated, attacks may become more frequent over time. The pain may persist and progress to chronic gout, leading to swollen, deformed joints. This condition may sometimes resemble osteoarthritis. Crystallised uric acid may be deposited under the skin as visible “gouty tophi,” commonly seen on the ears, fingers, or toes. These deposits provide a clue to



the diagnosis. Excess uric acid may also precipitate in the kidneys to form painful stones and, in severe cases, may eventually lead to kidney damage.

Not everyone with high uric acid levels develops symptoms. Some people remain completely asymptomatic throughout life, with the high uric acid level being discovered only incidentally during routine blood tests.

If gout is suspected, the diagnosis can be confirmed by blood tests measuring uric acid levels, joint fluid aspiration to demonstrate uric acid crystals, X-rays, or, occasionally, a synovial biopsy. Similar joint pain and swelling can also occur in ‘pseudogout’. In that condition, the crystals found in the joint fluid are calcium salts rather than uric acid.

During an acute attack, pain can usually be relieved with medication. Response to treatment varies from person to person. Some NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) work better in certain individuals. Drugs such as indomethacin and colchicine are often particularly effective. In severe cases, injections of steroids into the affected joint may also be required. After the acute attack subsides, medication such as allopurinol may be prescribed regularly to reduce blood uric acid levels.

Although medication remains the mainstay of treatment, simple measures may provide temporary relief. Soaking the affected joint in warm water with rock salt may help relax the tissues, and applying ice afterwards may reduce swelling.

Lifestyle modifications can also help reduce the severity and frequency of attacks.

- Maintain an ideal body weight. Although a BMI (body mass index) of about 23, calculated as



weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared, is ideal, the risk of gout rises significantly when BMI exceeds 35.

- Reduce alcohol consumption. Beer and binge drinking especially increase the likelihood of attacks.
- Increase intake of carbohydrates and reduce red meat. Vegetarians should remember that some vegetables, such as cauliflower and spinach, contain high levels of purines.
- Coffee consumption may help reduce blood uric acid levels.
- Vitamin C, either from food or supplements, can lower uric acid levels. However, taking more than 500mg daily in tablet form may cause side effects. It is safer to obtain Vitamin C naturally, for example, by squeezing half a lime into drinking water or

eating fruits such as oranges and bananas.

- Drink about four litres of water a day. Adequate hydration helps flush uric acid from the body and prevents kidney stone formation.
- Fructose is commonly added as a sweetening agent in jams, condiments and fruit juices. It is a major dietary driver of gout because its metabolism in the liver increases uric acid production. High consumption of fructose-sweetened drinks, sodas and processed foods can increase the risk of gout by as much as 85 per cent.

With proper treatment and sensible lifestyle changes, gout can usually be well controlled, allowing people to lead active and pain-free lives.

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



Fiction on fact

May we celebrate the 100th article for Wordsworld — strange but true! — with one of my all-time favourite authors?

I haven't read all of Amitav Ghosh's books but what I have, I have loved. In order of personal preference, of course, but his approach, building fiction on fact, is awesome, awe-inspiring. His 2025 collection of essays, *Wild Fictions*, had been sitting on my desk from the moment it came to bookshops but it was when I reached out for *Gun Island*, published in 2019 and gifted recently, that I started reading the nonfiction simultaneously. What an amazing pairing that's turned out to be! The very things he talks about in *Gun Island* are corroborated and substantiated across articles published over the years and featured in *Wild Fictions*, clearly underlining



Sandhya Rao

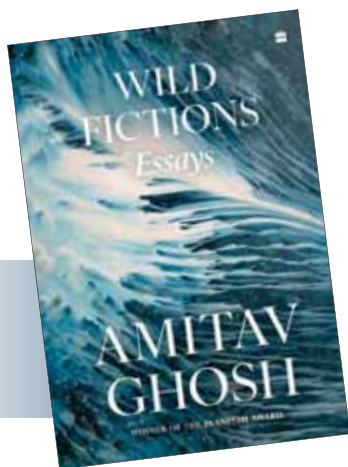
the author's commitment to social, political and environmental concerns.

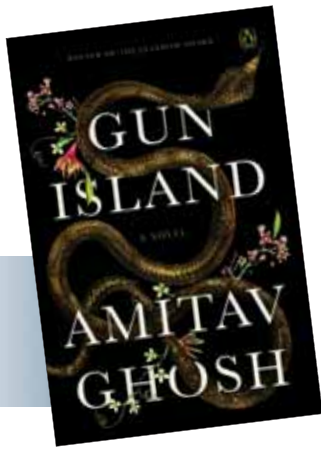
You could call *Gun Island* a kind of sequel to *The Hungry Tide* (2004); both are connected to the Sundarban and legends emanating from the region. Sundarban (more often referred to as Sundarbans) is a massive mangrove forest, richly biodiverse, covering over 10,000 sqkm across West Bengal and Bangladesh. It is located in the delta formed where the Bay of Bengal meets the Ganga, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers. The islands and mudflats are criss-crossed by several streams that experience high tide by night and low tide by day following the ebb and flow of the sea. Consequently, all the water is saline. This is where the Royal Bengal Tigers roam — and swim — but we don't know how much longer they will rule, along with a whole lot of other endangered species. Then,

there's the danger and devastation from cyclones.

In *Gun Island*, we meet a couple of characters from *The Hungry Tide*; while the latter story is spun around the legend of Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli intrinsic to the Sundarban, *Gun Island* follows the story path of Bonduki Sadagar, the Gun Merchant, and draws upon the legend of Manasa Devi, goddess of snakes. We are treated to vintage Amitav Ghosh as he weaves together folklore, faith, contemporary realities, climate change, migration patterns, local and global concerns, fisherfolk and philosophers, academics and activists... It's a wide and varied world that *Gun Island* paints, a world in which the forces of nature impact similarly across time and space.

Our protagonist, Dinanath 'Deen' Datta is an antique books dealer based in the US. He finds himself researching the legend of the Gun Merchant through a series of serendipitous meetings and references. This prompts him to visit the shrine of Manasa Devi in the Sundarban, accompanied by a technologically savvy and ambitious young man, Tipu, the son of a fisherman. Deen is intrigued by some symbols etched on the walls of the shrine and while he is pondering over them, he is saved from misadventure with a snake, thanks to the sudden appearance of Rafi, a boy who tends the shrine. When he returns to the US, Deen reconnects with an old friend and mentor, Professoressa Giacinta 'Cinta' Schiavon, a scholar in the history of Venice. It is she who finally helps him understand and unravel the legend of Bonduki Sadagar after a visit to Venice where they have a series of strange experiences. Cinta too finds closure to the sorrow she carries within, and Deen discovers how and why Venice is home to so many Bengali-speaking, mostly Bangladeshi, refugees. This latter fact is confirmed in an article in *Wild*





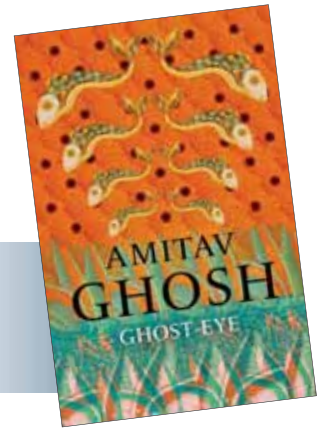
Fictions titled ‘The Great Uprooting: Migration and Displacement in an Age of Planetary Crisis’ first published in *The Massachusetts Review*, 2021. In the essay, Ghosh makes the observation that “...many of them (migrants) say that the worst part of their journeys consists not of their time on the road or the sea, but rather of the months and years they spend languishing in European migrant camps. In those camps there is nothing to do but wait and sleep: it is little consolation that you are fed and housed and given allowances; it is the waiting and the idleness that break the spirit.”

It’s hard to synopsise the story of *Gun Island*. In this connection, it is interesting to recall a conversation that Deen has with Cinta. When he refers to

the legend as being “only a story,” she raps him on the knuckles and says: “In the seventeenth century no one would ever have said of something that it was ‘just a story’ as we moderns do. At that time people recognized that stories could tap into dimensions that were beyond the ordinary, beyond the human even. They knew that only through stories was it possible to enter the most inward mysteries of our existence...” She goes on to argue:

“What if the faculty of storytelling were not specifically human but rather the last remnant of our animal selves? A vestige left over from a time before language, when we communicated as other living beings do?” This is a time and space in the realm of the evocative.

This feels like classic Amitav Ghosh in my view. He tells you a story, his style tends to be formal, and in the process, he makes you conscious of the world around. The reality. The reality of worlds that exist and seemingly others that don’t. Going by the reviews, his latest book, *Ghost-Eye*, also appears to be exploring something along those lines. But as far as the world as we know it goes, it is one that he has researched, examined and experienced for himself. Take, for example, the essay ‘The Town by the Sea’ in *Wild Fictions*. He is at the Nirmala School Camp in Port Blair on January 1, 2005, just days after the December 24 tsunami that ravaged this part of the world. In an echo of the migrants’ waiting in European refugee camps quoted a couple of paragraphs earlier, he writes: “The refugees had spent the last three days waiting anxiously in the camp, and in that time no one had asked them where they wanted to go or when; none of them had any idea of what was to become of them. The sense of being adrift had brought them to the end of their tether.



The issue was neither deprivation nor hardship ... it was the uncertainty that was intolerable.”

In their own ways, both books reiterate one overarching theme, that natural phenomena “are the byproducts of historical processes that have hugely benefited a small minority of human beings at the expense of the great majority of the world’s population.” When we look around and see what is consuming our minds today, this does appear to make sense. You could even claim that reading Amitav Ghosh is reading the world. *Ghost-Eye* has received mixed reviews. However, what Ashutosh Kumar Thakur says on the *Down To Earth* site may help clarify the phrase ‘reading the world’. Concluding that the novel is about coexistence, Thakur writes: “Ghosh does not offer solutions. He offers attention. In its calm, deliberate prose and its refusal to hurry meaning into place, *Ghost-Eye* stands as a reminder that literature can still function as a space for listening, for hesitation and for learning to see again.” That’s the place of literature, good literature. This is why we need books and writers and thinkers and observers and ponderers. This is why we must read with refinement... so we may be able to listen, to hesitate, to learn to see again.

The columnist is a children’s writer and senior journalist

Ghost-Eye stands as a reminder that literature can still function as a space for listening, for hesitation and for learning to see again.



RID 3100

RC Muzaffarnagar

DG Nitin Agarwal flagged off a walkathon to create awareness on organ donation in which all the 17 clubs in Khatauli, UP, took part. The rally was supported by Max Superspecialty Hospital, Vaishali; Alaknanda Blood Centre and the Inner Wheel Club.

Rotary  PEOPLE of ACTION

Club matters



RID 3205

RC Perumbavoor Heritage

Project Gift of Reading was inaugurated jointly by AG Iyjob Jacob and municipal vice-chairperson Annie Martin at Asramam HS School and Government Girls HS School in Perumabvoor. Books were distributed to students.

RID 3234

RC Anna Nagar Madras

ECG, Echo, blood sugar, BP, BMI etc were done for 70 elderly patients at a cardiac camp at the Ashiana Shubham Senior Citizen Community, Maraimalar Nagar. Dr Harikrishnan Parthasarathy, a Rotarian, was the project chair.





RID 3240

RC Aspiring Agartala

A mushroom farming workshop was held jointly with the Tripura Santiniketan Medical College. Club members and Debika Bhowmik, assistant director, State Agriculture Department, gave training to 28 participants.

RID 3120

RC Kushinagar

Free helmets were given to 50 two-wheeler riders during a road safety awareness drive at Subhash Chowk, Kasia. The camp held with the support of Sahil Bajaj Agency was inaugurated by regional transport officer Balwant Singh.



RID 3262

RC Bhubaneswar Meadows

A HIV/AIDS awareness camp was held at the Harijan Sahi Basti, an underserved area, reaching out to 100 women. Doctors from Capital Hospital, and Rtns Bijoylaxmi Kar, Suraj Raj and vice-president Deepak Jena shared insight on the disease.



RID 3291

RC Jodhpur Gardens Calcutta

DGE Tapas Bhattacharya was the chief guest at the women's football exhibition match held at the RCC Sisir Bagan Thalia. More than 1,000 spectators saw the match. PDG Mukul Sinha and PP Debi Prasad Basu were present.

Compiled by V Muthukumaran



All that noise about branding...



TCA Srinivasa Raghavan

Even at the ripe old age of 75 amongst the many things I don't understand is the idea of brands. Until the 1960s a brand simply meant the maker of the product. Atlas Cycles. Sunlight Soap. Usha Sewing Machine. And so on. These were just names of products, nothing more. Then in the 1970s a new significance was attributed to the term brand. Indeed, from that sprang a new verb, branding. This was the era when what's called marketing, as distinct from selling, became all the rage. You weren't just a selling agent. You became a marketing executive. Marketing basically meant creating an aura around a product by 'branding' it. Shoes and soaps were no longer merely sold. They were marketed via advertisements that tried to convince you about non-existent virtues of the product.

With my background in economics, I can see why brands and branding are an important form of communication about the quality of a product in highly competitive markets where product differentiation is absolutely minimal. Even a useless product can be sold as the one magical thing that you need in life. But what I don't understand is why it is necessary to brand everything under the sun. Take gutka and luggage. Why do the makers of these things spend so much money on marketing them? Gutka and cigarettes are known to be harmful, yet their makers insist on marketing campaigns that emphasise lifestyles. But how damaging yourself can be consistent with a superior lifestyle is beyond me. It's like saying it's cooler to shoot yourself with a top-class gun than with a country pistol.

Or take luggage. For heaven's sake, who cares about the make of your suitcase? After all,

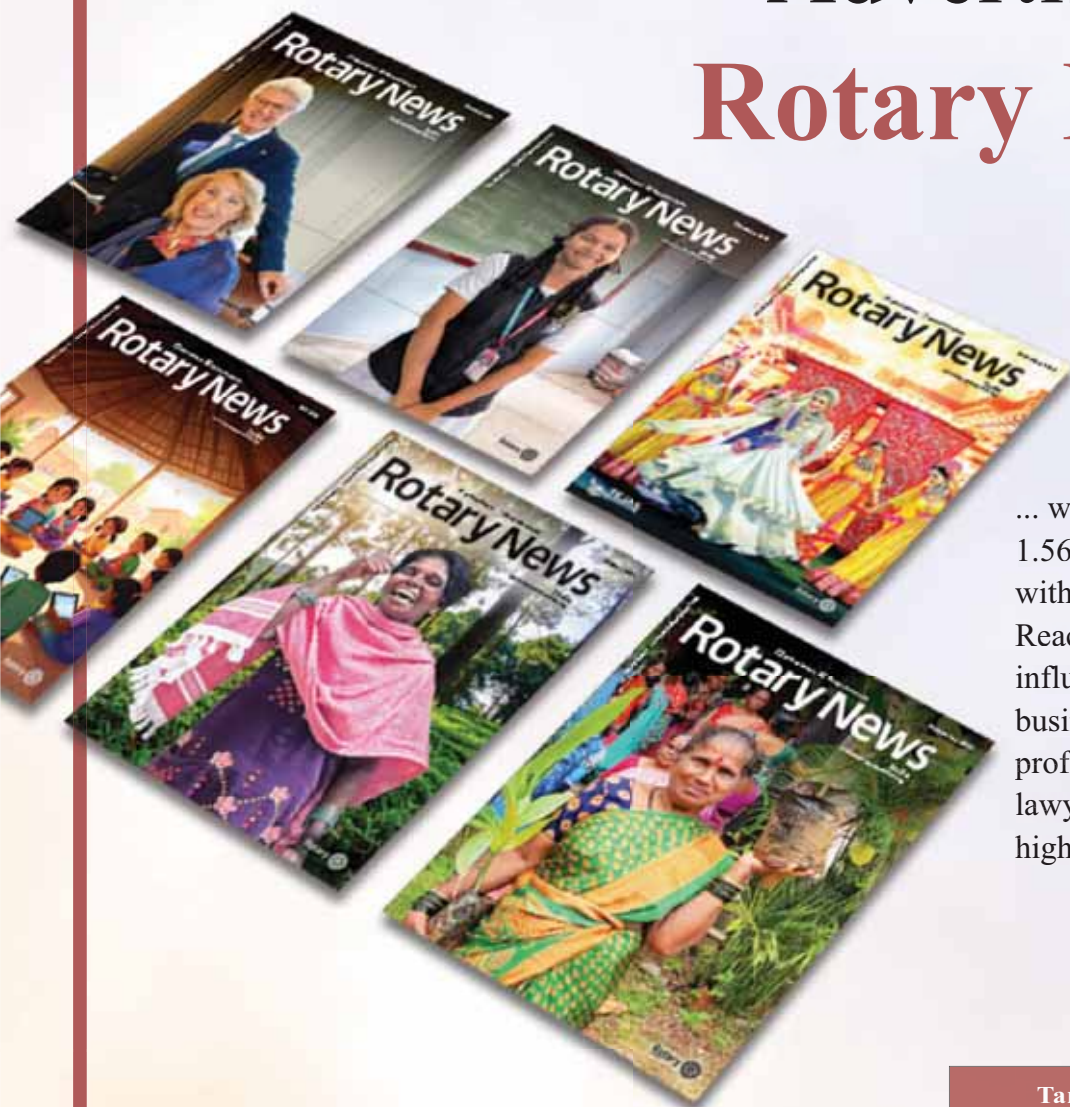
on a train it goes under the seat. In a car it goes into the boot. On a plane it goes into the hold. So why all the fuss over branded luggage? Yet people pay ten times as much for a branded suitcase as they would have to for an unbranded one, known derisively as 'local maal'.

Likewise in the case of alcohol. Nothing annoys me more than all that hype about scotch whiskey. There's way too much hype about peatiness, smokiness, aging, casks and so on. It's all a lot of nonsense about added flavour. As someone pointed out in a video, you pay for the bottle and label, not the alcohol. Back in the late 1960s, when I was in the first year of college, there was a science student who one day brought a beaker of pure ethyl alcohol. We mixed it with 12 bottles of Coca Cola in a bucket and left it on the corridor for free consumption. It tasted like any 'good' scotch today. I once served an Indian whiskey in a scotch bottle. No one could tell the difference, especially if mixed with soda.

Talking of which, why brand soda? As the Sikh shopkeeper in Amritsar told me once, "*Unnee-bee da fark bhi nahin honda, paaji*". When I asked an old friend who had headed a large consumer products firm about this, he asked a counter question: how will you know its quality? How will I know that if it's branded, I asked? I told him how an unbranded pair of shoes had turned out to be better than a branded one, that too a foreign brand. He refused to believe me. We argued for a while and then as old friends do, ended the discussion by calling each other names, incontinent men branding each other as ignorant fools. The English have a saying for people like us: there's no fool like an old fool.

Exactly right. ■

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