

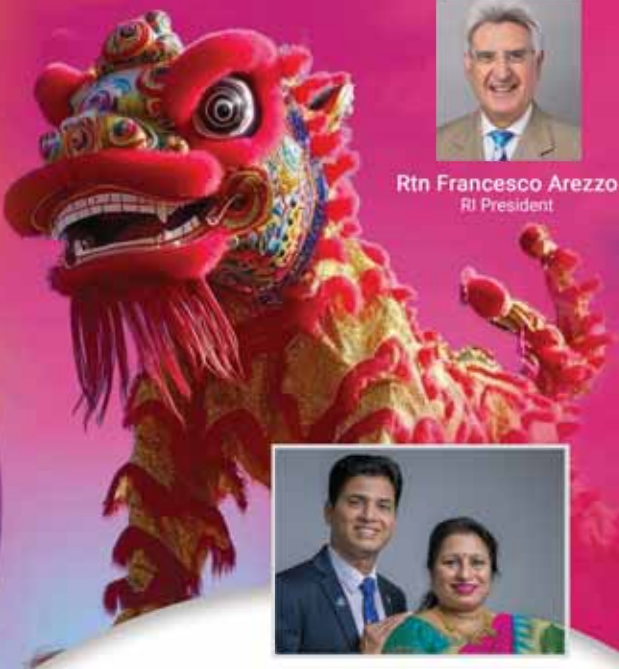
Rotary News

India
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Inside



42

Asha... the queen of lilting melodies



12

My VP being a former Rotaractor is deliberate



48

Providing solace to the terminally-ill



22

Clubs must better their past best



54

Therapy rooms for special children



38

The cascading benefits of a *Rotary News* article



58

A drive towards a plastic-free future

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Dharmashala, an impactful project

Since last year I've been reading *Rotary News* and am impressed with the activities of the Rotary clubs. But what and how to publish is also very important.

In the April issue, I was very impressed with the cover picture where a smiling young man and woman are in conversation with an older woman. When I read the cover story written by the editor on the cancer patients, I was really impressed. It is amazing to know about the social service activities that are being carried out by various Rotary clubs. To be frank, most people think that a club means enjoyment and fun, but in Rotary clubs, I find even past presidents and past governors take active interest in service projects.

The cover story has detailed how RC Bombay looks after the cancer patients' food, room facilities, and other aspects of their wellbeing. Hats off to RC Bombay for reaching out to cancer patients.

Ajit Shah, non-Rotarian, Ahmedabad



I was impressed to learn that RC Bombay has organised 100 one-bedroom flats to house cancer patients visiting the Tata Memorial Hospital for treatment. This is a noble service to cancer patients and their attendants who are being served freshly prepared food at a nominal cost.

Manav Ashray from HELP at the Vasundhara Enclave, Delhi, (98100 01241 and 98100 01896) is doing a

similar service for cancer patients. Here too accommodation and meals are given at a modest charge. In addition, a free ambulance is arranged for chemotherapy at the hospital.

As a Rotarian, I approached the owner of HELP but he refused to take donation from any institution and sought only blessings for the recovery of patients. You will find here patients also from Nigeria, Sudan, Zambia etc, sponsored by different Rotary clubs.

TD Bhatia, RC Delhi Mayur Vihar — D 3012

Your editorial titled *Wanted a peace maker to heal our world* is an inspiration for Rotarians the world over to promote peace for global good. We can take an oath at the RI Convention in Taipei for a 'War and conflict-free world'. Let there be an end to fear, hatred and prejudice among human beings. Can the next messiah of peace be a Rotarian? Your editorial has motivated me to kill my ego, prejudice and promote peace.

*Rajeev Chhabra
RC Nagpur — D 3030*

The editor's note says the tension between Israel, Iran and the US is largely driven by greed, the desire to control resources and maintain power. But is greed the only factor at play? There are other serious issues, such as

terrorism, that also need focus. Israel has acted against those accused of supporting militant groups. One can say Israel wants to live peacefully within its own borders, but feels forced into war and preemptive strikes due to security concerns. While sympathising with the suffering of Iranian civilians, the uncomfortable truth is that many Iranians suffered and died under their own regime.

Why do we remain silent about internal oppression and the action of those in power in Iran? We must look deeper, and examine the root causes, political, historical and social, before forming conclusions or taking sides. Only then can we have a more balanced and informed perspective.

*Priyadarsshinee Kanoria
RC Delhi Southex — D 3011*

With reference to the April editorial, the boiling cauldron of West Asia conflict should be tranquilised early as the world is facing different kinds of problems. In India there is acute shortage of LPG supply and expected shortage of fertilisers for farmers to sow the next crop. We pray for complete ceasefire between US, Israel and Iran soon.

RC Vizag Surabhi has taken up the challenge of imparting training to two lakh underprivileged women from 500 remote villages under a Vocational Mission programme. Training is going on in a phased manner under tailoring and embroidery and after the training, these women will be able to supplement family income and become financially independent instead of depending on the male members even

LETTERS

for small needs. Kudos to the clubs for the initiative.

*Raj Kumar Kapoor
RC Roop Nagar — D 3080*

In the March issue, the RI President's message was super. He has correctly pointed out that "Together, by extending our reach and working side by side, we truly *Unite for Good*."

The Editor's note *Pune's Peace Centre offers hope* was fantastic. RI director M Muruganandam's message, titled *Make and keep commitments*, was interesting, kudos to him. TRF trustee Bharat Pandya's message was magnificent.

Jaishree's article, *At 99, active in Rotary*, is an eye-opener for Rotarians who plan to retire from Rotary after 75 years. Dr TS Chhabra from RC Nilgiris proves that age is only a number and at the age of 99, he can do so many things to society.

*Daniel Chittilappilly
RC Kaloor — D 3205*

This has reference to your March issue on Rotary's latest peace centre and its impact. But this is on paper only, for what we see today is unrest and war in so many parts of the world. Let's find a few instances where these peace centres have helped bring peace in countries at war. Only then will we be convinced about these peace centres. Mere talk on different platforms is not enough. It would be a wonderful world if only we had peace and no war.

*Pratap Gokuldas
RC Coimbatore West — D 3206*

We are thankful to the editor for the great coverage of our project for students affected by natural calamities. Every month we eagerly wait for *Rotary News* and *Rotary News Plus*. Congratulations to the Rotary News Team for writing about the community welfare work being done by Rotarians across the country.

*Dr Mukesh Nainav
RC Pachora-Bhadgaon — D 3030*

In every issue of *Rotary News* new things are added to increase Rotarians' knowledge of Rotary. The 'Membership and TRF Contribution Summary' is nicely given in a South Asia map. Please also add Total TRF Contributions.

*Paramesh Dev Choudhury
RC Gauhati South — D 3240*

The article *Setting the course for impactful leadership* impressed me. I am 55, and in my third year of Rotary, and regret joining this wonderful organisation so late.

For two years, I asked many people 'What is Rotary.' None of the answers were satisfactory. But when I attended an RLI training session, I understood the procedures, activities, and rich history of Rotary. This training should be conducted regularly for all new Rotarians. A club that does not properly involve its members will soon shut down. Please make good use of Rotarians like me who are involved in Rotary.

*Sivaperumal Subramani
RC Walajapet — D 3231*

Correction

Dear Readers,

Every regional Rotary magazine has a publication licence from Rotary International, and carries every month mandated content from RI such as messages from the RI President, TRF Trustee Chair.

We also have to promote the annual Convention and publish content related to issues crucial to Rotary such as ending Polio. Apart from the compulsory content, RI shares every month with all regional magazines informative articles, with illustrations, of interest to Rotarians.

In our April issue, we carried one such article from RI titled *Rotary in Maps*, where inadvertently Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and Aksai Chin are not shown as integral parts of India. The error is regretted.

Editor

We welcome your feedback

Write to the Editor:

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Mail your project details,

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On the cover: RI President Elect Olayinka Babalola and Vice President Elect M Muruganandam at the Rotary News Trust office in Chennai.

Photo: Monika Lozinska



Follow the youth

Shoki Wafula did not know what to expect when he was forced to leave his birth country of Uganda for South Africa. What he found was a Rotary community that welcomed him with warmth and friendship. That experience inspired him to help create a Rotaract e-club where young leaders from around the world could connect, develop their skills, and serve together.

Today, that community includes members across multiple continents who collaborate on leadership development, peacebuilding and service initiatives. For Wafula, the experience reinforced the lesson that meaningful service begins with people who feel connected, valued, and empowered to lead.

His story reminds us why Youth Service Month is so important. Through Rotaract and programmes like Rotary Youth Exchange, young people build leadership skills, develop global understanding, and discover the impact they can make through service.

Rotary's Action Plan calls on us to enhance participant engagement. At its heart, that goal asks a simple question: How can we ensure that participation in Rotary is meaningful and fulfilling for everyone? Youth programmes and Rotaract provide a powerful answer.

When clubs mentor Rotaractors, host exchange students, or support youth leadership initiatives, they create opportunities for members to share their experience in ways that feel personal and rewarding. These

connections deepen members' sense of purpose and strengthen the bonds within our Rotary family.

They also create lasting pathways into Rotary. Thousands of young people complete Rotary programmes each year, and they carry those experiences with them throughout their lives. Many remain eager to stay connected.

Organisations such as Rotex International, an association of former Youth Exchange students, help Rotary programme alumni continue serving as mentors, leaders, and advocates for our youth programmes. As Rotex co-founder Hans Lee wrote in a recent reflection on Youth Exchange alumni, "exchange doesn't end when you return home."

When we welcome these young leaders into our clubs and activities, we strengthen the continuity of Rotary across generations.

During Youth Service Month, I hope every Rotary club reflects on how youth programmes can enhance engagement for new and longtime members. Collaborate on service projects and invite youth voices into your planning and decision making.

Rotary's message to the world is that we can *Unite for Good*. Youth programmes show us how that happens in practice — when generations come together, share ideas, and work side by side in service.

When we invest in young people, we are not only shaping future leaders. We are building a stronger, more connected Rotary today.

Francesco Arezzo

President, Rotary International



The quota conundrum

One-third quota for women in Indian legislative bodies remains a pipe dream with the additional step needed to implement the Bill, that was unanimously passed in 2023, failing to succeed in the Lok Sabha. The law cannot be implemented until a new census is completed and additional Lok Sabha seats assigned based on its results. The Opposition, concentrated in the non-Hindi belt, bitterly opposes this move, arguing it will penalise the developed states who have more effectively curbed population growth.

But let's leave the blame game aside. What merits a debate is the larger issue of gender equity and leadership positions for women in government and private bodies, including Rotary. At RI, as Rotary President-elect Olayinka Babalola said in his interview to me (Page 12), to get more women into Rotary "we have to make our environment more inclusive, support women and give them opportunities to thrive. I was on the RI Board, when for the first time in 2018, it took the decision that about 30 per cent of our leadership has to be female. And every director is supposed to make that happen." It is encouraging that Rotary's current female membership is around 27 per cent, considering women had been excluded till 1987, when the US Supreme Court intervened to secure Sylvia Whitlock's membership in a Rotary club.

If women had to fight a battle to get into a service organisation like Rotary, imagine how tough it is for them to enter Parliaments across the world. In India, the 2024 general election saw **74 women MPs** elected, four less than in the previous House. This is barely 14 per

cent of the 543-member House, and not even halfway to the one-third mark that the quota envisages.

So what's the scene like elsewhere? In the world's most powerful nation, the US, women's representation at the topmost government level has been dismal. For its first 130 years in existence, the American Senate had no female members! Until 1920, few women ran for the Senate, and until the 1990s, very few were elected, largely because women had no voting rights in many states! Today, in a House of 100, there are 26 women Senators, accounting for an impressive 26 per cent, until you consider that only 64 women in total have ever served in the US Senate throughout its entire history! And the country is yet to elect a female President!

Those occupying a pride of place in women's parliamentary representation are the Nordic countries — Sweden, Iceland, Finland, Norway and Denmark. As of 2023, these nations had 40–50 per cent women parliamentarians. Interestingly, the women in these countries largely get elected by the political parties prioritising women candidates, rather than through any legislatives quota system.

Most political systems frown on women's quota saying it compromises competence, but this is hardly true. As RIPE Babalola indicates in his interview: Give women opportunities, create an enabling environment, make them comfortable... and you will find women leaders!

Rasheeda Bhagat
Rasheeda Bhagat



Shape RI's future through CoL

Suresh Hari

The strength of Rotary lies not only in the service we do but also in our ability to grow and adapt through the ideas of our members. One of the most effective ways Rotarians can influence Rotary's future is through the Council on Resolutions (COR) and the Council on Legislation (CoL). As we enter the 2026–28 cycle, it is important for every club and district to engage actively with their CoL representatives and contribute by proposing well-prepared resolutions and, where relevant, enactments by June 30, 2026. Missing this deadline means that the proposals will only be considered during the 2028 CoL, causing a significant delay in implementation.

The CoR meets every year, and each district is represented by its elected CoL representative. This system ensures a democratic platform where ideas from across the Rotary world are discussed and voted upon. Every district should ensure its CoL representative is in place for 2026–28, and clubs and districts should work closely with both current and past CoL representatives to prepare their submissions on time.

A resolution is a formal request to the RI Board or TRF trustees to take action on a specific issue not already covered in Rotary's constitutional documents. It serves as a recommendation, expressing that "Rotary should consider doing this." An enactment, on the other hand, is a proposal to change Rotary's constitutional documents such as the RI Constitution or Bylaws, and once approved, it becomes binding. Thus, a resolution

encourages action, while an enactment establishes a rule.

For example, if a district believes that all incoming club leaders should complete certain Rotary Learning Center courses before assuming office, it may propose a resolution recommending RI to encourage and monitor course completion. The same idea, if formalised as an enactment, could seek an amendment in the Standard Rotary Club Constitution to make such training mandatory. The intent behind both is the same — building stronger, better-prepared leaders — but a resolution relies on encouragement while the enactment mandates compliance.

The process of proposing a resolution is simple and available through Rotary's official online platform. A valid proposal must include a clear and concise resolution statement, an endorsement from the district governor, and submission through the authorised Rotary platform. It may also include a Purpose and Effect statement explaining the need and expected impact. Only properly drafted and endorsed proposals will be considered.

When framing a proposal, it helps to focus on issues of global or multidistrict relevance, ensure the text is clear and practical, and reviews past proposals to avoid duplication. Consulting experienced CoL representatives can also strengthen your submission.

Every club and district is encouraged to begin discussions early, identify meaningful areas where Rotary can improve, and work collaboratively to prepare strong proposals. Participation in the CoR and CoL is not merely a procedural duty — it is an opportunity

to shape RI at a global level and ensure it remains relevant and progressive.

Key points to remember

- ❖ The final date to submit resolutions is June 30, 2026.
- ❖ Only Rotary clubs and districts, with the endorsement of the DG, can submit proposals through the official platform.

To make the most of this opportunity, clubs and districts should engage early with their CoL representatives, initiate meaningful discussions, and prepare thoughtful, well-drafted proposals. Participation in planned webinars and online meetings can further clarify processes and strengthen the quality of submissions. By contributing your ideas and proposals, you help shape the Rotary of tomorrow — one that continues to grow, adapt and serve with lasting impact.

A Resolution encourages action whereas an Enactment makes it a rule. A valid proposal must include: a clear and concise resolution statement, endorsement from the DG and submission through the official Rotary platform. You may include a Purpose and Effect statement explaining the need and expected impact. Only properly drafted and endorsed proposals will be considered.

Points to keep in mind

- Focus on issues with global or multidistrict relevance
- Be clear, specific and practical
- Review past proposals to avoid duplication
- Seek guidance from experienced CoL representatives

The writer is a PDG and CoL representative from RID 3192

Director speak



Youth first, Rotary forever

My dear Rotarians, Rotary stands tall as a service organisation guided by our highest ideal — *Service Above Self*. Yet, at its core, Rotary is also a membership organisation. The strength of our service, reach and future depend on how well we nurture and sustain our members. Each one of us carries the responsibility not just to serve, but to strengthen the very fabric of Rotary by uplifting our fellow members and building continuity for the years ahead.

As we reflect on this, a powerful opportunity stands before us — the vibrant world of Interact and Rotaract. These platforms are not just extensions of Rotary; they are the very foundation of its future.

As we step into May, the Youth Service month, our focus naturally turns to the young minds who will shape tomorrow. Their energy, ideas and aspirations are not just promising — they are transformative. Having begun my own journey as a Rotaractor, I say this with conviction: young people are not looking for perfection; they are looking for inspiration and encouragement.

Today's Interactors are tomorrow's Rotaractors. Today's Rotaractors are tomorrow's Rotarians. In every sense, they are our prospective members. The question we must

ask ourselves is: are we giving them the kind of inspiration they seek?

Let us go beyond engaging them as volunteers. Let us trust them with responsibility. Let us invite them into leadership roles where they can experience the true spirit of Rotary. When we do this, something remarkable happens — they don't just participate; they lead, they innovate, and they inspire.

Our role, therefore, is simple, yet profound: to make Rotary irresistible to them.

In this journey, the Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA) programme stands as a powerful catalyst. I strongly encourage every club and district leader to prioritise RYLA for the Interact and Rotaract clubs. It is not just a programme, it is an experience that shapes confidence, character and leadership at an early stage. RYLA has the power to ignite potential; often, one spark is all it takes to illuminate a lifetime.

As we move forward, let us carry this vision with clarity and conviction. Let us build momentum, strengthen our legacy, and ensure that what we pass on is not just continuity — but a stronger, more vibrant Rotary.

Together, let us continue to **Say Yes to Youth Service** — for Rotary's future begins there.

M Muruganandam

RI Director, 2025–27

Message from
TRF Trustee
Chair



A shot at the future

Our largest programme at The Rotary Foundation is PolioPlus, followed by a significant new initiative called the Rotary Healthy Communities Challenge, which emerged from the first Programs of Scale initiative in Zambia. Through this work, we are combating malaria, pneumonia, and diarrhoeal diseases — the three leading killers of children under 5 in Africa.

A healthy child still needs an education, and education is where futures are built.

Rotary is finding ways to invest in the next generation through partnerships and creative approaches. Johan Denolf, of the Rotary Club

Damme, Belgium, and Nirmal Rijal, of the Rotary Club of Kathmandu Mid-Town, Nepal, share one remarkable example:

In the mountains of Nepal, the children of Melamchi Ghyang village had no school. In 1985, a teacher named Purna Gautam set out to change that, founding a school on the promise that no child would ever be turned away. For many girls and boys, it became a lifeline against threats such as child labour, early marriage and human trafficking.

In 1999, Hilde Kuypers, a Belgian humanitarian, was so moved by Gautam's mission that she founded KetaKeti, a nonprofit, to support it. KetaKeti and the Rotary Club of Damme built a partnership while the club helped the community recover from a 2015 earthquake.

In 2024, the Rotary Club of Damme — working with the Rotary Club of Kathmandu Mid-Town and 15 clubs from Belgium and Germany, with support from District 2130 — united for around \$175,000 global grant.

The project brought solar energy to the school, eliminated dependence on firewood for cooking, powered a medical post, and launched reforestation and environmental education.

By 2025, enrolment had climbed to 440 students. Rotary clubs committed to three years of teacher salary contributions. By 2027, the school aims to be self-sustaining through an alumni fund, matched dollar-for-dollar by KetaKeti Belgium. What began as one teacher's promise has become a story of global friendship and the power of education.

Through a Rotary Foundation global grant, hundreds of Nepalese children now have a genuine shot at the future they deserve. Most remarkable of all: The school's own alumni are now helping secure that future for the next generation. That is the sustainable, generational impact Rotary endeavors to create.

There are countless such stories waiting to happen. With your commitment and The Rotary Foundation behind you, you can be part of one.

Holger Knaack
TRF Trustee Chair

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Magazine

Message from TRF Trustee



A Foundation for peace and impact

In the midst of global conflict and uncertainty The Rotary Foundation stands as a beacon of hope. With a focus on peace, our work through TRF creates conditions conducive to peace. In fact, Rotary thought about and implemented its peace-building programme over 25 years ago, long before it became ‘de rigueur’ for organisations and world agencies to incorporate peacebuilding in their activities.

Rotary’s work is aimed at positive peace through its service activities — in the seven areas of focus — that impact and change lives in our communities, and around the world. A peace mindset requires a shift in behaviour from reactive, conflict-driven attitude to a proactive, peace-oriented mindset rooted in empathy and a spirit of cooperation, collaboration, compromise and credibility. That is what Rotary’s Peace Centers and Peace Scholars programme are all about — changing behaviour and mindsets.

Increasingly TRF is looking at projects and activities that create a lasting impact in the community. Whether it is through working with farmers for water access and better harvests (through the Programs of Scale) or providing homes for the homeless, paediatric cardiac surgeries, or equipping and running medical vans across India, TRF is truly creating a great impact.

That impact becomes possible due to the generosity of Rotarians. As we enter the final part of this Rotary year it is now more important to support and invest in The Rotary Foundation. All funds are important — Annual Fund, Polio and Endowment Funds.

It has been an honour and privilege to serve on the Board of Trustees over the last four years. I am convinced that Rotarians look at TRF as their charity of choice and that is why they give to the Foundation year after year because giving to TRF is effective, efficient and transparent and does good where it is most needed.

Your generosity and dedication to helping others is truly inspiring. Thank you for your commitment to *Doing Good in the World*.

Bharat Pandya
TRF Trustee

My VP being a former Rotaractor is deliberate **Babalola**

Rasheeda Bhagat



RI President Elect Olayinka Babalola
and VP-elect M Muruganandam.

Incoming RI President Olayinka Hakeem Babalola's charm offensive begins with the easy familiarity with which he speaks to us as he strides into the Rotary News Trust office for this interview. There is neither protocol nor formality that you'd expect from the seniormost leader in any organisation.

After surprising me with his comment "we missed you at the Editors' conference in Evanston," he wonders why I didn't attend it (March 25 and 26). I explain that I was booked on Qatar Airways "and with missiles

flying all over that region my family wouldn't allow me to take that route. I did check out the alternative routes through Europe but they were too expensive."

To his raised eyebrow and unasked question, I laugh and say, "Oh, I decided that. I felt spending ₹4 lakh on the airfare was not worth it." Babalola chuckles and says: "Ok, 'it was not worth it' are the operative words!"

Continuing the banter, I respond: "My boss MMM (RI director and RNT chair M Muruganandam) is not stingy. He would have cleared the travel, but I decided not to go!"

After a bouquet is given, a celebratory cake cut, and pleasantries exchanged with a few senior RI officers who've come to meet Babalola, as we are on a strict timeline, I politely but firmly ask everybody except MMM, his vice-president for the coming year, to leave the room. Later, during the joint interview with the two, Babalola chuckles, and tells Muruganandam: "She's a strong woman, I can see!"



My VP being a former Rotaractor is not a coincidence, it's a deliberate move. It's the first time in Rotary's history; I hope the Rotaractors are excited and recognise the opportunity this gives them.

Yinka Babalola
RI President Elect

As both the incoming Prez, a member of the Rotary Club of Trans Amadi, RID 9141, Nigeria, and his VP, from the Rotary Club of Bhel City Tiruchirapalli, RID 3000, are former Rotaractors, the main question is about how they plan to rope in more Rotaractors and Interactors into Rotary to boost its membership.

"We need to be more welcoming of Rotaractors. I am the first Rotaractor to become RI President. And we are also going to have a past Rotaractor as vice-president. That was not an accident," says Babalola.

A rare coincidence, I comment. "No, it's not a coincidence, it's a deliberate move. It's the first time in Rotary's history, and I hope the Rotaractors are excited and recognise the opportunity this gives them." Also, getting youngsters into Rotary should be viewed through not only Rotaract but the entire gamut of "our youth offerings — Interact, RYLA, Youth Exchange and Rotaract. Each of these programmes delivers different experiences to young

people. Rotaract is that point where career and professional development should happen. Currently we do not have an intentional bridge between each of those programmes; in places where Interact is thriving, Rotaract is not, so when these people leave secondary school, they don't have somewhere to go, and hence we lose them. We have not made a deliberate effort to connect our RYLA programme with the Interact programme, our Youth Exchange with the RYLA or the Rotaract programme."

For instance, many Rotary Youth Exchange students go out and spend a full year or more with Rotary families, attending Rotary events. "Naturally, they expect that once they get back home, Rotary is waiting for them. But when that doesn't happen, it's a huge opportunity lost. We are working on it, and will do something about it; we have what we call a 'Grow Rotaract plan,' which was never there before.

Adds Muruganandam, "Both of us have a clear plan on getting more youngsters into Rotary. Interactors are the prospective Rotaractors, and Rotaractors are the prospective Rotarians. We know the huge, huge potential across the world, especially this part of the world, and I am going to address this opportunity. We have a plan, and coupled with Yinka's vision, we are talking about having over 125,000 Rotaractors by 2030."

While that is the corporate goal for Rotaractors; "in this part of the world, we will work on the formula 1:2:3, which we have given to all the clubs. For every Rotarian, let us think about two Rotaractors and three Interactors. Since we have huge youth potential, we don't want to miss it. Certainly, the future of Rotary lies in the hands of youth."

Also, adds the incoming VP, "Yinka telling you that my being a Rotaractor and becoming the VP is no

It's a misconception that young people don't want to do good.

I believe they want to serve and are seeking opportunities, which Rotary provides.

Yinka Babalola

coincidence, but a deliberate tactic, is by itself a strong message to the entire Rotary world. It's a strong message he wants to give to youngsters, that being a Rotaractor can take you to the position of Rotary's highest echelon of leadership. That is another big push for Rotaract."

Incidentally, apart from being former Rotaractors, both are engineers; while Babalola has over 25 years' experience in the oil and gas sector, Muruganandam has businesses in diverse sectors such as maritime logistics, energy and HR.

On how to engage the youth and make them focus, a difficult feat, Babalola says, "I think there are misconceptions there, the first being that young people don't want to do good. I believe they want to serve and are seeking opportunities to do so. And Rotary provides those opportunities; only we have yet to communicate the value proposition clearly and have not connected with them properly.





RIPE Babalola with Sumathi and Muruganandam.



Looking for competent women

We have to make our environment more inclusive for women.

An important focus area of RIPE Yinka Babalola at RI during his year will be increasing women's membership and enhancing their leadership positions. RI has around 27 per cent women as members, though some countries like Egypt have close to 50 per cent. "The Egyptians tell me that they are looking for men," he chuckles.

On a serious note, he adds, "To get more women into Rotary we have to make our environment more inclusive. A male-only environment and a mixed environment are two different things. First, we need to support women and give them opportunities to thrive. I was on the RI Board, when for the first time in 2018 it took the decision that about 30 per cent of our leadership has to be female. And every director is supposed to make that happen; as President-elect, I'm also trying to make that happen. For appointments I have to make, I'm looking for competent women. And when I see them, I give them the opportunity so that they can demonstrate what they are capable of doing."

We are seeking more women in leadership positions where only past district governors are eligible. "Governors are elected by the districts, and if districts don't select women as governors, they are shooting themselves in the foot, because when that opportunity comes, we will leave their men and choose women from other places."

Muruganandam intervenes to say that this is already happening



From L: TRF Trustee Ijeoma Pearl Okoro, RI President Francesco Arezzo's wife Anna Maria, RIPE Babalola's wife Precy Peacockba, and Theresa, wife of RID 9141 DG Anthony Woghiren.

where Babalola has to make the appointments. "For your information, he has appointed a woman — RI director Harriette Vervey from the Netherlands as the chair of RI's executive committee for 2026–27, and his admin chair is another woman... RI director Wyn Spiller from the US."

Babalola reiterates that "this is a very conscious choice. Not only for committee chairs, but also committee members, I always say: I want to see the gender balance. Not only I, but Rotary as an organisation, has been making a special effort to put women in leadership positions at different levels since we took that decision on the Board."

But, he warns, "that's not going to be enough. This same thing

needs to be done at the district, and more so, at the club levels. Because the Rotary club is where everything happens.

If our clubs are not supportive of women, particularly women of child-bearing age, nothing much can change."

To my puzzled look, he says, "Yes, young women, women of child-bearing age because at that point they are dealing with many things. I love telling stories and please allow me to tell this one."

He then relates a gripping story about a club meeting that he had attended. "I just went to a random club meeting and a lady walked in with two children. One of them was about 5, and the other was 18-month-old. The younger one was sleeping

in the stroller... sleeping beautifully. The 5-year-old was simply running about the meeting room."

He was quietly observing the Rotarians' response to this; "they did not react badly. But I've seen situations where Rotarians have said in such cases: 'Can you take this child out? This is not a play place. This is serious business. Can't you keep this child somewhere else when you come to a meeting?'"

With such an attitude, Babalola continues, women would certainly keep far away from Rotary. "Even if they join Rotary, and then get pregnant, they leave Rotary. And if the club is unlucky, they may not come back, unless they are really passionate about Rotary."

The questions which this experience raised in his mind included what if there was a speaker that day. That particular day, the club didn't have a speaker. What if the 18-month-old had got up from his sleep and started crying? How would the members have responded? The most interesting part of the story is that "after that day's meeting, the members took a good decision. They asked the hotel to give them access to the small room adjacent to the meeting hall, requested the men to bring some toys for the children, and the women decided that during every meeting, one of them will serve as a nanny to all the children. And they told the women to bring their children to the club meetings. Thus, more women started coming to the meetings."

The happy ending to this particular story is that "after a while, the men started enrolling for the nanny service, as they wanted to play with children, not just provide their toys. Because some of the older men who no longer have children at home, love the opportunity

to play. That is the kind of club women would like to join... where you know that your family will not suffer and you will not be overstressed. In fact, such clubs might be a motivation for women to come to Rotary, thinking: 'At least today I will have somebody looking after my children and I can have some peace!'"

Muruganandam endorses the push for more leadership roles for women, and says, "I've found that whenever we give opportunities to our women members, they outshine... they do an amazing job. They are committed, focused, hardworking."

His President nods in agreement, and says, "Somebody said if you want a job done, give it to a woman. I say this cautiously, but they show very little distraction compared to men!"

I am aware that Rotaractors are doing a lot of good stuff in many parts of our world. In fact, where Rotary is thriving, Rotaract is also thriving. Where Rotaract is not thriving, Rotary is not thriving. I have said that 1,001 times."

So, "we have to provide that opportunity for them to flourish and thrive. Internationally, with the *Elevate Rotaract* enactment, "we are saying a few things; we ask our regional coordinators to appoint Rotaractors into their various committees. We are beginning to have Rotaractors as assistant coordinators and currently have a Rotaractor as an assistant public image coordinator in Zone 5. This has to be replicated everywhere, at the district and club levels. We need district governors to do this and engage Rotaractors in a meaningful way and one that recognises their specific skills. It's not inviting Rotaractors to come and arrange the room. That's not what young professionals should



RIPE Babalola and VP-elect Muruganandam cutting a cake at the RNT office in Chennai.

At a glance

RIPE Babalola's response to a rapid round of questions:

Music: Afrobeat, Afropop. I love those.

Religion: I am a man of faith. I'm not very, very religious, but I believe in powers that are beyond me.

Favourite food: Beans and plantains. I can eat plantains three times a day because there are ten different ways of making plantain in our region.

Do you cook: I cook very well... to the annoyance of my wife!

Reading: Books on Philosophy. I like serious things like that... sometimes esoteric stuff that looks deeper than just what you see around you.

Favourite book: I've been reading *Mindstuck*, written by Michael McQueen, a Rotarian from Australia, where he talks about changing mindsets. It's fascinating.

Relax; movies or music: No, I don't watch movies, I don't have time! When I need to relax, when I'm tense, I burn incense. I like fragrance, as fragrance calms me. I get lots of incense from Arabia. I burn incense if I'm indoor, to calm me down. If I'm outdoor, I walk... forest walk for the fragrance from the plants.



Fitness: For fitness, I play golf, I swim when I have the opportunity. But because of my recent travels, all this is becoming a challenge so I sometimes just walk.

Travel, favourite holiday destination: I don't have any, the reason being that there are places I go and I tell myself: I'm going to come back here, but never find time to do so. But there are places where I felt at peace. For example, when I was in Nepal, somewhere close to Mount Everest, I was at peace. Dubrovnik in Croatia is beautiful; here I was sitting on a chair at one of the sea areas or the bays. And I slept off; it was so peaceful.

Dream for Rotary: Next year, I want to restore the emotional connection of Rotarians to Rotary. I've been asking Rotarians to connect to why they need to be in this organisation. If it's only transactional — you give something and you get back something... Take for eg a nanny, whose job is to take care of children; if in that group one is her own child, will you notice? Sure, you will. So the emotional connection makes a difference and I want to restore that. To many of us in Rotary, people ask: What is it about Rotary that you devote so much time, money, everything to it. Well, it's that emotional connection.

be doing. We have to find and leverage their skills.”

Muruganandam adds another dimension when he says, “What is more important for Rotarians to know is how visible are we to the Rotaractors. We have a huge story to tell but we have to tell it to them in a proper way, so that they can hear it. We have to tell that story better and let them know that here we have on offer a network, leadership and service, which is open to them. Then they will certainly get it... the kind of opportunities that are open to them in our organisation.”

Nodding in agreement Babalola reiterates the importance of creating a welcoming atmosphere for Rotaractors to join Rotary. He says that after 10 years in Rotaract, all the Rotarians in his city knew him. “When I was going to join Rotary as a Rotaractor, I walked into my Rotary club meeting. And the club president looked at me and

Rotarians should be visible to Rotaractors, and tell the huge story of Rotary to them in a way they can hear it, and know we have on offer a network, leadership and service.

M Muruganandam
Vice President-elect

said, ‘Rotaractor, what are you doing here today?’ And I said: ‘Mr President, I have come to join Rotary.’ The whole room turned and looked at me. ‘What? What audacity? What is wrong with this young man? Is that how you join Rotary? Look at that. Don’t you know Rotary is by invitation?’ I’ve told that story many times.”

The young man stood his ground and said calmly: “I never knew that a child needed an invitation to come into his parents’ home. But a Rotarian spoke up that day for me, and that’s how I became a Rotarian. We need to be open and demonstrate to the young people that Rotary is a place where they belong and are valued.”

This incident happened in 1993; have things changed now, I quiz both the leaders. While Muruganandam says, “Yes, drastically,” the incoming president says, “No. MMM is talking about what he is seeing here (in our region). Yes, I agree that Rotary has changed a lot since then. But are all Rotary clubs very open and welcoming? The answer is no.”

Did he mean places in Europe or the US? “Not anywhere. Not even in all Rotary clubs in India. Not in Nigeria. But not all Rotary clubs are like that. There are Rotary clubs that have accepted Rotaractors. Take for example MMM! He was a Rotaractor and is now a Rotarian; there is no way he would have come so far if his Rotary club would not have wanted Rotaractors. The same thing is true of my club, and a few clubs like that. But there are still Rotary clubs which are not as open, and not just for Rotaractors, for young people entirely.”

We next come to the question of how closely the President and the VP work, and the need for a good rapport. “Very closely,” Babalola smiles. “Absolutely... we need to have a good rapport. The body chemistry is important, and that is why it is the President



The spouse's role



RIPE Babalola (centre) with his wife Precy.

Yinka Babalola's wife Precy is a member of RC Port Harcourt Passport, and along with her husband, is an AKS member. He first met her at a Rotaract club meet. So, what kind of role did she play in his leadership journey in Rotary, I ask him. "When I addressed the spouses' session at the International Assembly, I told them that when I had attended the IA as governor, I assumed that as my spouse was a Rotaractor, the first female president of a Rotaract club and married to a Rotarian, she knows everything about Rotary. So life should be easy for her."

But a past district governor in Nigeria warned him on his return that nothing ever

prepares a spouse for a Rotarian's year as governor. "The truth of the matter is this... Rotary leadership is very demanding, and you have only 24 hours in a day, anywhere in the world. If you are going to deliver on the demands of leadership, somebody else needs to do some of the things you used to do. That naturally falls on your spouse. If you have a spouse like I had, who understands what the deliverables are, life is easier. And please note Rasheeda, I said life is easier; I didn't say life is easy!"

He adds that "she's a past president of a club, a past assistant governor, and I'm very grateful that Precy is my spouse."

Whenever we give opportunities to our women members, they outshine... they do an amazing job. They are committed, focused, hardworking.

M Muruganandam

who proposes who the VP should be. The bylaws state simply that the VP will do the duties as assigned by the President or when the President is not available. In case that the President becomes incapacitated, the VP goes in as President." He then chuckles and adds: "But I can tell you this VP will have a lot of work to do."

On the qualities that led Babalola to choose Muruganandam as his VP, and the latter's strengths, he says, "Courage. Tenacity. Also, we both share something else; a passion to grow Rotary. I have a record of growing Rotary in my part of the world. He has a record of supporting the growth of Rotary in his part of the world. And in 2026–27, we have a very ambitious goal of growing Rotary across the world. My desire, my aspiration, my goal is that for the first time in many years, Rotary's membership should grow. So, he has a lot of work to do!"

When I comment that at 52, his VP certainly has the energy to achieve this goal, Babalola says, "More than energy, he has the passion. Because you may have energy and not have passion. Both are required. He has the energy, he has the passion, and I don't know if he realises it himself... I see him as somebody who is driven. When I say this is what we need to do, he



understands and I don't need to talk too much about it!"

When I apologise and tell him that despite time running out, I had to ask him one last question on the possibility of Rotary emerging as a peacebuilder in our fractured world,

Imagine our Peace Fellows or Rotarians working in the White House. And in Iran and Israel, or Qatar and other places involved in negotiation. Even when governments don't trust each other, the Rotarians will.

Yinka Babalola

particularly in the background of the US-Israel attacks on Iran, Babalola smiles and says, "Oh, don't mind him (MMM, who has signalled to me the time is over and they have to leave!), after all, you are talking to his President!"

Coming to the question, he says many people have asked him "whether Rotary could play the role of mediator. But as an organisation, I don't think we are built for that. But as a people, we can do much more, because at every side of a conflict, there are Rotarians. And if our Rotarians have the capacity to build peace, which is what Rotary as an organisation is doing, then perhaps things may not go as bad. We can fix things before they get to the point of escalation and become a war."

Giving the example of what is happening in the Middle East, he says, "Just imagine that you have our Peace Fellows, or Rotarians, working in the White House. Imagine you have them on the Iranian side, or in Israel, or Qatar and others who are involved in the negotiation. Then, even when the governments don't trust each other, we will have people who trust one another because of

their membership in Rotary, and they can come to an agreement more easily."

The incoming President believes that in conflict situations Rotary needs to do two things; "leverage our Peace Fellows, and I'm happy that we have our Peace Centers and many of our Peace Fellows are undertaking social change initiatives. They are doing a lot of work, and all of it is related to peace. I hope that as Rotarians we think about the pillars of positive peace and ask ourselves what can we do to engender peace and create lasting impact. Can we influence our governments to take policy decisions that enhance or strengthen the pillars of peace? These are the ways in which we can influence the emergence of a more peaceful world."

He feels much more can be done; "I believe we are not doing enough; we need to do more. And, I must say that Rotary must never take sides in any conflict, because we will always have Rotarians on both sides."

Pictures by Rasheeda Bhagat and special arrangement

Designed by N Krishnamurthy

Clubs must better their past best

V Muthukumaran

Check out the past performances of your Rotary clubs in the last 7–10 years, and “better that best year so far by setting clear goals for creating a lasting impact in your communities,” said RIPE Olayinka Babalola, addressing presidents-elect at a Joint PELS of RIDs 3191 and 3192 in Bengaluru.

The club presidents must always remember that their tenure will come to an end on June 30, 2027, and only two things can happen from here: “Either you feel quite relieved of your responsibility the next morning, seeing no emails, or can be happy and smiling that you have made your club a much better one by growing it... the choice is yours.” Citing the Rotary Vision Statement, he said, “if you believe Rotary has transformed you, your business and family life, then put it all in writing after thinking it through, and pass on that change to rest of your club members.”

He advised the incoming club presidents not to recall Rotary’s history from 1905, going back to its founder Paul Harris in Evanston, when anybody asked them what Rotary was all about. “Just tell your personal story; of how your life was transformed by Rotary, and suggest joining it if they want similar positive changes in their lives.” As club leaders, they have to give opportunities to members for “Rotary to make life-changing impact in their lives.”

Rotary clubs must compete with themselves, rather than be driven by external factors, and set growth targets for the year, he said. “We have a target to become a 1.25 million-strong Rotary by 2030. Set yourself on fire

for a spontaneous combustion; go out, better your best. We need India to grow Rotary,” added Babalola.

Listing out three simple rules of life, RI director KP Nagesh said, “If you don’t go after what you want, you will never have it; if you don’t ask, the answer will always be no; and if you don’t step forward, you will always be in the same place.” He urged club presidents to “select the right person for the right job, use the right tools for execution, and appreciate your members for their contributions.”

Rotarians are all winners in life, “as they convert problems into opportunities to achieve. Plan, execute quickly, and don’t postpone your work and projects.” Aim big to achieve big, he said, “starting with having your own

club building, ensuring new clubs have 40-plus members, have their own trust supported by CSR funds, all Rotarians are PHF members, and at least 33 per cent are women.” All clubs must embrace the 1:2:3 formula that would grow Rotary, and also ensure more Rotaractors join Rotary clubs, Nagesh added.

RID 3191 had conducted over 15 Pre-PELS to train presidents-elect. “Our target is to induct 10 new clubs and add 500 new members,” said DGE Anil Gupta. At present, they have 92 clubs. In August, the district will launch a VTT mission (GG: \$40,000) that will provide hands-on training to four spine and neurosurgeons from Africa at the Aster Whitefield Hospital for one year. Over 100 depleted ponds



V Muthukumaran

will be rejuvenated in the Kolar region to enable the storage of 100 billion litres of water and the recharging of groundwater. The project worth ₹5 crore will be funded by a mix of CSR and global grants. RID 3191 clubs will do service projects worth ₹20 crore, and Gupta has a TRF-giving target of \$2 million. Around 10 GG projects are in the pipeline.

Collective leadership

RID 3192 DGE Ravishankar Dakoju's theme for his term is titled '*Dhanyavad* — Gratitude in Action'. "We believe in collective leadership and a borderless world. We dare to dream big and will execute programmes under three verticals in *Project Dhanyavad*."

Over one million trees will be planted across RI districts in India; in partnership with Water for Voiceless, an NGO, the district will install 10,000 water bowls for protecting pet animals and birds; and give basic education to

tribals in five schools being run by the NGO Friends of Tribals Society. This NGO is running over a lakh schools educating forest tribals across India, said Dakoju.

RID 3192 has tied up with various NGOs to hold workshops for elderly care, and will campaign against drug abuse. "Under DEI initiatives, 10 cabs and 10 autorickshaws will be given to transgenders, and a multidistrict Paralympics will be conducted," he said. "Apart from service projects worth ₹15 crore, around 20 GG programmes will be done. We have set an ambitious target of \$7 million for TRF-giving," he said.

Recalling the work already done, RID 3191 DG Sridhar BR pointed out a 24 per cent growth in membership, with induction of 689 new Rotarians, taking the total to 3,625. "We will add 13 more clubs, taking the number to 110 by June 30. Retention of 94 per cent of existing members, and 97 per cent of new Rotarians was achieved

with women's membership standing at 22 per cent," he said.

So far, RID 3191 clubs have done service projects worth ₹21 crore, CSR-funded initiatives of \$1 million, and 12 GG programmes are in various stages of implementation. "We have provided milch cows to 300 rural women through a ₹3 crore GG, to provide sustainable livelihood to them," he said. The district has reached the mark of \$1 million so far in TRF-giving."

Under the leadership of DG Elizabeth Cherian, RID 3192 has added 540 new members, taking the total to 3,790. The aim is to cross the 4,000 membership mark by June-end. "We are carrying forward a huge legacy that includes four Rotary blood banks, two skill development centres, 15 dialysis centres, helping over 200 schools, rejuvenating over 10 lakes and ponds, and now running over 10 mobile clinics," she explained.

Moreover, her member engagement initiatives for clubs such as *Chai-pe-Charcha*, Rotary Quiz, online Kannada classes, and wellness programmes have created a bond among Rotarians.

PDG S Nagendra was the event chair; PDGs Satish Madhavan (3191) and Srinivas Murthy (3192) were the learning facilitators. EMGA Sam Movva (Zone-7) presented Endowment Challenge Awards to RID 3131 DG Santhosh Marathe and RID 3150 DG Raam Prasad; Annual Fund 50:50 Milestone Awards to seven RI districts of the zone. ■



RIPE Olayinka Babalola at the Joint PELS of RIDs 3191 and 3192 in Bengaluru. From L: PDG Satish Madhavan, DG Elizabeth Cherian, DGE Ravishankar Dakoju, PDG S Nagendra, RI Director KP Nagesh, DGE Anil Gupta, DG Sridhar BR and PDG Srinivas Murthy.

Babalola witnesses Rotary in action at VHS

Kiran Zehra



VHS CEO Suresh Seshadhri welcomes RIPE Olayinka Babalola. DG Vinod Saraogi, RI Director M Muruganandam and PRID PT Prabhakar are also seen in the picture.

Seated beneath a shed where the trunk of a sprawling banyan tree rises through the roof, a pregnant woman waits quietly at the Rotary Central TTK VHS (Voluntary Health Services) Blood Bank in Chennai. Every now and then, she calls out to her five-year-old daughter, who is absorbed in the delight of climbing up and sliding down a slide in the play area near the waiting area.

Referred from a hospital in Adyar, she has come to receive blood to manage iron deficiency during her second pregnancy. One hand resting gently on her stomach, she says, “Here, the process is straightforward and free. It was easy to apply and receive the blood. We didn’t have to spend anything. Since treatment at a private hospital is expensive, we came here.” Her daughter continues to play, untouched by the weight of their circumstance. This care

and dignity are exactly what RIPE Olayinka Babalola had come to witness in action.

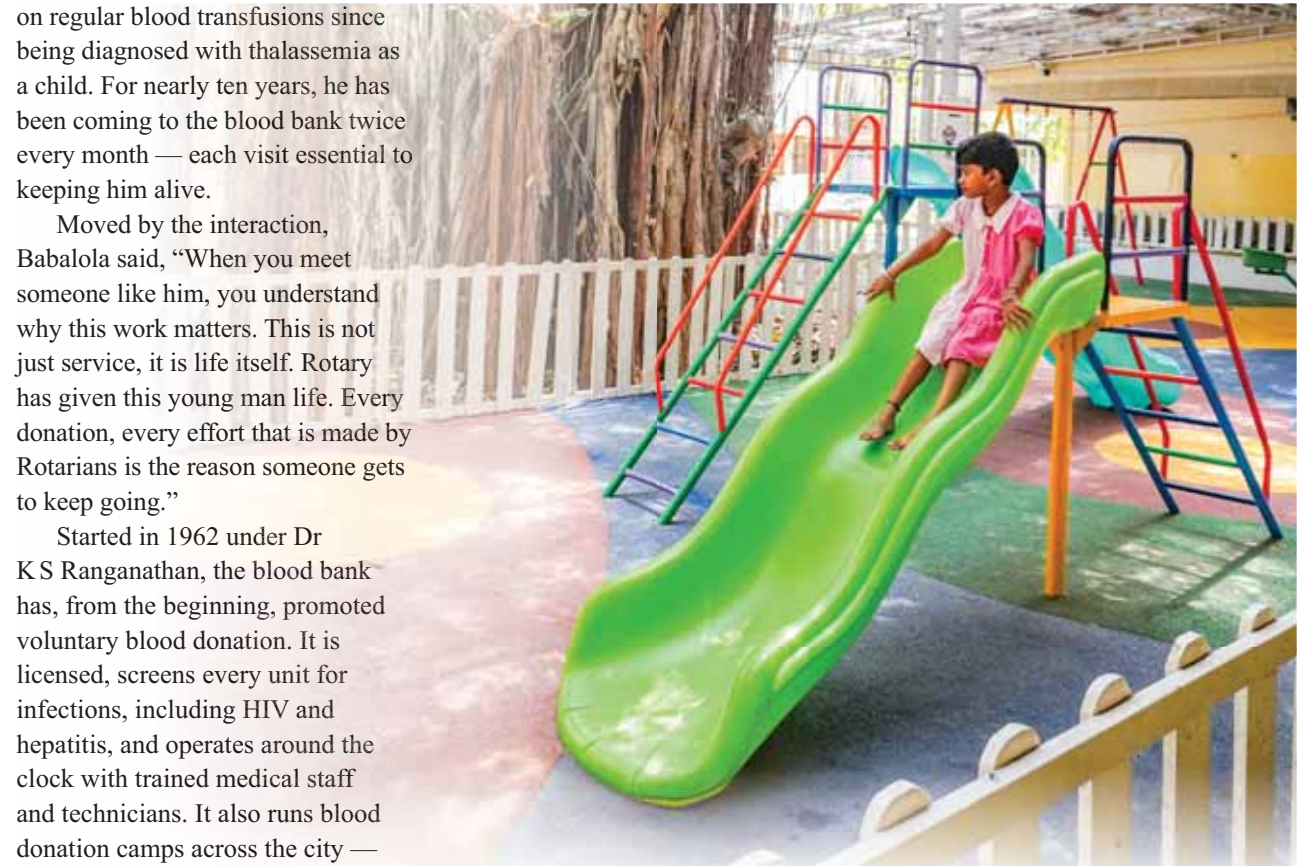
Over the years, other Rotary clubs, including Chennai Thiruvanniyur and Madras East, have contributed equipment, upgraded operating theatres, and supported diagnostic services, strengthening VHS’s ability to serve low-income communities.

During his visit, Babalola met a 20-year-old who has depended

on regular blood transfusions since being diagnosed with thalassemia as a child. For nearly ten years, he has been coming to the blood bank twice every month — each visit essential to keeping him alive.

Moved by the interaction, Babalola said, “When you meet someone like him, you understand why this work matters. This is not just service, it is life itself. Rotary has given this young man life. Every donation, every effort that is made by Rotarians is the reason someone gets to keep going.”

Started in 1962 under Dr K S Ranganathan, the blood bank has, from the beginning, promoted voluntary blood donation. It is licensed, screens every unit for infections, including HIV and hepatitis, and operates around the clock with trained medical staff and technicians. It also runs blood donation camps across the city — 167 camps in a single year, collecting nearly 15,000 units. Its services are structured around access. Blood and components are given free to patients with haemophilia and thalassemia, regardless of income. General ward



Above: A child riding a slide at the play area in the blood bank.

Below: RIPE Babalola interacts with a thalassemia patient as PRID PT Prabhakar and Vinod Saraogi look on.

patients receive blood at subsidised rates.

Much of this capacity has been strengthened through Rotary’s long association with VHS. In the 1990s, a three-way partnership between VHS, the Rotary Club of Madras Central, and TTK helped modernise the blood bank. Rotary secured a \$300,000 grant for equipment, raised additional funds, and contributed to building the current 8,000sq ft facility. VHS provided the land and continues to run and staff the centre, while TTK supported equipment and operations. PRID PT Prabhakar, who was closely involved in setting up the facility, and who briefed Babalola on the details, describes it as “a partnership built on shared responsibility.”

RI Director M Murganandam, DG Vinod Saraogi and PDG J Sridhar accompanied Babalola. ■



The event, 'Lights on Rotaract — a fireside chat with RIPE Yinka Babalola' put the spotlight on issues such as the smooth transition from being a Rotaractor to an active Rotarian, global grant projects for Rotaract clubs, and what 'measurable impact' Rotaractors can bring to Rotary across the world. The event was led by PDRR Karthik Kittu, past member, RI Rotaract-Interact Committee and past president of RC Bangalore Southwest.

Addressing around 30 Rotaractors from RIDs 3191 and 3192, on the sidelines of the two-day Joint PELS for incoming

Rotaractors must do GG projects: RIPE

V Muthukumaran

Rotary club presidents, Babalola said, "now you should take up GG projects, but ensure that you match the eligibility criteria and the TRF guidelines. If Rotaract clubs don't meet these conditions, they can either combine with their sponsor or other Rotary clubs to qualify for the GG." If Rotaractors can come up with "a good,

sustainable and impactful project, the district governors can allocate DDFs (district funds) too," he said.

When RSAMDIO general secretary Kiran SHS asked, "how to reposition Rotaract globally as an equal partner of Rotary," he replied, "many Rotaractors are already in regional RI Boards,

and their numbers will continue to increase in the coming years." (RID 3192 DRR Janice Philip is assistant Rotary Public Image Coordinator of Zone-7)

Welcoming Babalola, the first Rotaractor-turned-Rotary President Elect, PDRR Kittu, flagged off three issues needing clarity and direction from the



RIPE Olayinka Babalola at an interactive session with Rotaractors in Bengaluru. From L (seated): RSAMDIO past president PDRR Karthik Kittu, RID 3191 DGE Anil Gupta, RI Director K P Nagesh and RID 3192 DGE Ravishankar Dakoju.

RI leadership. First, Rotaractors have scale, energy and execution skills, “but we need a structured pathway for transition into Rotary.” Second, Rotaract is ready for TRF-giving, and collaborate with Rotary in all possible manner; and third, “we also want to implement our RI directors’ 1:2:3 formula to boost Rotary’s growth in India.”

Replying to the issues raised, Babalola said, “Rotarians are inspired by the Rotaract clubs. At the same time, Rotarians should act as mentors for a smooth transition of the youth in the Rotary world.” The grooming of future Rotarians starts very early from being an Interactor, then taking part in RYLAs, joining a

Rotaract club, and then moving onto Rotary Youth Exchange etc. He urged the Rotaractors to access the Learning Centre on *My Rotary* portal for regular updates on the latest developments.

Mindset change

RI director K P Nagesh said, “we need a change of mindset from both Rotarians and Rotaractors to meet our Rotary objectives.” Rotaractors must work in tandem with their sponsoring clubs and Rotarians to build a strong Rotary world in the next five years, he said.

RID 3192 DGE Ravishankar Dakoju said India has the largest youth population in the world, “nearly 70 per cent of them are below 35. We

are ready to partner with the Rotaract clubs, and get inspired by them.” DGE Anil Gupta, RID 3191, expressed his readiness to loosen the DDF purse for Rotaract projects, “if they are viable and sustainable meeting the district norms. We can together apply for a GG if a Rotaract project falls under the TRF framework.”

RIPE Babalola launched *Yuva Udaan*, a web-based App platform, for grooming young Rotaractors into Rotary leaders across RI districts in India. DRRs Karthik Chikmath (3191), Janice Philip (3192), DRREs Anirudh Kulkarni (3191), Sanjay R (3192), and PDRR Naveen Senna (3190) were present at the chat session with the incoming President.

First AKS Rotaract clubs

For the Rotary year 2026–27, all Rotaract clubs across India will mobilise \$125,000 for TRF-giving. “DGE Dakoju has assured that he will match it up with another \$125,000, so that Indian Rotaract clubs will get AKS membership by the time of the 2027 RI Convention,” Kittu told *Rotary News*.

He has prepared a draft note titled, ‘How Rotaractors can become early contributors to TRF. Not by obligation, but by belief’ for circulation among Rotary clubs, GMLs and Rotary magazines across the world.

Picture by Muthukumaran

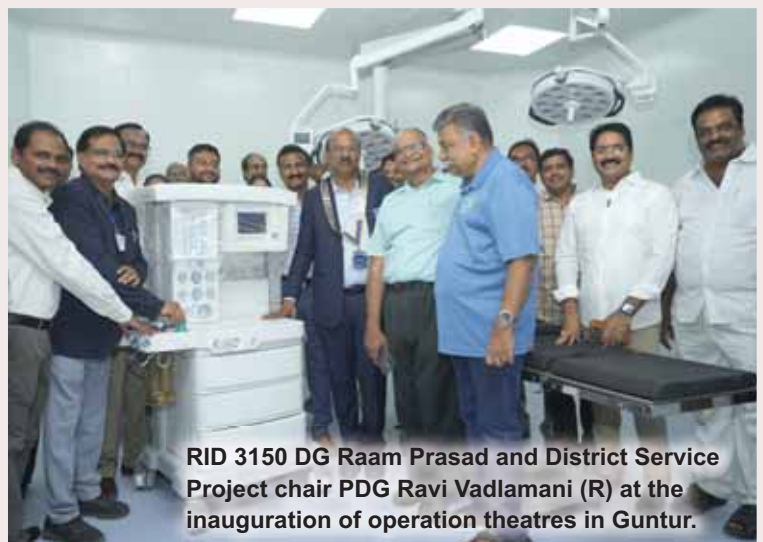
Rotary OTs at Govt Hospital, Guntur

Team Rotary News

Two modular operating theatres (OTs) were set up at the newly constructed Mother and Child Block of the Government Hospital by RC Guntur, RID 3150, through a GG project (₹75 lakh).

RC Stockton Sunrise, RID 5220, US, is the global partner. The OTs will be used by paediatric surgeons for treating birth defects of newborns, and the facility was named Sagireddy Rotary Paediatric Surgical Complex.

DG SV Raam Prasad inaugurated the new facility in the presence of District Service Projects chair PDG Ravi Vadlamani, hospital superintendent Dr SSV Ramana and Paediatric Surgery HOD Dr Jayapal. ■



RID 3150 DG Raam Prasad and District Service Project chair PDG Ravi Vadlamani (R) at the inauguration of operation theatres in Guntur.

Babalola lays down ambitious goal for Rotary

Team Rotary News

RI President-elect Olayinka Babalola, accompanied by RI Director KP Nagesh, began his visit to Chandigarh with a brunch meeting with Usha and PRIP Rajendra Saboo at their residence.

Later, he addressed incoming club leaders at the Presidents and Secretaries-elect Learning Seminar (PELS and SELS) held at Zirakpur, on the foothills of the Shivalik range in Mohali district, near Chandigarh.

“For Rotary to grow, all Rotarian must be able to tell their stories — how Rotary has impacted or transformed them,” he said, urging leaders to strive for excellence in advancing Rotary’s ambitious Vision 2030. The goal is to reach 1.25 million Rotarians and 125,000 Rotaractors worldwide by 2030, marking Rotary’s 125th anniversary.

Babalola commended RID 3080’s initiatives for the coming Rotary year, announced by DGE Rita Kalra. These include AI functional literacy for youth in the Chandigarh Tricity, entrepreneurship opportunities



From R: RIPE Olayinka Babalola, PRIP Rajendra Saboo and RI Director KP Nagesh at the PELS of RID 3080.



RIPE Babalola and RID Nagesh being welcomed by RID 3056 DG Arun Bagadia (centre) and RID 3012 PDG Sharat Jain (L) in Jaipur.

for women, expansion of Happy Schools, and health programmes focusing on TB elimination, cervical cancer awareness, and mobile screening for non-communicable diseases.

A special postal cover commemorating his visit was released by the Chandigarh postal

department. The seminar, organised by DGE Rita along with PDG Arun Mongia, brought together over 500 club leaders from Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

In Jaipur, Babalola and Nagesh participated in the PELS of RID 3056 and attended a dinner hosted

at the iconic Rambagh Palace, in the company of DG Arun Bagadia, PDGs Ajay Kala and Balwant Chirana, RID 3012 DG Amita Mohindru and PDG Sharat Jain.

The incoming RI President was captivated by Jaipur's architectural splendour, including the famed Hawa Mahal and other heritage landmarks, during a city tour hosted by DG Arun Bagadia.

The Rotary leaders also attended the PELS and SELS hosted by DGE Amit Gupta of RID 3012.

Traditional Rajasthani folk performances, soulful music and the rhythmic beats of the grand *naubat* created a vibrant and memorable cultural evening.

Addressing the presidents and secretaries-elect, Babalola emphasised purposeful service, strong leadership, and the importance of creating sustainable change through Rotary initiatives to ensure lasting impact. PRID Raju Subramanian also addressed the session. ■



RID 3012 DG Amit Gupta and his wife Swati present a memento to RIPE Babalola as RID Nagesh looks on.

Membership Summit sets the course for Vision 2030

Jaishree

The joint Membership Summit of RI districts 3231, 3233 and 3234, held in Chennai during the India visit of RIPE Olayinka Babalola, was a call to action for the incoming district and club leaders to draw plans to strengthen Rotary's membership. With Rotary's ambitious Vision 2030 — targeting 1.25 million Rotarians and 125,000 Rotaractors by the organisation's 125th anniversary — the summit urged the DGEs to begin work immediately to expand and strengthen membership.

Babalola set the tone with urgency and clarity. "We cannot wait till July 1 to start. We need to start now," he said, stressing early collaboration between incoming leaders and current

governors. He reminded the DGEs that while their year in office is significant, humility and long-term relationships matter more. "You will be governor for one year, and PDG for life. So please do not ruin the life possibilities with one year of perseverance."

Drawing from Rotary's vision statement and his presidential message, *Create Lasting Impact*, he challenged Rotarians to shift their perspective inward. "As members we've been creating lasting change across the globe through our Polio eradication programme, the peace centres where we equip people with skills to build peace, and our various global grant projects. Now I want you to ponder how Rotary has changed you as a Rotarian," he said, emphasising that personal transformation stories are key

to meaningful membership growth. "For Rotary to grow, every Rotarian must be able to tell that story."

Through deeply personal anecdotes, he illustrated Rotary's unseen value. Recalling a Rotarian whose daughter's life was saved through the timely financial support of fellow members, he said, "Rotary has a way of showing up quietly, silently, when it matters most." Sharing his own experience of receiving unexpected help in securing a visa, he reinforced that Rotary gives in ways beyond service: "It's also okay to receive... your Rotary connection has opened doors for you in many places."

He cautioned against impersonal narratives when speaking about Rotary. "Very boring stuff," he remarked about statistics-heavy introductions. "Because for you it maybe something. But it may not impress a layman." Instead, he urged members to connect emotionally. "You can start by saying, for me, this is how Rotary has transformed me. And tell your story."

Stressing on inclusivity and club culture, Babalola recalled his own near rejection from Rotary due to an unwelcoming club. He called on



From L: DGEs D Suresh Jain and TS Ravikumar, his wife Kavitha, Usha Saraogi, Shalini Duvvuri, Sumathi and RI Director M Muruganandam, RIPE Olayinka Babalola, PRID AS Venkatesh, his wife Vinita, and DGE Shriram Duvvuri.



RIPE Babalola presents Citation for Meritorious Service to PDG J Sridhar and his wife Punitha. From R: Director Muruganandam, PRID Venkatesh and DG Vinod Saraogi are also present.

leaders to be especially mindful of Rotaractors. “Let us value them for the skills they possess. Let us not be asking them to do basic things, or look at them as small boys and girls who have come to enjoy free food.”

On membership targets, he simplified the seemingly ambitious goal. Referring to RI director M Muruganandam’s call for adding 10,000 members every year for the next four years, he noted, “We are simply asking that every club have a net gain of just two members! That’s a very easy target. Any club that

does not bring a new member has a destined handshake with extinction. Every new member is an asset, a resource, a new fund raiser.” He urged the district leaders to better their best and “stop saying Rotary is declining. You don’t see a decline in your region. Yes, it is... in some part of the world; but we’ll change that.”

With data-driven details and a structured roadmap, RID Muruganandam explained the Red-Amber-Green (RAG) classification of clubs based on membership strength. “To achieve our goal, push the Red clubs to Amber, and Amber to Green,” he said, noting that nearly 43 per cent of clubs in India are in the Red category (below 25 members), and 35 per cent in Green (25–50 members).

He outlined a comprehensive seven-point agenda, anchored in a “1:2:3 formula” — adding 100 Rotary, 200 Rotaract and 300 Interact clubs, alongside 100 new RCCs. This, he said, would result in “a net growth of 10,000 Rotarians and 10,000 Rotaractors each year for the next four years.” He also called for increasing women’s membership by 5 per cent and projected that “India will give 40 per cent contribution to world Rotary membership.”

Highlighting a major gap, he pointed out that of the 4,963 Rotary clubs in India, nearly 3,000 clubs had not chartered even one Rotaract club, and 3,800 had not started an Interact club. “So, we are not bothering about youth,” he observed bluntly, urging immediate corrective action.

Striking an optimistic note the director highlighted India’s strong performance globally. “Zone 5 tops the world in membership performance,” he said, detailing achievements in new clubs and member additions.

PRID AS Venkatesh highlighted the challenge of retention. “Every year, Rotary inducts 150,000 Rotarians. But the net growth is not even 4,000,” he said, pointing out the high attrition rates. “Let’s also make sure that those who are in, stay inside Rotary.”

PRIDs PT Prabhakar and Mahesh Kotbagi extended their support to DGEs TS Ravikumar (3231), Shriram Duvvuri (3233) and D Suresh Jain (3234), while they shared their action plans aligned with Vision 2030.

The Rotary clubs of RID 3233 contributed \$100,000 to TRF commemorating the RIPE’s visit. Babalola presented the Citation for Meritorious Service to PDG J Sridhar. ■



Babalola visits India



Above: RIPE Olayinka Babalola and RI Director K P Nagesh with PRIP Rajendra Saboo and Usha at the latter's residence in Chandigarh.



RID 3056 DG Arun Bagadia welcomes RIPE Babalola and RID Nagesh in Jaipur.

Below: RIPE Babalola and RID M Muruganandam at a Rotary cervical cancer vaccination camp in Madurai. Sumathi is seen on the right. RID 3000 DG J Karthik (third from R) and DGE Subramani Ramanujam (third from L) are also present.





RIPE Babalola and RI Director Nagesh with RID 3080 DGE Rita Kalra and PDGs Jitendra Dhingra and Arun Mongia.

Below:

From L: PRID Mahesh Kotbagi, RIPE Babalola, Publisher of *Rotary News* PRID P T Prabhakar, RID 3234 PDG J Sridhar and RID Muruganandam at the RNT office, Chennai.



RIPE Babalola being given a grand welcome in Madurai.



RIPE Babalola with PRID AS Venkatesh





PDG Balwant Singh Chirana, his wife Dheeraj Kanwar, DG Bagadia, RID Nagesh, RIPE Babalola, PDG Sharat Jain and Ruchika, Poonam Bagadia and PDG Ajay Kala in Jaipur.

Below: RIPE Babalola interacting with students after distributing school essentials to them in Jaipur.



Above: RID Muruganandam and PRID C Basker present a memento to RIPE Babalola at the membership summit in Madurai. Sumathi Muruganandam (L) and PDG C Sivagnanaselvam are also seen.



PDRR Sasikumar takes a selfie with RIPE Babalola and RID Muruganandam at Chennai.



Above: RIPE Babalola shakes a leg with RID Nagesh and PDG Sharat Jain (3012). Poonam Bagadia is seen on the left.

Left: RIPE Babalola tries his hand on the drum in Jaipur, as RID 3012 DG Amit Gupta, RID Nagesh and Swati Gupta enjoy the moment.

More stories on RIPE Babalola's India visit in the next issue.

A Chepauk roar, inside a room

Kiran Zehra

When RIPE Olayinka Babalola walked into the auditorium of MGR Janakiammal College in Chennai, the Rotaractors of RID 3234 were up on their feet, waving, clapping and whistling. “Babalola in the auditorium is no less than Dhoni in Chepauk Stadium,” said IPDRR Sasi Kumar and it did not feel like an exaggeration. “This is because he didn’t arrive as a distant global leader. He is one of us,” he added.

“It is a pleasure to be here, and I thank Vice President (elect) MMM (M Muruganandam) for organising this opportunity for you to meet me, a fellow Rotaractor. There is a saying in my country: if you have the right teacher, you cannot go wrong. You

have MMM, someone who has been a Rotaractor himself, and with a mentor like that, you are on the right path,” noted Babalola.

Appreciating the work Rotaract is doing in the district, he said, “I’ve seen your project videos, and your contribution to The Rotary Foundation is remarkable.” DRR Sathish Kumar later told *Rotary News* that the district Rotaractors have contributed \$86,389 by April 17 to TRF. Shifting the focus to what lies ahead, the RIPE asked, “Rotary in India is growing. Rotaract is growing. But is it growing enough?”

He pointed out that India currently has around 49,000 Rotaractors and accounts for nearly 30 percent of the global Rotaract strength, “an achievement many would celebrate. But I am not impressed.” Referring to India’s population of 1.4 billion, he said, “even a small fraction of Indians in the 18–30 age group should translate into at least 2 lakh Rotaractors.”

Answering a question from a Rotaractor: “Is Rotary really listening to its youth?” RI Director Muruganandam replied: “The scenario today is not like how it was

20 years ago. Today, Rotaractors are not just participants, they are being integrated into leadership. The system itself is evolving. The appointment of a Rotaractor as an Assistant Rotary Public Image Coordinator (RID 3192 DRR Janice Philip), a first in Rotary history, isn’t symbolic, it is structural. We know the power of youth... we would like to really cultivate, motivate and invite more Rotaractors into the Rotary world.”

Babalola added, “Rotary is beginning to listen. Since *Elevate Rotaract*, there has been a deliberate push to bring Rotaractors into Rotary’s decision-making spaces across levels, across geographies. Not as future leaders, but as present ones.”

Giving them a glimpse of his “interesting interview with the *Rotary News* Editor,” he said, “I have told your editor I want to hear more Rotaract stories. Because listening, in the end, isn’t about policies or positions. It’s about whose stories are told and who gets to tell them.”

DG Vinod Saraogi, PDG J Sridhar, DRR Sathish Kumar and DRRE Vignesh Chandran were present at the event. ■



From L: RID M Muruganandam, RIPE Olayinka Babalola, PDG J Sridhar, DG Vinod Saraogi, DRR Sathish Kumar, DRRE Vignesh Chandran and PDRR Sasi Kumar.

MMM appointed Campaign Chair of Paul & Jean Harris Legacy Society



From L: RI Director KP Nagesh, RIPE Olayinka Babalola, RID M Muruganandam, RI President Francesco Arezzo, RIDs Wyn Spiller and Jennifer A Scott, RI treasurer Patrick Eakes, RID Harriette Verwey and PDG Irv Kaplan (seated), Chair of Rotary Global History Fellowship.

RI Director M Muruganandam has been appointed Campaign Chair of the Paul and Jean Harris Legacy Society for 2026–27. The Legacy Society is an exclusive circle limited to 23 people who will contribute \$250,000 towards the renovation of the home of Rotary’s founder Paul Harris and his spouse Jean in Chicago.

Earlier in October, at a special dinner hosted in Evanston by RI and the Paul and Jean Harris Home Foundation, Muruganandam was recognised as the Society’s first member to contribute this amount.

During 2026–27, he will also assume the responsibilities of RI Vice President. ■

In view of the current security situation in the Gulf region and uncertainties around international travel, the RI Board has decided to shift the venue for the 2027 RI Convention from Dubai to Barcelona, Spain. The Convention will be hosted at the Fira de Barcelona on June 26–30, 2027. Barcelona, initially chosen to host the 2029 Convention, has previously hosted the event in 2002.

Registration for the 2027 Convention in Barcelona will open in September 2026, a few months after the 2026 Convention in Taipei in June.

For more information, please refer: <https://my.rotary.org/en/barcelona-spain-selected-host-2027-rotary-convention>.

rotary.org

Barcelona to host 2027 RI Convention



The cascading benefits of a *Rotary News* article

Rasheeda Bhagat

What can be more gratifying than finding a mail in your inbox saying that your article published in *Rotary News* has resulted in a dilapidated school building in a Karnataka village not only getting renovated with structural repairs, water proofing, a fresh coat of paint, but the children also getting got brand new furniture, school bags and uniforms?

Such a mail, which came in last fortnight from Janet Yegneswaran, past president, RC Bangalore Koramangala, said all this, and more, after thanking me for publishing in October 2024 the article *This Rotarian is on a greening spree*. (<https://rotarynewsonline.org/this-rotarian-is-on-a-greening-spre/>). A champion of greening our planet, Janet has been instrumental in planting nearly 100,000 trees in

Karnataka, mainly Bengaluru and also Tamil Nadu. These trees have given succour to the victims of natural disasters, creating a 'food forest' on barren land, and her work led to the forging of a partnership with the Bosch India Foundation, which put her in charge of a community development centre supported by it in the Anekal region of Karnataka, which operates in some 30 villages. This centre works mainly in areas such as children's education and women's empowerment.

During her rounds in Anekal, about 30km from Bengaluru, she came across a village primary school with around 100 children, which was in a dilapidated condition and required renovation, school furniture, etc. The roof was



Janet Yegneswaran (third from L), past president, RC Bangalore Koramangala, and Inner Wheel members with children after giving them school bags.

leaking and the toilets were in a terrible condition. While talking about her greening initiatives, the *Rotary News* article also related her efforts to improve the living conditions of the villagers in the region and published a picture of the school requiring repair and renovation.

When Janet recently visited that school in Chinnayanapalya village in Anekal, she was pleasantly surprised to see the building repaired, and freshly painted. “This school has two dedicated teachers — Bhasker and Rashmi. Both are post graduates and seriously interested in improving the facilities here and introducing new educational tools. They told me that some Rotary club in Pune, after seeing



Women display wire bags they have made.



that article and photograph, had come forward to renovate the school. My hope is that once we publish this article in the magazine, it will inspire other Rotary clubs and corporates to contribute towards renovation of critical educational facilities in schools in these villages has been fulfilled,” she wrote.

She recalls that in 2024 when she and Merlin from Bosch India had visited the “Honnakalasapura Govt Primary School in Anekal, to assess the possibility of renovation by the Bosch India Foundation, we had found the building very dingy and

damp. Water was leaking and had collected in the corners of the classroom as it was the rainy season. The children had no benches and tables. Bhaskar Master and Teacher Rashmi, both very dedicated teachers, have been working here for years, and Bhasker even goes to some children’s homes on his scooter and brings them to school.”

Well, one good deed begets another; this particular school with such dedicated teachers has seen a bunch of welcome gifts. On one of her visits to the school “Bhasker Master said: ‘Give us a Smart



Class — I want to show the world to these children’. His words moved me, he was not asking anything for his own comfort, but for the children. I took it up with RID 3191 governor B R Sridhar, sent him pictures of the school and its children. He immediately took up the request and the Smart Class was commissioned at this school on March 5,” smiles Janet.

More goodies came pouring in. On her next visit to the school, she carried glasses and plates for the

children from RC Koramangala. “They say, when it rains, it pours. Member of the Inner Wheel Club of Koramangala (where too she is a member) came with school bags. They were moved on seeing the children sitting on the ground in damp conditions, so on their next visit, they brought six *Nali-Kali* tables and 36 chairs, as well as curtains. And in April they are coming back with uniforms for the children!”

Nali-Kali tables are specialised, round or modular furniture used in





Above: Janet along with Rotary members at the renovated primary school at Honnakalasangapura. The old building is seen on the facing page.

Clockwise from left: Village women being taught basic literacy; Colourful Nali-Kali tables and chairs donated to the primary school; Stainless steel plates and tumblers given to schoolchildren at Honnakalasangapura near Anekal.



Karnataka government schools, and are specifically designed to support the *Nali-Kali* (joyful learning) activity-based teaching system. They facilitate small-group learning, encouraging collaboration, self-paced learning, and social skills instead of traditional lecture-style seating.

That is not all! Pepperl+Fuchs, another corporate which works in industrial sensing technology, has also stepped in and as its CSR initiative, further improved the school, with “water proofing and painted the building. Now a philanthropist, Eric Dilipkumar, who lives overseas, and is returning to India, wants to donate to this school a Godrej glass book shelf, tables and rotating chairs

for the teachers, all costing around ₹70,000. Bhaskar Master says that now that the school has received a complete face-lift, they have started receiving many applications from the villagers for admission of their children,” beams Janet.

Rather than the teacher coaxing the parents to send their children to school, the opposite is happening at this spruced up school!

Other initiatives Janet is taking in this clutch of 30 villages is introducing music sessions for children in another school by taking musicians from Bengaluru for a special session. Blankets have also been distributed to the villagers, and a representative of Bosch India also wants to give grocery kits to the villagers.

One aspect that is troubling her is the status of women, and the disturbing fact that even educated women from rich families are not allowed by their men to work outside the house, “which causes them a lot of frustration. The women of Anekal come from a very conservative background. They get married when they are in high school and most of them are housewives, and are very happy with the training we give them to work at home — making bags, doing ari work, crochet, etc and market their products locally within their own circles. Some of them want to start beauty parlours and are looking for support,” she adds.

Giving such women special skills to do meaningful work which will give a purpose to their lives, along with a decent income, and doing some work in adult literacy are high on Janet’s agenda right now. ■

Asha... the queen of lilting melodies

SR Madhu

The word *asha* means hope. For seven decades, Asha Bhosle's spirit of *joie de vivre* energised and entertained millions of music lovers with songs of hope. But her voice was stilled on April 12, 2026 at the age of 92.

Let's recall the voice of hope — and of energy, sensuality and oomph — by naming a handful of the thousands of songs that hypnotised India. (Nearly 20,000 in 20 languages according to a recent estimate.)

Dum maro dum (Hare Rama Hare Krishna, 1971) is one of the most impactful songs of all time! Kishore Kumar said it was so powerful that it could bring a dead person back to life!

Aayiye mehrban (Howrah Bridge, 1958), the nightclub song that wowed the world! Asha's voice captured the impishness and mischief that Madhubala radiated, which invited comparisons with Marilyn Monroe.

Abhi na jao chhodkar (Hum Dono, 1961, Asha-Rafi, Jaidev). A song that will be sung so long as romance lives, said Dev Anand.

Jaaiye aap kahan jayenge (Mere Sanam, 1965, OP Nayyar). Effervescent, ageless, enchanting. Her didi Lata Mangeshkar's favourite. Lata frequently hummed

this song and complimented Asha on her rendering.

Aaja aaja, main hoon pyar tera (Asha-Rafi, Teesri Manzil, 1966, RD Burman). An electrifying action-packed song, When Asha sang for Helen, it was music mayhem. This one marked a turning point in Bollywood's rock and roll history. The hurricane tempo made viewers and listeners dizzy.

Chura liya hai tumne jo dilko (Yaadon Ki Barat, 1971, RD Burman). Zeenat Aman dazzled, Asha Bhosle sizzled, in this "princess of love songs".

Asha Bhosle

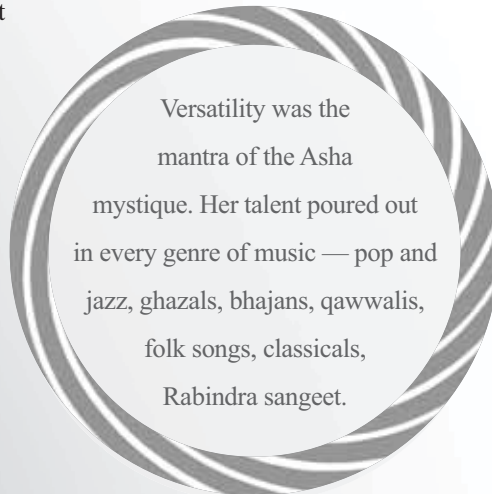


Versatility was the mantra of the Asha mystique. Her talent poured out in every genre of music — pop and jazz, ghazals, bhajans, qawwalis, folk songs, classical and Rabindra sangeet. And she gave melodious expression to every mood. She was the voice behind the twinkletoeed brilliance of cabaret queen Helen in *Piya tu ab to aaja* (*Caravan*, 1971), the worshipful serenity of Meena Kumari in *Tora man darpan kahlaye* (*Kaaajal*, 1964), the heart-rending melancholy of a prisoner’s lament in *Ab ke baras bhejbhaiyya ko babul* (*Bandini*, 1963), the romantic abandon of Asha Parekh in *O mere sona re sona re sona re* (*Teesri Manzil*, 1966). “Asha’s voice can change its colour like a chameleon,” Gulzar remarked once.

No wonder Asha won honours aplenty. Two national awards for best playback singer and seven Filmfare awards; a



With her sister Lata Mangeshkar.



without being slippery; it covers high and low ranges with equal ease and expression; it is full of tone, yet does not lack in feminine grace.”

Asha was born in 1933 in Sangli, Maharashtra, a town of goldsmiths and sugar refineries. Her father, Dinanath Mangeshkar, owned a travelling theatre company that performed in small towns of Maharashtra. “My whole education was watching actors and singers perform,” she once said.

Asha was nine when her father died in 1942. Lata became the family breadwinner through playback music, and Asha helped out. In 1949, when Asha was 16, she made the worst blunder of her life, getting into an abusive and exploitative marriage. She walked out of it in 1960, after two children, while being pregnant with a third.

The early 1950s were a nightmare for Asha, as she was the one who kept her family

special Filmfare award for her songs in the 1995 *Rangeela*, and a Filmfare Lifetime Achievement Award in 2001. Special honours included the Dadasaheb Phalke award in 2000, a BBC Lifetime Achievement Award in 2002 (presented by then UK Prime Minister Tony Blair), and a Padma Vibhushan in 2008. In all, she bagged a few hundred awards, major and minor.

Musicologist Pandit Ashok Ranade described Asha’s voice as “vibrant without a trace of tremble; it is quick-moving





Asha heard and absorbed a lot of western music, empathised with the Beatles, Michael Jackson, Frank Sinatra and her favourite Barbara Streisand.

afloat, while being jobless. She struggled for music assignments, and worked herself to the bone, accepting any music crumbs that fell her way — such as cabaret and nightclub songs for Helen and Bindu. Lata, on the other hand, had become a sensation after the 1949 *Mahal* and *Barsaat* and had acquired a god-like status in Bollywood. This didn't benefit Asha, who was too proud to ask her sister for help. She tried to cultivate her own singing style, distinct and different from that of Lata. She heard and absorbed a lot of western music, empathised with the Beatles, Michael Jackson, Frank Sinatra and her favourite Barbara Streisand.

The year 1957 was transformative for the singer; she got to sing for SD Burman in two Dev Anand films (*Nao Do Gyarah* and *Paying Guest*). More importantly, she sang for OP Nayyar in the 1957

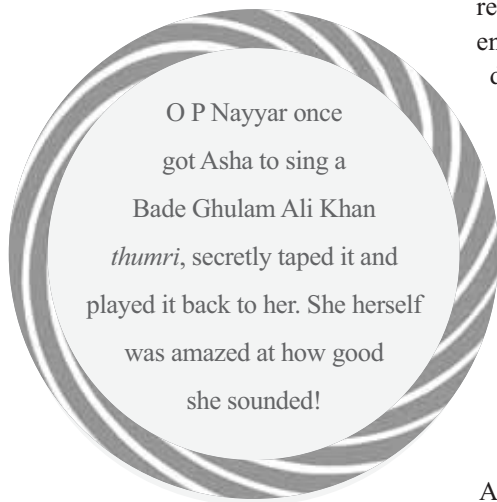
blockbuster *Naya Daur*, which starred biggies like Dilip Kumar and Vyjayanthimala. Songs like the Asha-Rafi duet *Maang ke saath tumhara* were huge national hits.

The Asha-Nayyar partnership grew and flourished. According to music critic Raju Bharatan who wrote a biography of Asha, Nayyar said that for many years Asha suffered from a Lata complex and he helped her combat it. He once got Asha to sing a Bade Ghulam Ali Khan *thumri*, secretly taped it and played it back to her. She herself was amazed at how good she sounded!

The Asha-Nayyar combine created 324 songs in some 70 movies, some of them songs of intoxication and lilting melody — in films like *Howrah Bridge*, *Ek Musafir Ek Hasina*, *Phir Wohi Dil Laya Hoon*, *Kashmir Ki Kali*, *Kismat*. Nayyar said he needed “a powerful full-throated, sensuous voice” for his music, and he found it in Asha.



With Kishore Kumar.



O P Nayyar once got Asha to sing a Bade Ghulam Ali Khan *thumri*, secretly taped it and played it back to her. She herself was amazed at how good she sounded!

The two had a live-in relationship for 13 years. It ended in 1972 following several differences and ego issues. The emotional turmoil in her life was captured in the song *Chain se hum ko kabhi* (*Pran Jaaye Par Vachan Na Jaaye*, 1971.) Asha’s tearful voice and the ineffably beautiful melody make you close your eyes and listen in silent ecstasy. The song won a Filmfare award for the best song — but Asha got the song deleted from

the film. She refused to accept the award. Nayyar accepted it at the Filmfare award function on her behalf — but threw the award statuette into the Arabian Sea while returning home. It was a bitter parting. Nayyar didn’t recover professionally from Asha’s exit, but her career thrived.

The RD Burman phase

RD Burman (Pancham) entered Asha’s life professionally in 1966 with the sensational *Teesri Manzil*, and its unorthodox songs and sounds which demonstrated



Asha with OP Nayyar.

his genius. Asha’s splendid solo *O mere sona re sona re sona* in *Teesri Manzil* captivated critics and laymen alike. A string of Pancham-Asha chartbusters followed — the sprightly *Piya tu ab to aaja* in *Caravan* (1971), the epoch-making *Dum maro dum* in *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* (1972), and the heart-stealing *Chura liya* in *Yaadon Ki Baarat* (1973).

Pancham was the top composer of the 1970s. He

enriched and invigorated Asha’s career. It was a marriage of music and companionship. “I didn’t marry Asha, I married her voice,” said Pancham. Both had eclectic tastes. They would sometimes listen for hours at night to music of all genres — folk, pop, jazz, Bismillah Khan, the Beatles, Latin, Arabic, Bengali folk. Asha would say “Let me go to bed, you’ll get up only at 11am but I have a recording at 10am.”

After Pancham

Pancham’s death in 1994 was a massive blow for her.

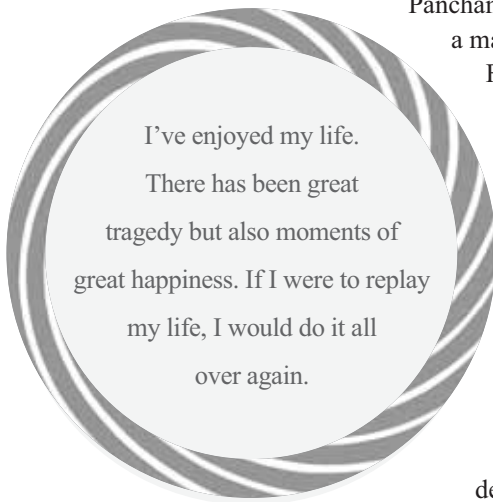
Further tragedies were to come. She doted on her children. In 2012, daughter Varsha, who was 56, committed suicide by shooting herself when Asha was in Singapore. In 2015, her second son Hemant died of cancer in Scotland at 66. In recent years till her own death in April, Asha’s family

consisted of elder son Anand, his daughter Zanai Bhosle, 24, and her twin brother Ranjai. “Zanai is my life, *Meri jaan hai*,” Asha said.

She remained resilient as a singer, making a splash with the 1995 *Rangeela*. Singing for Urmila Matondkar under the baton of AR Rahman, she sang two expressive songs of youthful longing and playful sensuality — *Tanha Tanha* and *Rangeela Re*. She won a special Filmfare award for the film.

In 2001, she sang the elegant and classic *Radha kaise na jale*

With R D Burman.



I’ve enjoyed my life. There has been great tragedy but also moments of great happiness. If I were to replay my life, I would do it all over again.

for actress Gracy Singh in Amir Khan's award-winning *Lagaan*. AR Rahman's composition blended classical Indian rhythms with folk influences, and Asha sounded 28 rather than 68.

In 1996, Asha produced *Rahul and I*, a remix of songs she had done with RD Burman. She disliked the remix business but put this album together to prevent someone else from coming up with a terrible remix.



With Rekha.

International concerts and collaborations

During the 1980s and 1990s, Asha went globe-trotting and staged several concerts in the US, UK, Canada, UAE and other countries. She performed to wildly cheering audiences who were very familiar with her work. These were the first of several foreign tours for live shows.

Asha engaged in several international music collaborations. In 1991, for example, British singer and song-writer Boy George produced a single titled "Boy George Sings, Bow Down Mister". It consisted of colourful visuals from the *Mahabharata*, Asha's recitation of verses from

the *Gita*, and Boy George's own interpretation of Indian spirituality.

Says Asha about herself: "I've enjoyed my life. There has been great tragedy but also moments of great happiness. I've taken both in my stride, and if I were to replay my life, I would do it all over again." A statement characteristic of Bollywood's most innovative, prolific, versatile and resilient singer.

SR Madhu is a senior journalist and a member of the Rotary Club of Madras South.

Designed by
Krishna Pratheesh S



RC Bhavnagar president Kaushal Sheth and secretary Mahipalsinh Rana interacting with a woman at the hospice, Rotary Karunalaya.

Providing peace and solace to terminally-ill patients

Rasheeda Bhagat

An iconic project of the Rotary Club of Bhavnagar (RID 3060), titled *Rotary Karunalaya*, is a hospice-cum-rehabilitation centre for terminal stage cancer patients and others suffering from chronic ailments related to the kidney, brain or the heart. Set up in 2022 with the objective of helping middle-class families who have very sick family members, but lack the financial ability to take care of

them in a professional facility, or the means and manpower to look after them at home, it is operated out of a rented accommodation where 12 rooms house around 26 patients.

Dr Umang Desai, past president of the club and a cancer specialist, and Dr Neeraj Joshi, an orthopaedic surgeon, are two core team members from the club who provide hands-on service for running this project, which strives to give dignity and as much comfort as possible to these patients.

Taking me around the incredibly clean and well-maintained premises, Dr Desai explains that the Karunalaya takes in patients “whose medical treatment is over but are completely or partly bedridden or dependent on somebody else for their daily needs. It is a very costly proposition to keep them in hospital, and it is not possible for many middle-class families to keep them at home. Either the houses are too small to spare one room for such family members, as this kind of care requires a separate room, or both the husband and wife are working and can’t take care of the sick parent.”

There is severe scarcity of manpower for this kind of work and even in a tier two city like Bhavnagar to get a person for 24-hour care costs around

Rasheeda Bhagat



Rotary News' connect to Karunalaya

Explaining the genesis of the project Dr Umang Desai says, "I've always been wondering what more I can do for my cancer patients, particularly those who do not have the means to continue to live in dignity and with the physical and medical support they need. One day, while reading *Rotary News*, I came across an article that some club in Andhra Pradesh has set up a kind of hospice for cancer patients."

He got hold of the phone number of the club president and called him; "but he couldn't speak English well, and didn't speak Hindi either. But he said he would get hold of a member of his club who spoke English to call me."

Soon he got the call, and the Rotarian explained to him how the club had donated some equipment to a hospital to establish a rehab centre and slowly got involved in running it. "The idea was already in my mind about doing something for cancer patients and the magazine helped me to take it forward. Actually we get so many ideas from *Rotary News*," he smiles.

He adds that they started with just 10 beds, renting only the ground floor. "then we pushed it to 13 beds, and then as the demand increased, we rented the first floor also."



Inmates enjoying a bhajan programme at the hospice.

₹30,000 to 35,000 which most people cannot afford.

On the funding required to run this project, Dr Neeraj Joshi says their annual expenditure on this project is ₹25 lakh. Since the accommodation has been rented, a substantial portion goes into the rent, and the rest for staff salaries and other related expenditure.

Club president Kaushal Sheth says at this rented accommodation, there are 12 staff members to take care of around 26 inmates. "We have an in-house kitchen. The cook stays here for 24 hours; she prepares breakfast, lunch, evening tea and snacks and dinner. A medical officer visits the facility daily and a physiotherapist

takes care of those who need this therapy," he says.

Dr Joshi and Dr Desai visit the place every day and spend 30–45 minutes here, making rounds just as in a hospital. "We meet the patients and enquire about their condition. If they have any demand or medical need, we try to meet it to the extent possible. And then we spend some time on admin and management and upkeep of the place," says Dr Joshi.

On the most common requests made by the patients, or their needs, he says they have three basic requirements.



Celebrating Ganesh Chaturthi.

Below: The hospice's inmates enjoying a Garbha programme during Navratri.



The physical needs pertain to assistance... right from brushing their teeth, to bathing, to getting out of bed and back into it. About 70 per cent of the patients require such assistance.

Next is their medical requirements... medicines, physiotherapy

and advice on the diet. Depending on their medical condition, the patients have specific diets to follow and care is taken to see that this is done. "For example, if you go to our kitchen in the morning or the evening, for something as simple as the toor dhal, you will find

four or five different preparations of this dhal. One will be with and another without lemon, or without chilli, or salt. The cook carefully prepares the food like that, keeping the diet restrictions in mind." Once in a while they are given treats such as piping hot dosa and pav bhaji!

He adds that their third need is "an emotional need; they want someone to talk to, or rather to listen to them and what they are saying. So our Rotary Anns come in groups in the evenings, talk to them, play games with them, or chant prayers or bhajans with them. We celebrate all the festivals here including Navratri and Holi. This takes care of their emotional needs to some extent."

Most of the patients here are above 60 years old, and are not all from Bhavnagar, with some patients having come from as far as Mumbai. To the best of their knowledge, says Dr Desai, there are only two such centres running a rehab centre for cancer patients on a charitable basis. Others are run as commercial organisations.



Even this is not totally free, even though the Rotarians spend around ₹25 lakh a year to run it. The inmates pay ₹450 a day, but this includes all the three meals and snacks, the cost of the medical and non-medical staff who look after them, physiotherapy etc. The monthly cost of around ₹13,500 is paid by their families. Those who can't afford this price are given a good subsidy.

The annual shortfall is about ₹25 lakh which is raised through donations. "A number of top executives from corporates and businessmen are our club members and that really helps us raise funds. And we've found that if we have a good project, there is no dearth of money. As long as people have trust in you, you can find the money," says Dr Desai with a smile.

At the Karunalaya too, "the donations keep coming, without our trying much. In fact, when we started this facility, we used to charge ₹600 a day, but then people started helping us, so we reduced the charges, despite the cost of living going up!"

Once in a year, during Navratri celebrations, the Rotarians take the inmates out, though that is quite a challenge, as over a dozen of them have to be carried out in wheelchairs. Sometimes they are taken to a famous temple or a resort; "those times men and women over 80 told us, with tears in their eyes, that this was the first time in their lives they were visiting a fine restaurant."

Dr Joshi adds that each patient is a story... in the last three years, they've lost about 20 patients. Sometimes the patient's end comes amidst heartbreaking stories. Dr Joshi relates the time when one of the men passed away. "We called the relatives... actually the son, and he said I am busy and will come in a little while. We waited and waited, and tried to contact him again and again. Finally, around 10pm the son said: 'If you cannot manage, just put the dead body on the footpath outside, I will collect in the morning.'"

Dr Joshi explains that the concept of this place is that it's a hospice... which means these patients are not going to get well. Apart from terminal cancer patients, there are also terminal kidney or heart patients. Asked if the terminal kidney patients receive dialysis, he shakes his head and says, "We don't give any active medical treatment here, these patients will gradually deteriorate. A hospice is for those who are waiting to die, and you just give them a peaceful life. In a hospital if a doctor says nothing more can be done and you take them home, and the relatives can't manage at home, they bring them over here."

The second class of patients come here for rehabilitation post orthopaedic surgery, or neurological condition like paralysis and get physiotherapy.

Occasionally, such patients do go back home. He gives the example of a woman with a diabetic foot; her leg had to be amputated. She was brought here for rehabilitation. Physiotherapy was started, she was fitted with an artificial limb, she started walking and eventually went home. ■



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Therapy rooms for special children

V Muthukumar

It was a dream come true for past president Sargam Falari from RC Bicholim, RID 3170, as two objectives of his pet mission were fulfilled one by one, but after much planning and deliberations. This included setting up therapy rooms for differently-abled students at the Narayan Zantye School for Special Children, Vathadev, in North Goa, and providing a teachers' training programme for around 40 special instructors.

Project Smita (Smiles), the first global grant project (\$47,000) of the club, has set up three therapy rooms for audiology-speech therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy with diagnostic equipment, tools and learning aids for special children, inaugurated in September 2025. "During my tenure as club president (2023–24), I visited the special school and heard from the teachers that the growth of their





special children is not keeping with the metrics of national standards for those with learning disabilities. First, they lacked the right equipment and special therapy rooms that help in rehabilitation. Second, teachers needed special training for handling differently-abled children,” recalls Falari, the primary contact of the project.

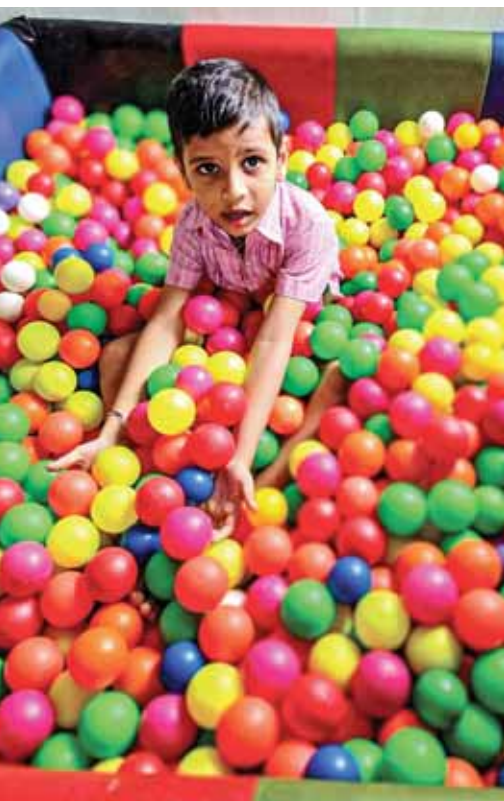
Following the inputs from the special school, his team looked into the pros and cons of setting up therapy rooms “with needs assessment done before applying for the GG.” Once the GG funding was sanctioned, “therapy rooms were created in 18 months, fully-equipped for teachers to impart life skills to their special children.”

Expressing his happiness, club president Damodar Shrinivas Prabhu says, “all our 64 members are elated to see this project through for special





Above: PDGs Gaurish Dhond (R) and Vinaykumar Pai Raikar at the inaugural of therapy rooms at the Narayan Zantye School of Special Children, Vathadev, in North Goa.



children. The 20-year-old school has around 180 students in various age groups suffering from varying disabilities and needing diverse approach by a set of special instructors. Right now, the school has 30 special teachers.”

Now these special rooms will facilitate the identification and grooming of children in craft skills such as pottery, making of paper bags, cloth bags, agarbathis, diyas (for festivals), embroidery etc, says Jyoti Sawant, club secretary. “Three therapists — one each for physiotherapy, audio-speech and occupational skills — will help the special teachers in mentoring the students,” she explains.

But getting the facilities ready is only half the work done. “We had a domain expert Ketaki Parob, psychologist, who took an exhaustive four-month course (Dec-Mar) for 40 special teachers, including 10 trainees from another school, spread over eight sessions on the ways to handle different types of special children whose needs and difficulties vary,”

says Falari. All the trainee teachers were given completion certificates at an event held in April. Thanking Rotary, Manjiri Jog, a teacher, says, “We are grateful to the Bicholim club for upgrading our teaching skills to such high standards. This new perspective will guide us to look after the special children better.”

Speech and audio therapist Deepaswi Sawant points out the “new therapy rooms will ensure faster development of children... making them to adapt to the practical world. We have heard so much about the global work done by Rotary, but this special project gave us the real feel of Rotary’s magic.” It was an emotional moment for the project team led by Falari as “I could sense a mission accomplished well in time.”

RC Lake Arrowhead, RID 5330, US, is their global partner. PDGs Gaurish Dhond and Vinaykumar Pai Raikar inaugurated the therapy rooms at the special school, a part of the Keshav Seva Sadhana group of educational institutions in Goa. ■

On March 24, 2026, RI District 3053 created history by entering the India Book of Records for the ‘largest free multi-specialty medical camp organised at a single venue.’

A total of 2,82,577 OPDs were recorded; 1,42,788 laboratory investigations were conducted; and 3,623 surgeries performed over a week (Mar 17–24) at a health camp at Shivpuri organised by the district, along with Shrimant Madhavrao Scindia Swasth Sewa Mission, and the MP government. RC Gwalior led the initiative, and it was supported by RCs Shivpuri, Shivpuri Crest, Guna, Guna Royal and Ashoknagar.

From diagnosis of complex eye-related, dental and orthopaedic ailments, to advanced medical consultations and free high-tech robotic surgeries, the camp provided various services to patients, including children, from rural and remote areas.

Union Minister for Communications and Development of NE Region Jyotiraditya Scindia, reacting to this achievement, stated that the record is not just about numbers or scale, but the result of collective effort and service.

High-tech equipment and expert medical teams ensured timely and

A record Rotary medical mission in Shivpuri

Team Rotary News



DG Nisha Shekhawat welcoming Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia at the medical camp.

quality care for every patient, said Rohit Jain, president, RC Gwalior, adding that this initiative particularly benefitted people who usually had to

travel to bigger cities for treatment. Access to large-scale medical facilities at one location made healthcare more accessible and convenient. ■

DG Nisha and Rotarians interacting with a patient at the camp.





Rotary  PEOPLE OF ACTION

A drive for a plastic-free future

Jaishree

In a blend of purpose and adventure, the Rotary Club of Hubli Vidyanagar, RID 3170, flagged off a unique Time-Speed-Distance (TSD) motor rally from Hubli to Goa. Nearly 200 Rotarians, driving 66 cars, participated in this “slow rally” championing the theme *Go Plastic Free*.

The rally focused on creating awareness along the way on elimination of single-use plastics. At village squares and community stops along the route, Rotarians interacted with residents, shopkeepers and youth groups, speaking about the environmental and health hazards of plastics and encouraging practical, sustainable alternatives.

The message was hard to miss. Branded vehicles, creative displays and vibrant banners ensured visibility at every stop, while the enthusiasm of participants drew curious crowds and sparked meaningful interactions.

The organisers also walked the talk. “We consciously avoided plastic in every form; meals were served on eco-friendly plates, water was carried in stainless steel bottles, and snacks were packed in

Hema Shekharappa, a member of RC Hubli Vidyanagar, makes a statement in a newspaper-crafted outfit, driving the message home.



Rotarians Smita Shah, Kirti Tarnad, Asha Salian and Anjali Mokashi holding placards with environment-related messages.

paper bags,” said event coordinator Mahima Dand.

As a precision rally, the journey tested skill and discipline rather than speed, with participants taking nearly 10 hours to reach Goa. The drive concluded with an Awards Nite celebrating creativity and commitment,

Branded vehicles, creative displays and vibrant banners ensured visibility at every stop and drew curious crowds.

with prizes for categories such as Best Dressed Car and Best Display of Theme. “All the participants were given specially designed t-shirts; the teams were encouraged to customise them with designs of causes close to their heart and the best designs were recognised,” she said.

A professional team mapped the rally route and interactive games at checkpoints kept the energy high throughout the journey.

The overall cost of the event was around ₹12 lakh. “We had generous contributions from various sponsors and with the remaining funds, we are planning to install large dustbins at strategic locations in Hubli,” said Mahima.

DGE Lenny D Costa, DGN Ashok Naik, PDGs Avinash Potdar and Basil D Souza were present at

the flag off, along with Hubli MLA Mahesh Tenginkai and Rajya Sabha MP Sadanand Shet Tanavade. Sanjay Shetti was the event chair.

Through a wonderful gesture of friendship, “friends from Australia, connected through our club member Sadhna Rao, contributed ₹54,500 towards the education of orphaned girls, also giving kitchen utensils and appliances worth ₹25,000 for an orphanage.” Club members further donated blankets, sarees, groceries and sweets.

This rally is part of a continuing tradition. Organised once every two years, each edition spotlights a different social theme. Previous rallies have addressed issues such as noise pollution with *Horn Not Okay, Please!* and mental health through *Mind Matters More.* ■

Peace pole at girls' shelter

RC Trichur, RID 3205, set up a garden and installed a Rotary Peace Pole, two swings, a grass carpet and benches at Nirbhaya Home, a shelter that provides care and protection to around 90 girls aged 12–18 years.



Club members in front of the newly installed peace pole and swings.

Rickshaw carts to support livelihoods

RC Chandannagar, RID 3291, distributed cycle rickshaw carts to 20 daily wage earners to enable them to transport and sell goods such as vegetables, plants and groceries. The project was carried out in partnership with the Eastern India Rotary Welfare Trust (EIRWT). The club and EIRWT each shared 50 per cent of the total cost of ₹2.9 lakh.



A beneficiary pushing his rickshaw cart.

E-autos for women

RC Rourkela Queens, RID 3261, distributed e-autos to four women under its *Project Saksham*. Now in its third year, the project focuses on women's economic empowerment by providing e-autos as a sustainable source of livelihood. The beneficiaries were selected through a verification and legal screening process.



PDG Manjit Singh Arora and DGE Alam Singh Roopra present a key to a beneficiary.

Author honoured

Author and columnist Shobha De was presented the Citation of Merit by RC Poona, RID 3131, in recognition of her contributions to literature, journalism and public discourse. DG Santosh Marathe presented the award.



From L: DG Santosh Marathe presents the award to author Shobha De. Also present (from R): Tanuja Marathe, PDG Dr Deepak Shikarpur, PP Kailash Monga and club president Rohit Mitra.

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- ★ Desk organisers, Paper Weight,
- ★ Plastic mobile stand,
- ★ MDF Photo frame,
- ★ New year Diary & Calendar.

Women make an impact in Dindigul

Jaishree

Nearly 20,000 girls and young women in and around Dindigul, Tamil Nadu, have been vaccinated against HPV this Rotary year, in a cervical cancer prevention drive. The initiative, led by RC Dindigul Queencity, an all-women's club in RID 3000, brought together strong partnerships and grassroots mobilisation.

“RC Delhi South, RID 3011, was our major sponsor, supplying the vaccines, while we identified beneficiaries locally,” says Aarthy Mukesh, the club's bulletin editor. Several Rotary clubs across India, along with partners such as the State Bank of India and Tamil Nadu Mercantile Bank, supported the effort.

The vaccination drive was backed by extensive awareness campaigns. With medical experts on board, the club organised sessions in colleges and

institutions, engaging both students and parents on the importance of HPV vaccination. Walkathons and rallies helped carry the message into the wider community. “This has been one of our signature projects, and every member was involved,” she says.

Another long-running initiative reflects the club's sustained commitment. Eight years ago, it set up the ClubFoot Free Dindigul Centre at the Government Medical College Hospital, in association with Cure



Club president Rajathi Kamalakannan (R) with her team at the Clubfoot Centre to distribute shoes to babies.





Interactors collect proceeds from a scrap dealer after selling recyclable waste.



Above: Members of RC Dindigul Queencity with nursing students at a HPV vaccination camp.

India. Today, 150–200 infants from surrounding villages receive treatment there.

Every Friday, club members visit the centre to counsel parents and provide corrective footwear, which must be replaced every six months. “We understand each child’s needs closely. While all members contribute, Malliga has been a major supporter,” says Aarthy. Festive gatherings at the centre offer encouragement to families navigating long treatment cycles.

The club’s strength lies in its close-knit membership. With 63 members, it nurtures bonding through its monthly “full moon night” meetings — informal gatherings filled with storytelling, shared memories and potluck meals. These moments, deepen friendships and strengthen their commitment to service, she says.

Their most recent meet was held at the MVM Park, which the club has maintained for the past two years. Members also take turns to cover

staff wages; last month’s ₹12,000 was contributed by Yuvasaratha.

At the Blossom Centre for children with special needs, the club conducts vocational training in soap-making, weaving, embroidery and crochet. Solar lights were recently installed there through member Lalitha’s support, while Vanitha Muralidharan contributes towards rent and medicines.

The club has also sponsored 13 Interact and three Rotaract clubs. Interactors run collection drives for the *Share and Care Wall*, redistributing usable items to the underprivileged, while the *Trash to Trees* initiative converts recycled waste into resources for tree planting. The club involves Interactors and Rotaractors for mega sapling-planting drives which it organises regularly.

Visits to old age homes remain a regular activity. “We spend time with the elderly, engage them in simple activities, and support the homes with essentials,” says Aarthy. Recently, Maya, a Rotarian from the UK, contributed ₹2 lakh towards cots, wheelchairs and medical supplies for residents across four homes. ■

A RYLA for special children

Kiran Zehra

Leadership programmes rarely account for children with special needs,” says Dr Sandeep Gharat, president, RC Dombivli East, RID 3142. A DEI-focused RYLA organised by his club in March sought to challenge that gap “by creating a space where differently-abled children could actively take part, and not be held back by their limitations.”

It brought together 42 special children from 11 special schools, along with their teachers and caregivers, for “a day of structured activities designed to encourage participation, interaction and self-expression.”

Guided by past president Radhika Gupte, District DEI chair with over three decades of experience in special education, the programme was attended by DG Harsh Makol and district secretary Nikhil Dhoot at the inaugural session.

The day began with a simple breakfast, followed by a walk through the Rotary Children’s Park in Dombivli. Spread across 2.5 acres, the park has been developed and maintained by RC Dombivli East and its Trust on land leased by the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation. The space includes a play area, jogging track, an ayurvedic and a butterfly garden and an amphitheatre.

Next, the children enjoyed a lively Zumba session with “music filling the space as the children followed simple steps, clapping, turning and moving together. Some were hesitant at first, but soon joined in, smiling and keeping pace with the group. The session helped them loosen up, respond to instructions and feel part of a shared activity,” says club member Tejas Thakkar, who organised the session. He runs a dance academy named Rhythm Riders in Dombivli.

During the art session, conducted by Ann Varsha Katekar, the children worked with coloured paper and beads to create simple artwork. “Some worked independently, while others responded to gentle guidance, slowly. This gave them a chance to focus, make small decisions, and express themselves without pressure. It was a way of communicating ideas and preferences that may not always come easily through words,” she says.

This was followed by lunch, where the children were served a simple meal of rice, dal, vegetables and sweets. The afternoon session featured a magic show conducted by club member Dr Manoj Ketkar. As tricks unfolded, “some of the children leaned forward, eyes fixed on my performance, while others reacted with spontaneous laughter and awe,” he says.

The programme concluded with evening tea and snacks. Teachers were invited to share their feedback, followed by a brief felicitation. The children were given backpacks and snack packs to take home. DGE Nilesh Jaywant attended the valedictory ceremony. RC Dombivli co-sponsored the event. ■



From 2nd Left (seated): District DEI chair Radhika Gupte, DG Harsh V Makol, club president Sandeep Gharat and secretary Vinayak Agte with RYLA participants.

From RI South Asia Office

Appoint District Foundation positions for RY 2026–27

To achieve the fundraising goals for 2026–27, it's essential that DGEs build a strong leadership team focused on elevating the Foundation among club leaders. If you haven't already, please appoint the following key roles and share it with RI so that they can have access to vital reports and resources that will strengthen your fundraising efforts.

- District Endowment/Major Gifts Chair (DE/MGC)
- District CSR Chair
- District Annual Fund Subcommittee Chair
- District Paul Harris Society Coordinator
- District Fundraising Subcommittee Chair
- District PolioPlus Subcommittee Chair

To submit appointments, log in to *My Rotary*, go to Manage, and select the District Administration tab.

Listed contribution on behalf of club members

A club may contribute collectively on behalf of its members using offline or online methods as indicated below.

Cheque/demand draft (DD)

- ❖ A single cheque/DD issued from the club/club trust account.
- ❖ A duly filled-in official letter template needs to be sent to Rotary Foundation (India), when sending listed contributions.
- ❖ This letter must be printed on the official club letterhead before submission.
- ❖ Submit a list of members with membership IDs, fund designation, and contribution amounts in INR.
- ❖ The total listed contribution must equal the cheque/DD amount.
- ❖ Individual contribution must be at least \$5; otherwise, donation credit will be awarded to the club/district as per TRF policy.
- ❖ Contributions must reach RISAO by May 31 of the Rotary year.

Online via My Rotary platform:

- Authorised club leaders (president, Foundation chair, Membership chair, executive secretary/director, secretary, treasurer) may contribute through their *My Rotary* account using the club's PAN.
- Payments must be processed via the club's online banking services, not from individual leaders' accounts.

Please note the following for using the Listed Contribution method:

- ❖ **Tax receipt:** Issued to the club or club trust.
- ❖ **Contribution credit:** Allocated to individual members based on amounts listed against their membership IDs.
- ❖ **Requirement:** Club/club trust PAN must be provided. ■

For lifelong learners

Breakout sessions are your one-stop shop for in-depth learning, inspiration, and networking at the Rotary International Convention June 13–17 in Taipei, Taiwan. Robin Hollingsworth from the Rotary Club of Franklin, Kentucky, said last year at her first convention the sessions hooked people and made them convention regulars. “You’ll have to keep coming for the number of workshops alone and their quality and magnitude.”



Happiness in Rotary

Members are clear: The club experience is the most important factor in their connection to Rotary. Learn simple techniques that make members happier with their clubs.

AI for good

Calling technology novices and savvy artificial intelligence users: Get actionable ideas to use AI in Rotary for positive change in health, disaster response, and more.

You are Rotary's storyteller

Steal these ideas to build RI's image and you'll help your community get to know Rotary and attract new members.

Generations unite!

Young Rotary leaders share their tips for engaging younger members and getting generations working together.

Bend your club to fit

Rotary evolves, so must its clubs. Try an innovative or flexible club model: hybrid, cause-based, or corporate, to name a few.

Members nearly quadrupled

Learn how a club that ballooned from 11 to 40 members in two years overcame challenges through better engagement, more awareness of Rotary, and a welcoming culture. ■

A silent team leader

Quite popular as the DGSC couple among Rotary clubs in MP and parts of Gujarat, DG Sushil Malhotra and his wife Ruby are known for their stewardship skills. While the governor has been the District Grants Sub-Committee chair for four years, now this post is headed by his wife.

With 2,600 Rotarians across 102 clubs, he wants to add 100 new members. About 200 have been added already; he hopes to charter two more clubs, in addition to three already formed.

His clubs have installed over 50 dialysis machines through GGs at charity and government hospitals and donated a surgery microscope (GG: \$46,000) imported from Japan to Padhar Missionary Hospital, near Betul, for cancer treatment. RC Bhopal Hills has flagged off an ophthalmic van (GG: \$35,000) and a mobile dental clinic (GG: \$35,000) for People's Hospital, Bhopal.

A mega green belt was created (CSR grant: \$28,000) in Pithampur, an industrial area near Indore. Malhotra has achieved the TRF-giving target of \$252,000 "four months ahead of time. Now I want to double it to over \$500,000. For the first time, RID 3040, a 40-year-old district, has raised this much amount for TRF," he beams.

A Rotarian from 2006, Malhotra doesn't flaunt his achievements. "I am not a publicity monger as my team works silently. I believe in teamwork and my performance speaks for itself." TRF trustee Bharat Pandya and RI director K P Nagesh are his role models.



Sushil Malhotra
Testing-certification lab
RC Indore Meghdoot
RID 3040

Meet your Governors

V Muthukumaran



**Dnyaneshwar
Shewale**
Ice cream/juices
RC Nasik North
RID 3030

A new blood bank in Nagpur

Service above Self is the mantra that guides Dnyaneshwar Shewale as his goal is to serve humanity throughout his life. "I joined Rotary in 2006, only to serve the larger public in a much broader manner."

He has inducted around 1,060 new members, and chartered 18 new clubs with seven more in the pipeline which will bolster the present tally of over 120 clubs and 6,500 members. A CT scan machine (GG: \$70,000) was installed at the Matru Sewa Sangh Hospital, Yavatmal; under *Project Happy Schools* (GG: \$42,000), desk-benches were donated, digital classroom was set up and solar toilets were built at the Mai Lele Shraavan Vikas Vidyalaya, Nashik and bicycles (CSR: \$118,000) are being given to 5,000 girl students in a phased manner, with funding from Delta Phenochem. "We will set-up a new Rotary Blood Bank (CSR: \$130,000) at Umred taluk in Nagpur in tie-up with corporate partner WCL. This medical facility will service the needs of local hospitals for treating emergency cases and people with chronic illnesses," Shewale said.

He wants to collect \$1 million for TRF and is focused on achieving his district targets in membership growth and TRF-giving. "I am passionate about community service. Both the RI directors, M Muruganandam and KP Nagesh, are my role models in Rotary as they are young, energetic and very focused in achieving their goals," he says.

Celebrating Rotary identity

Rotary is a way of life for Nitin Agarwal who wears symbols of this global NGO on a specially themed, custom-designed suit during his official club visits, and travels in a Rotary-branded car, thus carrying the RI identity as an everyday celebration of sorts.

With 2,155 Rotarians across 117 clubs, he has set an expansion target of 15 new Rotary clubs and a steady membership growth. "We have chartered over 200 Interact clubs, thus engaging schoolchildren on Rotary's ideology and global reach," he said. As a cadre member of TRF and a faculty of the Rotary Leadership Institute, he mentors new clubs and emerging leaders. For the first time, district grants were sanctioned for 23 clubs for their community projects. Global grant projects worth \$200,000 are being done by the district clubs across RI's Focus Areas. Corporates are funding service projects valued at around \$20,000. Agarwal has set a target of \$300,000 for TRF-giving.

Gavels and gongs were presented to every club, and each Rotarian has got a Proud Member plaque, so that "we take pride in our organisation." Agarwal joined Rotary in 2009 inspired by the global impact of TRF, and wants to continue his "service outreach through my life." He also encourages fellow Rotarians to serve "society through collective goodwill, and by understanding what Rotary stands for, and support the efforts of the Foundation."



Nitin Kumar Agarwal
Chartered accountant
RC Moradabad Mavericks
RID 3100



SV Raam Prasad
Export business
RC Jubilee Hills
RID 3150

Spotlight on paediatric surgery

The opportunity to be with like-minded people who share the same passion for service to make a positive difference in society keeps Raam Prasad motivated in his Rotary journey.

With 106 clubs in his district having over 4,200 Rotarians at present, he wants to add 200 new members and charter nine new clubs. When he took over as DG, "I had to remove two clubs, and so far, have added eight new clubs. There were 3,750 members then."

A high-tech equipment (GG: ₹1.2 crore) was donated to the Institute of Genetics, Hyderabad, to facilitate genome research; a Retina wing (GG: ₹1.2 crore) was inaugurated at the eye-care centre of Ramdevrao Hospital; and *Project Heal a Child* (CSR grant: ₹50 lakh) does surgery for batches of six children at shortlisted hospitals after determining their medical condition. The district clubs are doing CSR-funded projects worth around ₹4.5–5 crore across RI's Focus Areas.

His target for TRF-giving is \$1.5 million. He joined RC Srikalahasti in 1984, and later shifted to different cities in South India. Later, Prasad moved to UK to work in British American Tobacco for five years, before settling in Hyderabad

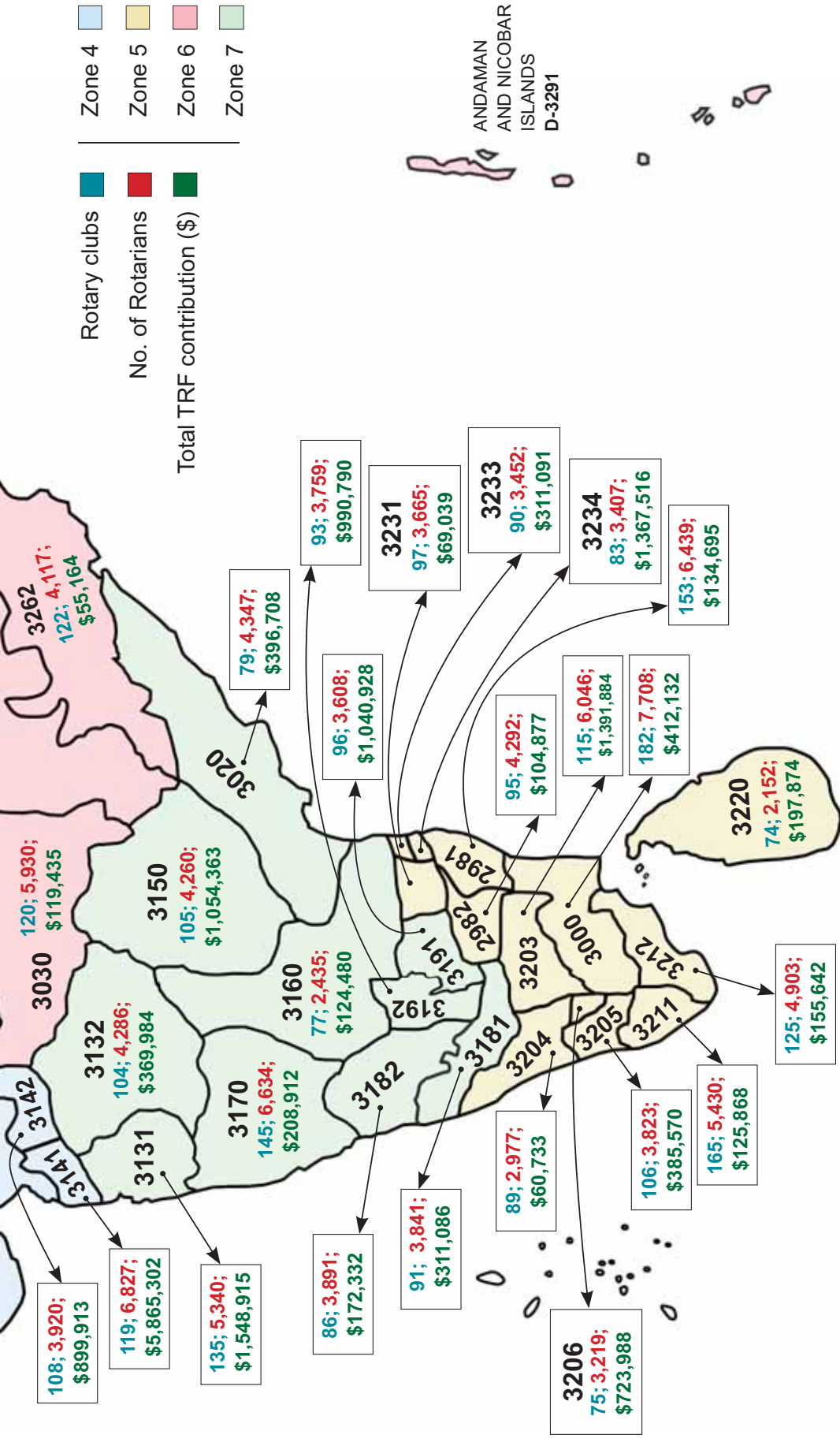
for good and joined his present club in 2010. In the next 15 years, his focus will be on strengthening Rotary clubs in Telangana "by encouraging them to do impactful projects and nurturing the next generation of leaders." For him, the global NGO has given a "wonderful platform to build meaningful connections and friendships for the betterment of communities," he adds. ■

Project Heal a Child (CSR grant: ₹50 lakh) does surgery for batches of six children at shortlisted hospitals after determining their conditions. The district clubs are doing CSR-funded projects worth around ₹4.5–5 crore.

SV Raam Prasad
DG, RID 3150

Membership & TRF contribution summary





* Membership figures as on April 1, 2026.

* TRF contribution figures as on March 31, 2026.

Making a difference

A limb fitment camp in Pune

A two-day prosthetic limb camp organised by RC Pune Heritage, RID 3131, benefitted 150 amputees. The project involved two medical camps — one for taking measurements, followed by fitment of artificial limbs a month later.

The logistics were taken care of by Bharat Vikas Parishad and Dhole Patil College of Physiotherapy. The project cost of ₹18 lakh was funded by CSR partners — Forvia, POCL and Profive Engineering. The limb fitment camp has given a new lease of life to 150 individuals restoring their mobility and dignity, said Subhro Sen, club president. ■



RC Pune Heritage members with beneficiaries at the artificial limb fitment camp.



Rotarians with children at Project SCAW.

School kits distributed in Vellore, TN

RI District 3231 distributed welfare kits to 1,000 children under *Project SCAW* — School Children Assistance and Welfare — at Sri Narayani School, Vellore, Tamil Nadu. The kits contain educational supplies that help in classroom learning of students.

The project costing ₹50 lakh supports less privileged students with educational material to motivate them to attend school regularly, and was done jointly with RC Ambattur, RID 3234. ■



Free spectacles for Tripura children

Tripura CM Manik Saha inaugurated *Project Dristypath* of RC Aspiring Agartala, RID 3240, in which free spectacles will be given to schoolchildren under 14, who require them. Ophthalmologist Dr AK Chama will lead the eyecare project.

In the coming days, special aids like splints and braces will be given to those who have undergone hip and knee replacement surgery at the Tripura Government Medical College and Hospital. ■



Tripura CM Manik Saha (centre) inaugurates the permanent eyecare project of RC Aspiring Agartala.

RID 3040 at the MP Art festival

As part of its efforts to boost public image, RID 3040, through RC Indore United, extended support to the Madhya Pradesh Art Festival, a three-day cultural initiative of the state government, held during January 24–26.

Over 1,200 artists from a wide range of vocational and creative disciplines including music, dance, sculpture, painting and performing arts took part to showcase their diverse skills. More than 21,000 visitors thronged the Gandhi Hall, Indore, the festival venue. DG Sushil Malhotra and IPDG Anish Malik were present. ■



RID 3040 DG Sushil Malhotra (4th from L) and IPDG Anish Malik (3rd from L) at the event.



A sunshine-friendly way of life

Preeti Mehra

Let solar power help you negotiate the ongoing global energy crisis.

The energy crisis triggered by the Iran war has set off alarm bells in many quarters, including our homes and offices. More than anything else, a war being fought some 2,800km away has forced us to realise how fragile our lives are when we depend on a single source of energy derived from crude oil.

Identifying another source to fuel our daily needs suddenly became a priority for ordinary citizens. Many of us rushed to petrol pumps to top up our vehicles. In another knee-jerk reaction, we made a beeline for stores selling electrical appliances to buy an induction cooktop to address the cooking gas shortage. Such was the scramble for these appliances that department stores in Chennai reported running out of stock in no time. This must have been the story in other cities and towns as well.

But induction cooking is a short-term solution, since it, too, depends on power generated largely in our country from fossil fuels — coal, natural gas and petroleum. None of the three is an eco-friendly source of clean energy. And petroleum comes from crude oil, which is suddenly in short supply. So, where does it leave the individual citizen when it comes to cooking and the consumption of energy for lighting, running fans, refrigerators and air conditioners.

Luckily, there is light at the end of the tunnel from the sun, that perennial source of energy, some 150 million km in space. Governments and corporations have been tapping solar power to reduce dependency on fossil fuels and simultaneously reduce the country's carbon footprint. As citizens, we can contribute to this effort while we downsize our electricity bills.

I know some of us are already tapping into solar power, but more of us need to join the party to make the earth

Government subsidies are available for certain categories of solar units and details are available on the website of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.



a cleaner and greener place. So, this column will outline the pros and cons of incorporating solar power into your energy mix and why you should spare a thought for solar-powered cookers.

One lesson the Iran war has taught us is that we need to think long term about reducing our dependence on power supplied through the grid. Putting up solar power panels does involve initial cost. A basic solar panel system that can generate 1kW power costs anywhere between ₹50,000 to ₹80,000. According to information on the internet, the power generated is enough to run three ceiling fans, one LED TV, four LED bulbs, a laptop, a router and a small refrigerator.

Systems that generate higher power require a larger initial investment. Installing a 3kW system would cost ₹1.5 lakh to ₹2.4 lakh, while a 10kW one would require ₹5 lakh to ₹8 lakh. Government subsidies are available for certain categories of units and

details are available about the various schemes on the website of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.

What keeps people from installing solar panels is the false notion that they require high maintenance cost. The panels indeed have to be cleaned once a month and an annual service check is required which costs between ₹2,000 and ₹5,000.

But this is a small price to pay when you consider the long-term energy savings. The power bill in an average home is likely to see a 60 per cent to 80 per cent reduction, though this depends on the number of sunny days in a year. Also, having a battery system that stores power could help on cloudy days. But power consumption is guaranteed to be reduced, and so too will your carbon footprint.

Coming to solar cookers, I was first exposed to them 21 years ago when I visited the home of a retired army officer in Yol, a cantonment town near Dharamshala. A group of us was invited for tea, and the lady of the house proudly took out a cake she had baked in a solar cooker recently installed on the edge of her lawn. The oven-fresh cake was delicious, and my fascination with solar cookers started then.

There are amazing advantages of using a solar cooker. First and foremost, we can save fossil fuels such as coal, kerosene and LPG. It also does not pollute the atmosphere, besides all nutrients are retained as food is cooked at a lower temperature.

Of course there are disadvantages too. If there is no sunlight, you cannot use the cooker. And the direction of the cooker has to be changed from time to time to catch the best rays of the sun.

The summer months in India are ideal to use a solar cooker. I have known people who cook one-pot meals in their solar cooker to save energy, and that may be quite enjoyable when the kids are on school summer

People wrongly think that solar panels require high maintenance cost. The panels need cleaning once a month. Annual service costs ₹2,000–5,000.

holidays and need to be engaged in different activities. They could be taught the art of cooking dishes on a solar cooker or solar oven. This will hold them in good stead all their lives and teach them how to deal with an energy crisis like the one we are facing today.

There are some interesting designs and models of solar cookers available online, even ones that cost less than ₹6,000. The box solar cookers are very popular in India. However, it is best to read reviews and do some in-depth research before buying one.

There was a time when cooking on solar power was a hit-and-trial experience. But friends who use it frequently showed me a number of YouTube videos giving recipes for solar cooking. One of the websites that you could consult before going in for solar cooking is *sunshineonmyshoulder.com*. It even gives you recipes that will specifically please the children and make their summer holidays that much more special.

You must wonder why I am hard selling solar panels, solar ovens and solar cookers to you. Well, the truth is that I am passionate about saving energy and reducing the carbon footprint on the planet, be it during a war-generated fuel crisis or just peaceful sunny days.

The writer is a senior journalist who writes on environmental issues



RID 3012

RC Jindal Nagar

Under *Project Kushiyon ka Safar* (joyful ride), 80 children were taken on a picnic to EOD Adventure Park, Delhi. They enjoyed the fun rides and adventure sports, and for the Rotarians, it was an unforgettable moment.



Club matters



RID 3055

RC Vadali Round Town

DG Nigam Chaudhari inaugurated a phaco machine and surgical microscope at the Sabarkantha Rotary Eye Care Centre. The GG project was supported by four donors from the US.

RID 3110

RC Rudrapur

Around 70 students including two special children from different schools and an NGO took part in a 4-day RYLA held at a resort, in Jim Corbett, Ramnagar. DG Rajen Vidyarthi and District RYLA chair Ram Bansal were the guests of honour.





RID 3120

RC Varanasi Rudraksha

Two infant feeding rooms were set up jointly with RC Varanasi Vrinda on the premises of the Kashi Vishwanath temple. The temple's CEO Vishwa Bhushan Mishra lauded the initiative that cost ₹1.1 lakh.

RID 3053

RC Bhiwadi

The club has conducted 32 mammography camps screening around 1,000 women till now. Apart from early detection, the cancer screening camps created awareness among the rural women.



RID 3141

RC Boisar-Tarapur

More than 400 women were screened at the three-day breast cancer detection camp held at the Boisar factory of Viraj Profiles. During the camp, 14 women tested positive, and the club will sponsor the treatment.



RID 3150

RC Mahabubabad

Club president Vemiseti Kumar handed over a sewing machine to the Geetha Bharathi Training Centre at BC Colony. The donation will aid in providing financial self-reliance to indigent women.

Asthma explained

Gita Mathai

Ican't breathe." The words may come out jerkily and be accompanied by a paroxysmal cough, followed by a whistling sound. The nostrils may flare due to air hunger. In children, rib retractions may be clearly visible.

These symptoms are typical of bronchial asthma. The severity can vary from a minor irritation that makes daily activities difficult to a life-threatening attack with gasping, inability to speak in full sentences, and bluish discolouration of the tongue and fingertips. It can be fatal.

Asthma affects around 2 per cent of adults and nearly 20 per cent of children in India. Fortunately, many children outgrow their asthma. In India, asthma still carries a stigma. Treatment is often unscientific and erratic, involving a mixture of allopathy, homoeopathy and naturopathy. Since the disease itself has spontaneous remissions and



Traditional yoga can improve lung capacity and breathing techniques.

The cobra pose, bridge pose, and alternate nostril breathing are particularly helpful.

exacerbations, a sudden ‘miracle cure’ may appear to result from treatment, however unscientific. As asthma is a chronic condition with no permanent cure, these ‘miracles’ are soon followed by relapses.

Asthma can occur at any age but tends to start in childhood and is more common in boys. Its incidence is increasing worldwide, probably due to the cumulative effects of population growth, overcrowding, urbanisation and environmental pollution, especially from petrol and diesel fumes.

Everyone’s airways are lubricated with a small amount of mucus. The amount increases in response to respiratory infections, exposure to strong odour, cleaning agents, air purifiers, vaporising mosquito repellents, temperature change, and inhaled allergens such as cockroach dander, dust mites, wood particles and cigarette smoke. Pets (birds, cats and dogs) can shed particles of saliva, hair and dead skin into the air, which can get inhaled.

Asthma can flare up during exercise, especially in cold, dry air (for example, in air-conditioned gyms). It may also be an occupational hazard in workplaces with chemical fumes, paint vapours, gases, or dust. Strong emotions such as anger, laughter, crying or stress can cause the airways to constrict. Many people suffer from GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease). When they lie down, especially at night, stomach acid can be aspirated into the airways, causing inflammation, chronic coughing and wheezing.

Allergens may be ingested and not necessarily inhaled. The culprits may include food additives such as preservatives, colouring agents or monosodium glutamate. Certain medication, including beta-blockers, aspirin and ibuprofen, can cause bronchospasm as a side effect.

In non-asthmatic individuals, these triggers activate a cough reflex. The smaller airways expand, the diaphragm (which separates the lungs from the abdomen) moves upward, and mucus is coughed out. In asthmatics, however, the airways collapse rather than expand, stick together and get narrow. As air is forced through these narrowed passages, the characteristic wheezing sound occurs. The diaphragm also moves downward in an uncoordinated manner, making coughing and lung clearance less efficient.

The diagnosis of asthma requires basic tests: a blood count to check for increased eosinophils, a chest X-ray to rule out other causes of cough and wheezing, a cardiac evaluation to exclude heart failure, spirometry and peak flow measurements, and allergy testing to identify triggers.

Before the advent of inhaled therapy (nebulisers, inhalers and rotahalers), treatment of asthma attacks involved tablets and syrups. These medicines were swallowed, absorbed into the bloodstream and eventually reached the lungs, where they relaxed bronchial muscles, making it easier to cough up mucus and breathe.

Today, medication is delivered directly into the lungs, providing rapid relief with minimal side effects. Nebulisers are now available in convenient handheld sizes. Inhalers are highly effective but must be used correctly. Face masks and spacers improve drug delivery, and proper inhaler technique must be learned.

‘Quick-relief’ inhalers provide immediate bronchodilation during an acute attack or may be used prophylactically before vigorous exercise. Maintenance therapy usually includes a long-acting bronchodilator combined with a non-absorbed steroid. This must be taken regularly to prevent lung damage. The mouth should be rinsed after using an inhaler to remove

Asthma flare-up can be triggered by infections. An annual flu vaccine is recommended, and older adults should receive the pneumococcal vaccine.

any residual medication. Tablets and syrups may also be prescribed. Medications should be taken exactly as directed, without self-adjustment.

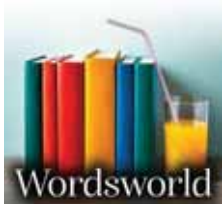
Asthma flare-up can be triggered by infections. An annual flu vaccine is recommended, and older adults should receive the pneumococcal vaccine.

A peak flow meter is a useful investment to monitor lung function at home. Early warning signs such as slight coughing, wheezing, or shortness of breath should be recognised before a full-blown attack develops.

Regular exercise, such as walking, cycling, jogging and swimming, is beneficial as it increases lung capacity. It is important to warm up and cool down properly and to use a quick-relief inhaler about 15 minutes before exercise. Always carry your inhaler while exercising.

Traditional yoga can improve lung capacity and breathing techniques. The cobra pose, bridge pose, and alternate nostril breathing are particularly helpful. Consistency and regular practice are essential.

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



It's the voice, not the words

Looking beyond 'correct' and 'incorrect', particularly with regards to written texts. Where's it coming from? What is it saying?

Before we step into the world of words, an aside about dystopian literature. Dystopian, as in a world that's dehumanised, where people are oppressed and controlled by totalitarian forces, where life is nightmarish. Does this sound familiar? You will find this world in books such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *1984*, Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*. Despite not having a taste for such literature, I had read all of these way back, but held back from reading Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (published 1985) until now.

I had barely read two or three pages when our magazine-man dropped off *Outlook* magazine featuring Iran. The cover carried Shirin Neshat's



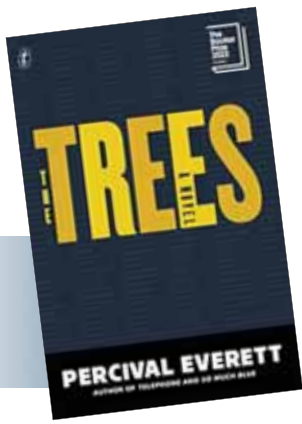
Sandhya Rao

1994 art-work, *Rebellious Silence*, and the introduction to the issue began with a quote from *The Handmaid's Tale*: "There is more than one kind of freedom,' said Aunt Lydia. 'Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it.'" The writer of this piece, Chiki Sarkar, calls this book the Bible of our times, especially for women. It is a complex work of speculative fiction that could well presage which way our world is headed, given the autocratic, dictatorial, misogynistic, aggressive, trigger-happy, oppressive, insular regimes ensconced worldwide, the conquering mindset captive to the killing mindset.

The 'handmaid' referred to in the title is a category of women 'preserved' or 'tolerated' for the purpose of

reproduction — in the novel. Human machines, in other words, forbidden from any kind of engagement with the material and emotional world. Many other categories exist in this dystopian scenario, but in all of them, women are enslaved, beholden, trod upon. Of course, there's a hierarchy and the wives of the powerful wield the kind of power influential people generally do. I read in an interview that Margaret Atwood, who is Canadian, based her characters on Canadian politicians and their shenanigans. Her razor-sharp writing is a sardonic reflection of her attitude towards sanctimonious religiosity.

Percival Everett's writing is equally razor-sharp and sardonic to boot, laced with political irony and laugh-out-loud humour. His characters emerge from the soil and climate of the milieu represented in the novel. Thus, in *The Trees*, which can be mistaken for detective fiction but solidly establishes itself as something else altogether, the world that is recreated is of the deep south of the US. Yes, the hotbed of slavery at one time. The novel is set in the present day, in this case, Money, Mississippi, entrenched in racism and black politics and local gossip. There's been a series of grisly murders of white people at various places. However, at every crime site is found also the body of a black man holding a severed body part in his hand. By the time discovery leads to action, the black body disappears, only to appear again at another murder in another location. As the story builds, the mystery grows into the mysterious; there's even a hint of voodoo. Meanwhile it seems as though the novel is a litany of lynching of black people growing into a protesting rebellion. At the end of the novel, the reader is left with more questions than answers though it is clear that discrimination is rampant and victims will not be silent.

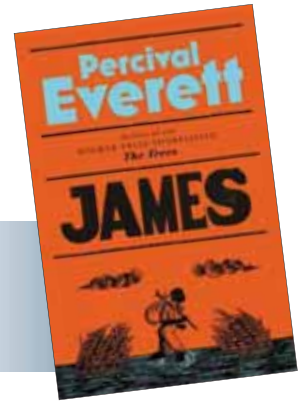


The Trees was our book club read and while some enjoyed the writing for its powerful storytelling and individualistic style, others were thrown, particularly by the language. One person went so far as to say she hated it, mainly because she felt the English was all strange, all wrong. Which brings us to the question of what's right and what's wrong and why voice matters in the language of the written word. Is it that our worldview and experience are limited only to what we know — which is very little — and hence our inability or unwillingness to 'understand' (acceptance comes later) something, anything different? Aren't words and the arrangement of words just a means, the building blocks, to learn to make meaning? Isn't language

the process of constructing meaning? Isn't the finished product an expression of a vision, a way of communicating, a voice? Ultimately, isn't language a marker of identity? Deny language, deny identity.

The Trees is a marvellous read and so, when I discovered another Percival Everett — *James* — on my friend's bookshelf in Bangalore I grabbed it and finished it in two days flat. It's the story of enslaved Jim, transported into this novel from Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in which he is the moral compass, the father figure to Huck. He continues to be Huck's role model and protector in *James*; the suggestion is that this is where Huck was and what he was experiencing every time he disappeared from Twain's narrative. Some people see *James* as a retelling of *Huckleberry Finn*, told from Jim's standpoint. Apparently, Everett read *Huckleberry Finn* some 15 times "in order to blur it" until he was thoroughly sick of it and came to the conclusion that he didn't think "there's a flaw in it that I haven't found, but the world remained"! It's the world, or worlds, we discover when we read Percival Everett.

Jim, his wife and his little daughter, are all bonded to a white 'massa'. When Jim hears that he, and only he, is about to be sold to another 'massa' in New Orleans, he has no choice but to escape, vowing to come back for his wife and child at a later date. Huck accompanies Jim out of affection and loyalty to him. Along the journey, they encounter many experiences; Jim often comes close to being lynched, the normal punishment at the time for being a 'runaway'. He is caught a couple of times but he manages to get away; eventually he manages to shed his 'nigger' name, and christens himself James. 'Just



James.' He manages to motivate many other slaves to make a bid for freedom, unmindful of the dangers that surely lie ahead even as a fire rages behind them. An old white man carrying a shotgun accosts them: "Niggers, where do ya'll think you're goin'?" I stepped in front of him. "Who the hell are you?" he asked. He pointed his gun at me. I pointed my pistol at him. "I am the angel of death, come to offer sweet justice in the night," I said. "I am a sign. I am your future. I am James."

Everett references the narrative with details of the period (during the civil war), the social fabric, the master-slave dynamic, among other things, without compromising on the lightness of the storytelling. Here too, language plays an important role in the storytelling. As a slave and in the company of white masters, Jim goes "What dere be in dem woods? Dat be a ghost? You stays away from me, you ol' shade" when in fact, he is well-read and well-spoken. In a telling scene, Jim teaches a group of children how to use 'slave language' as a protective shield against white masters who consider the enslaved illiterate, brutish, dull-witted, created only to serve them. It's a sequence that is at once empowering and heartbreaking. At the conclusion of the novel, Jim's words come together to become the voice of James, the voice readers hear.

The columnist is a children's writer and senior journalist

There is more than one kind of freedom,' said Aunt Lydia. 'Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it.'

**A quote from
The Handmaid's Tale**



RID 3170

RC Malvan

A water purifier, along with a cooler, was installed at the Malvan main bus stand. PDG Sangram Patil, AG Prashant Kolte, club president Pankaj Pednekar and event chair Mahadev Patkar were present. The water kiosk will benefit over 250 commuters a day.



Club matters



RID 3191

RC Bengaluru Kanakapura Road

Notebooks were distributed to 2,000 students from different schools in the presence of club president V Durairaj and secretary Uma Satya.

RID 3211

RC Haripad

Three dialysis units were donated to the Danappadi Care Craft Hospital (two units) and Sreekanthapuram Hospital, Mavelikkara, through a GG. Earlier, a machine was given to the Danappadi Huda Trust Hospital. The hospitals will provide 800 free dialysis sessions per year.





RID 3231

RC Mooncity Thiruvannamalai

DG V Suresh donated 12 portable ECG machines (₹63,000) to the Rotary Dialysis Centre. The machines will enhance the diagnostic capabilities of the centre, benefitting the patients.

RID 3181

RC Mangalore Central

An artificial limb (₹2.1 lakh) was donated to Babu, a rural poor, whose left lower limb was removed due to diabetic gangrene. PDG B Devdas Rai mobilised the funds and gifted the prosthetic limb to the beneficiary.



RID 3250

RC Ranchi

Union MoS for Defence Sanjay Seth inaugurated the hand fitment camp at the Rotary Bhawan in which 62 amputees benefitted. The electronic Inali hands will not only restore limb functions, but confidence and dignity to the beneficiaries.



RID 3291

RC Jodhpur Gardens Calcutta

A monthly elderly care programme is being held over the last two years. At the recent event, diapers were given to elderly inmates at an old age home suffering from age-related illness and mobility challenges requiring hygiene assistance.

Compiled by V Muthukumar



The boorish government driver



TCA Srinivasa Raghavan

Having lived in Delhi since 1958, I have watched with increasing dismay and despondency, the growth and proliferation of not just cars but also a new species of drivers, the government drivers. These are persons who drive vehicles owned or rented by the government. They have multiplied like rabbits and pose the same level of nuisance to other road users. Indeed, so outrageous is their behaviour that many people in Delhi have decided to paint a sign on their private vehicles that says ‘On Government Duty’ or more simply ‘Government Vehicle’. The idea is to get preferential parking or the license to jump the red lights at traffic signals or drive recklessly or even to just feel nice that no one will check your conduct.

But it’s not always that easy for the ordinary citizens because the police can tell the difference between a genuine government vehicle and a pretender. Because a real government vehicle is never driven by a guy who is dressed in designer clothes and who is usually quite well-mannered. A real government driver, the truly genuine article, is just the opposite. That’s why even if you can’t judge a book by its cover, you can certainly judge a government vehicle by its driver. They have that air about them, like they think they own the roads and the parking spaces.

So what is it about these guys? What explains their unruliness on the roads and in parking lots? Where does that sense of entitlement come from? I have asked both the government and the non-government drivers these questions. The former don’t understand the question. They take their rights for granted. The latter simply utter frustrated expletives because they get hauled up

by the police while their government counterparts are allowed to do as they please. At airport or railway station pickup points, for example, not content with the special VIP places, these fellows wait with impunity at the general places while others are chased away. If James Bond had the licence to kill, these fellows have the licence to be an utter and complete nuisance. It’s hugely annoying, but if you tell a cop, he tells you to go away instead and not so politely either.

Many years ago, I had the utterly humiliating experience of the policeman banging his stick on my bonnet while gesturing to me to leave. I did so and watched in my rear view mirror a government car take my rightful place. Then the cop and the driver got into a friendly chat. Humiliation. Rage. Frustration. All of no use. White colonial masters have been replaced by these brown ones.

But there are exceptions when the ordinary citizen goes one up. A former very senior and ranking officer of the Reserve Bank of India once told me how when he came out of the arrivals hall at the airport, he had to wait for his car to come, while the man who was walking just ahead of him had his car waiting right there at the curb. No hanging around for him, even for a minute.

The RBI man asked his protocol officer — the protocol thing is another story, for another day — who the man was. The reply proved that for every big shot in India, there’s an even bigger shot. Apparently, and I don’t know if this is true or just a rumour, there are a few private number plates in every city that are unburdened by normal rules. These numbers are so exclusive that even government vehicles of VIPs don’t have them. These poor sahibs have to rely on their drivers, instead, for getting special consideration. ■

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