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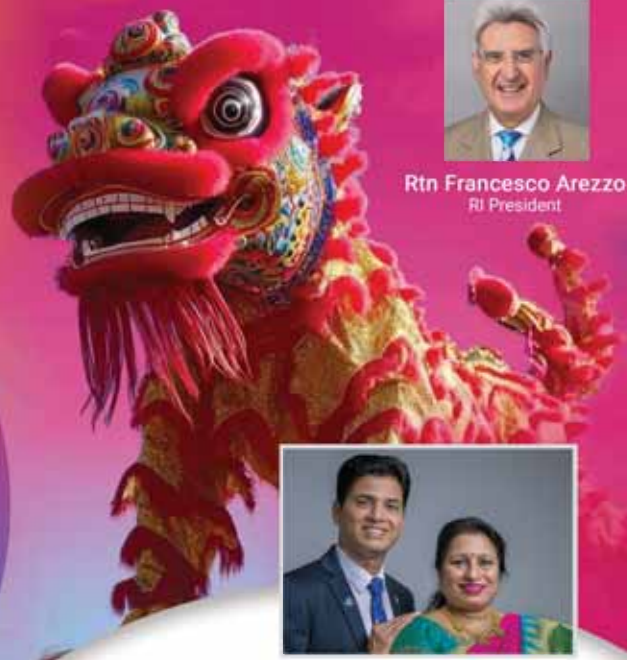


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Further Details Contact: PDG Sridhar J, Mobile No: +91 97908 39030 | PDG Debashish Mishra, Mobile No: +91 99370 66669

Inside



12

Visually challenged on road to self-reliance



18

Making Rotary a household name is my vision



30

Rotary launches egg pushcarts in the North East



38

Kerala flood victims get homes



42

The journey of an exemplary Rotarian



46

Bicycles for girls; blood for Thalassaemia patients



52

Restoring lost sounds

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Rotary 

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



1



2



3



4



5



6

1. Rotary President Francesco Arezzo and his wife, Anna Maria Arezzo-Criscione, are welcomed by Rotarians in Nigeria during a tour of Africa; 2. Wrapping up a visit to Ethiopia, Arezzo attends a Kick Out Polio event featuring young soccer players; 3. Will the real Francesco please stand up? The president meets his doppelgangers in Chennai, India; 4. At a Rotary event in Chennai, Arezzo and his wife enjoy a lighthearted moment with aide John de Giorgio and his partner, Monique Chambers; 5. Planting a tree in Nigeria; 6. Arezzo cuts the ribbon on a maternal and child health project in Uganda;



7. With Rotary Youth Exchange students and Foundation Trustee Chair Holger Knaack in Brazil; 8. Helping launch the Pink Auto Project in Chennai with Rotary District 3234 to provide women with motorised rickshaws to secure a livelihood and economic independence; 9. Inspecting the venue for the general sessions at this month's Rotary International Convention in Taipei, Taiwan; 10. With Anna in Chennai.



Let's carry the momentum

As my year as President of Rotary International comes to a close, I offer my heartfelt thanks to each member of our global Rotary family. Your kindness, warmth, and dedication have changed my life.

During this year, I had the privilege of travelling across our world, from San Francisco, birthplace of the United Nations, to the innovative Rotary clubs of Nigeria. In every place, I saw Rotary members and our partners working side by side to create lasting, positive change, reminding me that our strength lies in shared purpose.

That spirit leads naturally to a simple truth: Rotary is not something we attend, but something we do. We are not spectators. We act, and through that action, we transform our communities and ourselves.

As we continue this work, we must keep our focus on building conditions for peace. Rotary is, at its core, a peace machine. But maintaining that machine requires intention, commitment, and steady effort.

That same resolve is needed now as we push toward polio eradication. The final mile is often the hardest, but we cannot falter in our promise to the children of the world.

You have shown that when we *Unite for Good*, there is no challenge we cannot meet if we stand together. Let us carry this momentum forward with courage, compassion, and an unwavering commitment to the safety and prosperity of all.

Francesco Arezzo
President, Rotary International



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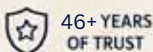


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The power of youth...

The biggest surprise of the recent elections in a few Indian states, came from Tamil Nadu where a newly formed party, TVK, led by Tamil superstar, a political novice, Joseph Vijay emerged the single largest party with 108 seats in a House of 234. A big reason behind his stupendous performance, which caught many political pundits by surprise, was the huge support from the young (Vijay got over 50 per cent of the votes from the 18–39 age group comprising 42 per cent of Tamil Nadu's population). The other was that those younger than 18, and with no voting rights, persuaded their parents and other elders, to go out and vote for Vijay. Let's give him a chance, they pleaded!

After the results, Vijay sent his young voters and the children who had encouraged or pressured their elders to vote for him, a warm, heartfelt message: 'Vijay Uncle's thanks,' which went viral. The unprecedented 85.1 per cent voter turnout felt like a celebration, he added.

In recent years we've been hearing Rotary's top leadership constantly rooting for younger members, elevating Rotaract and making Rotaractors and Interactors feel an integral part of the Rotary family. Rotaractors can now become members of Rotary clubs even while holding their Rotaract club membership. At major RI events such as Conventions, International Assembly and Zone Institutes DRRs are invited and included in panel discussions. What is even more welcome is the enabling environment they are given... to speak freely and fearlessly.


Greatly impressed with the confidence and fearless manner in which RID 3192 DRR Janice Philip participated in a panel discussion moderated by both the RI Directors KP Nagesh and M Muruganandam at Tejas, the Delhi Zone Institute, I later interviewed her (Page 18). Her demeanour and composure, ideas and the confidence with which she articulates them are exemplary.

She is just one among lakhs of such young leaders in India today, epitomising what Nandan Nilekani, the co-founder of Infosys, describes in his 2008 book, *Imagining India*, as its 'demographic dividend'. Here he explains in detail how India has successfully transitioned from its socialistic past and is marching towards becoming a global economic power. The writer argues that India's huge youth population, if effectively managed and given the right opportunities, can become a tremendous asset which can catapult India on the world stage as a power to reckon with. But, he warns, if handled improperly, the young could become an unmanageable liability or a 'demographic disaster'.

What is indisputable is the immense energy, enthusiasm and optimism that the young have... everywhere in the world. As well as courage and fearlessness to speak their mind. Was it not precisely this spirit that led an angry and emotionally charged Greta Thunberg, then merely 16, to challenge world leaders at the UN's Climate Action Summit in New York City in 2019 on carbon emission with that famous speech 'How dare you'?

She had thundered: "You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth... How dare you continue to look away and come here saying that you're doing enough, when the politics and solutions needed are still nowhere in sight."

Need one say more?


Rasheeda Bhagat

Let's promote women in Rotary

The Editor's note in the May issue (*The quota conundrum*) has focused on women's empowerment in Rotary, while talking about the efforts in Parliament to bring in women's quota.

Following their admission in 1989, women now make up around 26 per cent of the global membership of Rotary. One of the areas of engagement includes empowering girls through initiatives related to healthcare, education, safety and wellbeing. Rotary projects include distributing menstrual hygiene products, building sanitation facilities in schools, building gender-segregated toilets and addressing gender-based violence.

Rotary clubs these days are active in promoting women's entrepreneurship through vocational training centres, microloans and skill development. The Rotary Fellowship for Empowering Women and the Rotary Action Group for Girls' Empowerment are driving these initiatives globally. The Sylvia Whitlock Leadership Award is an official award recognising members who work to advance women in Rotary.

KMK Murthy, RC Secunderabad — D 3150

It is a fact that there is a shortfall in women's global membership in Rotary which stands at 27 per cent now, and this causes concern. When we try to find reasons of this shortfall, we encounter numerous views and suggestions. But it is difficult to point out any particular reason.

As mentioned by the editor, often women's quota are frowned upon and the reason given is that such quotas means compromising on quality. When competent candidates are available fixing a 'quota' may be necessary. But how to determine any one's competence? What are the parameters and who will decide on these?

As regards women's involvement in Rotary, the remark of RIPE Yinka Babalola: Giving women opportunity to create an enabling environment, make them comfortable, and you will find a woman leader, is worth thinking about.

Niranjan Kar, RC Bhubaneswar — D 3262



I read about the Dharmashala project of RC Bombay (April issue) for cancer patients near the Tata Memorial Hospital, Mumbai, and my heart swelled with pride.

Think about it: a cancer patient travels hundreds of kilometres, drained by treatment, worried about costs, and unsure where they'll stay. And Rotary steps in with a Dharmashala: a clean bed, warm food, dignity, and hope — at a very nominal price.

This is what real service looks like. Not just writing cheques, but holding someone's hand through their darkest days. This is Rotary — turning compassion into concrete kindness.

Take a bow, RC Bombay. Moments like these remind me why "Service above Self" is more than a motto, it's a way of life. Proud to be associated with this incredible organisation.

Lalit Manik

RC Ulhasnagar — D 3142

Director Speak in the April issue has impressed me. RID KP Nagesh's remarks are most welcome. Rotary clubs should recognise and honour the Rotarians who work tirelessly. Let us unite for good to *Create a lasting impact*.

Chappidi Veeraiah, RC Singarakonda

Addanki — D 3150

On the cover:

Beneficiaries of *Project Surya*, an RC Cochin Global, RID 3205, initiative to help people with visual disabilities to enter mainstream jobs.

Rotary News should carry funding appeals for projects

Congratulations for doing an excellent job editing *Rotary News*.

I would like to make a gentle suggestion of publishing worthy appeals for donation in *Rotary News* for Rotary projects meant to benefit large numbers of those living beneath the poverty line (BPL), where the funds requirement are ₹50 lakh or more. Be it for solar lamps for very

low-income villagers, farming machines and cold storage rooms for perishable products, or drip irrigation systems both for farmers' cooperatives and poor farmers. As *Rotary News* goes to all Rotarians across districts it will not be difficult to collect large funds required for such projects.

Ashok J Mehta

RC Mumbai North Island — D 3141

Director speak



Connected by friendship, united in service

June is celebrated as **Rotary Fellowships Month** — a reminder that Rotary is not built only through meetings and projects, but through friendships, shared passions and human connections. Rotary fellowships bring together members from across the world through common interests — whether in sports, professions, culture, travel, health, environment or service. These connections often begin around a shared hobby or vocation, but they frequently grow into lifelong friendships and meaningful collaborations.

Over the past few weeks, I had the opportunity to visit Rotary clubs and leaders in **Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda and South Africa**. While each country has its own unique challenges, cultures and rhythms, one thing remained remarkably familiar — the warmth of Rotary fellowship and the shared desire to serve communities with sincerity and impact.

That, perhaps, is the true internationality of Rotary. No matter where we travel in the Rotary world, we encounter the same spirit of friendship, trust and service. A Rotarian walking into a club thousands of miles away is never really a stranger. We speak different languages, come from different backgrounds, and live in different realities, yet Rotary gives us a common purpose that transcends geography.

What was equally inspiring during these visits was seeing how strongly clubs are focusing on relevance and continuity. Across the world, Rotary leaders are asking the same questions: How do we

retain good members? How do we keep clubs vibrant? How do we ensure younger members find meaning and belonging in Rotary?

Membership growth is important, but sustaining that growth is even more critical. Retention does not happen through strategy alone — it happens through experience. People remain where they feel valued, involved and connected. Clubs that create genuine engagement, encourage participation, nurture friendships, and provide opportunities for meaningful service will always remain strong.

The Rotary Foundation reminds us that giving is far more than a financial act — it is an expression of trust, compassion and shared responsibility. Every contribution, regardless of size, carries the possibility of changing a life somewhere in the world. There is a special joy in knowing that our collective generosity helps restore sight, provide clean water, support education, fight disease, and bring hope to communities we may never personally meet. As we move towards our shared goal of crossing the landmark contribution of **\$50 million**, let us continue to give with conviction and pride. When every Rotarian participates, TRF transforms individual goodwill into extraordinary and lasting impact across the world.

Across continents and communities, this is what continues to unite us. Let us carry that spirit forward and continue to *Unite for Good*.

KP Nagesh

RI Director, 2025–27

Take me to Taipei

It's time! Get ready to be wowed by the Rotary International Convention in Taipei.

You'll get updates straight from top Rotary leaders, enjoy performances that awe, and feel inspired by world-class speakers. You don't want to miss the keynote talk by Malala Yousafzai, the youngest-ever Nobel Peace Prize laureate and an advocate for girls' education. (And remember, registration stays open online for last-minute bookings to Taiwan for the convention June 13–17, and some members register on-site.)

So what's your advice for first-time attendees when they arrive? Are you one of the many members who make a beeline to the House of Friendship, the town square of the Rotary community? Or maybe you like to make an entrance with your pals from home, ready to cheer and dressed to show your national pride at the opening flag ceremony.

Photographs: An Rong Xu



However you approach the convention, spend a little time reviewing the breakout sessions to personalise your learning schedule to grow your passions and help your club thrive. And relish the time you'll spend bumping into old friends and meeting new ones while exploring the exhibits.

Outside of the convention, you'll have easy access to top attractions: skyscraper icon Taipei 101, dumpling houses and outdoor food markets, and the National Palace Museum with hundreds of thousands of imperial artworks and artifacts.

"If you're somebody who likes to travel and meet new people, who wants to connect with leaders from other countries to gather more ideas, more solutions, more resources," says Joshua Arias, of the Rotaract Club of Santo Domingo Bella Vista, Dominican Republic, "this is a perfect convention." ■

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Editor

Rasheeda Bhagat

Deputy Editor

Jaishree Padmanabhan

Administration and Advertisement Manager

Vishwanathan K

Rotary News Trust

3rd Floor, Dugar Towers,
34 Marshalls Road, Egmore
Chennai 600 008, India.
Phone: 044 42145666
rotarynews@rosaonline.org
www.rotarynewsonline.org



Magazine

Message from TRF Trustee Chair



For the common good

Nearly a year ago, I wrote my first message to you as Rotary Foundation trustee chair, encouraging you and all our members to take a fresh look at the Foundation and its unique way of making the world better.

In the months that followed, I invited Rotary members from around the world to share their own stories about projects they have led with Foundation support. They described the impact they witnessed firsthand and how thousands of lives have been transformed.

Now that you have heard about so many successful projects and the wonderful members and dedicated staff who make them happen, I ask that

you, too, become part of this success story.

Your donation to The Rotary Foundation already makes a difference. However, I would like to take it a step further and encourage you to think bigger: Consider making a targeted investment in the area most important to you.

Each of us has a particular passion. Yet we all share something in common: We want people around the world to be better off. In Rotary, your dreams of a better world can become reality with the help of The Rotary Foundation. Because Rotarians don't just dream — they put their dreams into action. And these actions make a real and lasting difference in so many lives.

With your investment in polio vaccinations, you work to ensure that no child will ever contract polio again. With your investment in Rotary Peace Centers, you contribute to world peace. By investing in our Annual Fund, you ensure that effective projects will continue to be sustainably funded.

Not every contribution to the Foundation needs to be large. Every gift helps us achieve the lasting impact you have read about this year. The world needs Rotary more than ever. It needs our courage, optimism, and commitment to the common good. This is why we need you.

We have a variety of areas of focus in Rotary. Whether you choose to support maternal health in Nigeria, literacy programmes in Belize, economic empowerment in communities recovering from hardship, or freshwater protection projects, your investment will create a lasting, measurable impact. Giving to the Foundation is about so much more than funding projects. It's a way to show compassion and empathy for others. As I have said many times before — and believe more now than ever — everything we do opens an opportunity for someone, somewhere.

I am grateful for this opportunity to serve.

Holger Knaack
TRF Trustee Chair

Visually challenged on road to self-reliance

Kiran Zehra

Akshay's life began with two limitations he did not choose — no vision and no financial cushion. Born blind, he learned early to stay close to his mother, to let her guide his steps and to wait for someone to hand him what he needed. By the time he was in his twenties, he hardly left home alone.

When he was first introduced to *Project Surya*, an RC Cochin Global, RID 3205, initiative to help people with visual disabilities to enter mainstream jobs, he stepped into the training room “slowly, tapping the floor with my cane until I found a chair. A trainer placed my hand on a keyboard. The screen reader spoke to me. I quickly pulled my fingers back. My head was spinning,” he recalls. What was even more embarrassing was when “they asked me to say a line in English. I murmured a few words, then stopped. I dropped my head and held on to my cane tightly. I had not spoken in English ever before.”

Each batch has to complete a community project, contributing something meaningful to the community with at least 100 beneficiaries.



Mobility training for the visually challenged students.



Visually-impaired students learning to shop for their need as part of the training programme.

But Akshay kept coming back to the training centre. One morning, “I managed three commands on the computer without help. Another day, I walked from the gate to the classroom without holding anyone’s arm.” Small things, but they all added up. Weeks later, he sat through a mock interview, “speaking louder than I ever had in English,” he smiles.

Today, he works as an Accessibility Tester at IBM, earning over ₹1 lakh a month. Soon he built a house for his family, “the first home my parents have ever owned.”

For Akshay, “the journey did not begin with confidence or ambition. It began with a quiet young man sitting in front of a computer, trying to keep up with

a voice that felt too fast. *Project Surya* helped him build a life he had never imagined,” says Joby A Thattil, president of RC Cochin Global (RCCG).

Project Surya is a long-term skilling programme that trains visually-impaired adults in computer literacy, mobility, English communication and workplace readiness. “The approach is simple: teach practical skills, build confidence step-by-step, and prepare trainees for mainstream employment,” says Thattil. Over the years, the programme has become “a bridge between hesitation and independence for hundreds of visually-impaired youngsters.”

The beginning

The initiative began in 2008, when club member George



A visually-impaired student helping another student with trying an smart assistance spectacle.



Akshay at his work station at IBM.



Mathew researched the number of visually-impaired adults who were finishing school yet entering the job market with almost no formal training. Supported by RCCG and in collaboration with the Society for Rehabilitation of Visually Challenged (SRVC), the first 10-seat computer lab was set up at Infopark Kochi, with the support of the then-CEO of Infopark, Sridhartha Bhattachary.

Enable India (a non-profit organisation in Bengaluru, empowering people with disabilities) provided the curriculum and methodology. The first batch for a six-month course enrolled seven students. When SRVC branched off in 2015, the Rotary club rebuilt the collaboration with Enable India and formalised the initiative as

Project Surya, guided by its long-time mentor Mareena George. It expanded training capacity to 15 students per batch in 2017 and strengthening support systems, including boarding and travel for deserving students. The centre provided computers, mobility, communicative English, personality development, soft skills and assistive technology training.

During the pandemic, the centre moved entirely online for nearly four years. Training returned to Infopark in 2023 in a hybrid format under centre director and club member Kala Ravishankar. More modules were added in communication and workplace readiness, standardising assessments, and strengthening the

training structure. “The hybrid model allowed students from across Kerala and neighbouring states to join the programme. Many of them had previously been unable to attend in person,” says Thattil.

Today, the project operates as a fully equipped Computer and Life

Akshay now works as an Accessibility Tester at IBM, earning over ₹1 lakh a month. He has built a house for his family, “the first my parents ever owned.”



Sales stall organised by the visually challenged students at Infopark to raise funds for a community project.



A mobility training exercise for the visually impaired at a metro station.

Skills Training Centre at Infopark, offering free, structured programmes for visually-impaired adults. It provides training in assistive technology and life skills, conducts corporate sensitisation sessions, and runs awareness and community outreach programmes for individuals and families. Fully supported by the endowment of RCCG, “the programme is designed for long-term sustainability rather than short-term intervention,” he says.

Since its inception, the project has completed 20 foundation-course batches, training over 300 visually-impaired candidates through intensive in-person programmes, and more than 45 online batches. Over 900 individuals have participated in awareness workshops focused on mobility, assistive devices and employment pathways. Thattil is proud that “today, approximately 85 per cent of *Project Surya*’s alumni are in employment.”

Explaining the recruitment procedure, Thattil said, “We reach out to companies directly to explore suitable opportunities for our visually-challenged candidates. When we learn of a vacancy, we share the



A student learning Excel Sheets in braille.

CVs of eligible candidates and follow up with the company on the interview process. We also maintain strong connections through our alumni network and we contact companies based on referrals from our alumni who are already working there.” Company visits are organised so that candidates can better understand the organisation and its work culture, and “we also use these visits to enquire about potential vacancies.”

One of the highlights of this project is that each batch is required to complete a community project — contributing something meaningful to the community with at least 100 beneficiaries. One of the batches donated educational toys such as chess boards, carrom boards, building blocks etc worth Rs 20,000 to GM LP School in Malappuram. To raise funds for the project, the candidates organised a sales stall at Infopark.

Successful placements

Poornima V M grew up in a single-parent household and has completed her master’s degree in engineering.

She was employed in a private company where her work involved long hours on the computer, often during night shifts. Over time, she suffered from functional low vision. She joined *Project Surya*, where she learned new ways to study and work using assistive technology. She prepared for the competitive exam for the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and cleared both the written exam and the interview.

“Being selected for an apprenticeship at ISRO was a major achievement for me. It proved that losing vision did not reduce my intelligence,



The 21st batch of *Project Surya* along with mentor Mareena George (front row, third from right) and centre director Kala Ravishankar (front row, right).

skills or determination to succeed,” says Poornima.

When **Gokul M** joined the training centre in 2019, he had never used a computer before. He has low vision and did not know how to use screen-reading software, which reads out what is on the screen for visually-impaired people. Even simple tools like a magnifier were new to him.

“In the beginning, Gokul was very quiet. He did not talk much in class and avoided taking responsibility in group activities. Learning to use new tools — like listening to a computer voice reading text, using enlarged screens and memorising keyboard shortcuts — was frustrating for him at first,” recalls Thattil.

But over six months, he became more comfortable using computers, he also became more confident. When it was time for the group’s community project, Gokul stepped forward to lead. His team organised a toy collection and fundraising drive for an upper primary school. He worked hard, making calls, collecting donations, and coordinating everything.

Being selected as an apprentice at ISRO was a major achievement for me. It proved that losing vision did not reduce my intelligence.

Poornima

Before finishing the course, he secured a government job as a Gramin Dak Sevak (rural postal employee), where he uses the same computer skills which he once felt unsure about.

In 2018, **Sandeep G** (30) was working as a nurse. He had more than 10 years of experience, working in hospitals in India and abroad.

Then his life changed. A leg injury slowly made him completely blind because of optic nerve damage. Sandeep, who lives in Karunagapally in Kerala, had to rethink both his career and his life. He used his talent in mimicry, singing, filmmaking and acting to earn some income

through stage shows, but the work was not regular.

In 2024, he joined a six-month course at *Project Surya*. The first few days were hard because he missed home, but slowly he adjusted and found direction again. “It was during this time that I began using a white cane and learned to travel on my own between Ernakulam and Kollam.” He learned to use computers with screen-reading software like NVDA, and trained in Word, Excel and email, using audio instead of sight.

Today, Sandeep works as an assistant trainer at the Kerala Blind School Society. “Losing my vision changed my life, but it did not end it. Instead, I built a new path, not based on sight, but on learning, adjustment and determination,” he says.

Blind Walk

The club observed White Cane Day (Oct 15) at Infopark with participants in a blindfolded white-cane walk to raise awareness on the challenges faced by visually-impaired individuals. Students of *Project Surya* participated in the event. ■

Get your iconic projects featured in Rotary News

Rotarians and Rotary clubs, or districts, that undertake well-planned and meticulously executed projects that benefit the local community, transforming people's lives, naturally want them known to other Rotary clubs. What better way to do this than to showcase the project in *Rotary News*, which is circulated to **over 1.6 lakh Rotarians, about 1,000 public libraries, educational institutions, doctors' waiting rooms, clinics,** etc and read by over 4 lakh readers every month?

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Do send suggestions to:

The Editor at
rushbhagat@gmail.com


Rotary News Editorial Dept
rotarynewsmagazine@gmail.com

Editor



Rasheeda Bhagat

RI District 3192 District Rotaract
Representative & Rtn Janice Philip



Making Rotary a household name is my vision

Rasheeda Bhagat

Janice Philip, the District Rotaract Representative (DRR) of RID 3192 and Assistant RPIC of Rotary, is both a Rotaractor and a Rotarian. Asked why she'd want to be both, she says, "My family believes in giving back to society and we are a group of people ... all neighbours... who started the Rotary Club of Bangalore Vidyananyapura over nine years ago. I was then a Rotaractor and my mother, who joined the club then, is its incoming president. My father is the district learning facilitator."

Janice joined the same club five years ago, and retained her membership in Rotaract, which has made her not only a DRR, but also the first DRR in the country to be an assistant RPIC.

Seated in the *Rotary News Trust* office she exudes both charm and confidence, and says Rotary has put the "right perspective about service in my entire family's mind."

Asked what Rotaract has given her over the last 10 years, she says, "So many things, leadership skills and a platform to speak. The person I am today wasn't the one who stepped into Rotaract 10 years back. I was barely confident, always scared to talk. I was sure I wanted to give back to society and make a difference but didn't know how!"

Her Rotaract journey has smoothed her rough edges, gave her opportunities, guidance, mentorship and a

network that encourages growth. "It has opened a wide range of platforms where I have grown as a leader and pushed me beyond my comfort zone. Today when I look back, if Rotary and Rotaract did not exist, probably I wouldn't have had the opportunity to be the person I am today."

More important, she adds, "this role enables me to give the same opportunity to thousands of other youngsters. That is the biggest blessing god has sent my way!"

But why does she need to be both in Rotaract and Rotary, I push. "While Rotaract gives me a perspective with youngsters, being a Rotarian is a privilege. You get to visit places which broaden your horizon and thought process, opens up opportunities which are not there in the students/youngsters' crowd."

Elaborating, she says that while students talk only about their colleges and early careers, Rotarians tend to plan for the next five years, and the kind of entrepreneurial people they can connect with. "The conversations are different, the opportunities are different. It gives you a whole different perspective and a much larger canvas."

But wasn't it Rotaract that gave her the opportunity to become an ARPIC at this young age? "Absolutely, and I feel it's an absolute honour and a privilege. And being chosen for this role is a huge responsibility as well as a privilege and opportunity. It allows



With Rotaract leaders from across India at the Lead25 conclave in Chennai.

me to not just grow as a leader, but also enables to create opportunities for multiple other Rotaractors.”

She reiterates that for her to become the first woman DRR in her district, many leaders paved the road for her. “And today I have an opportunity to inspire many others so they can follow the path that I have taken.”

On what strengths Rotaractors bring to the Rotary family, Janice says, “Rotaractors today belong to a very active generation which is very curious... they have speed, momentum, agility, ability to start anything from scratch. We are a generation with

curious minds; today nobody waits for permission to start, they just want to be a part of something that they can actively contribute in and that gives us strength to do so much within the organisation.”

She adds that for a long time “we were viewed as youngsters, probably kids who were yet to be in the workforce. But today’s Rotaractors are digital natives, they know exactly what they are doing. In fact, if you compare my generation and the current generation, there is a huge gap, they are much more forward, progressive and the kind of momentum they bring really changes everything drastically.”

When I interrupt saying that Rotarians consider her age group the “younger generation,” Janice smiles

and quips: “I mean between the alpha generation versus the millennials, there is a large gap in how the mindset has changed. We try to get permission to try something new. But today’s generation is not afraid to try, or fail; they are willing to take the risk.”

What age group? “Eighteen to 20, when most people come into Rotaract. College students.”

She herself works as a SAP consultant in a startup, doing implementation projects. So did Rotaract help you in some way? “Absolutely,” she says.

On the longstanding dialogue within top Rotary leadership that the



Rotaractors need to be treated with more respect, I ask Janice if the scenario is finally changing or are they still being asked to move around the furniture! She smiles and says, “It is changing and has largely changed. Today Rotarians are more forthcoming.

We want to be the first
Rotaract-led group to become
the first Rotaract community
AKS member.

But when we talk about Rotarians and Rotaractors working together, it’s not just a one-way mind shift. It works both ways. So while we expect Rotarians to be accommodating, Rotaractors also need to take up an equal amount of accountability and responsibility.”

So are they stepping up? “Yes; they’re asking for the opportunity to serve and want to be treated as equal partners. They are willing to contribute, even monetarily.”

She says India’s Rotaractors are brimming with ideas; across all the four zones, “we’re thinking about contributing to the PolioPlus Fund. We want to be the first Rotaract-led group to become the first Rotaract community AKS member.”

This they plan to do by all the Rotaractors raising \$125,000, and “our DGE Ravishankar Dakoju will match it with an equal amount.”

Coming to the resistance from Rotaractors to pay their dues — which is just \$8 for community-based clubs and \$5 for colleges — I ask Janice if this is not just chump change for today’s youngsters. “I completely agree, and think it’s a mindset problem. Because for a long time Rotaractors got the membership for free. But now they are beginning to understand what they are getting from Rotaract — they are hearing the stories we leaders tell them, about the opportunities that have opened for each of us. We try to involve them by opening doors.”

But, adds the DRR, there is a segment of Rotaractors, from institution-based clubs, who genuinely find it difficult to pay the dues. And it is here that some of the sponsoring Rotary clubs have started helping out.

She clarifies that today the rules allow a Rotaractor, who is 18, to

become a member of Rotary, and there is a small number of youngsters who are doing this. “In our district there may be 50–70 such people.”

To the question why Rotaractors who become Rotarians would want to continue in Rotaract, the DRR says, this is due to their need to mingle with their own age group, where they feel they’d have more opportunities to contribute and connect better. But, she admits, the transition has to happen for them sometime, so “rather than having a transition where Rotaractors in colleges graduate and move away, we introduce them to Rotary early so that they build a connect, they work with Rotarians, know their mindset and the larger opportunities they’ll get to make an impact.”

Another initiative being taken to improve the conversion rate, Janice adds, is concentrating on past presidents and current presidents of Rotaract clubs and encouraging them to move to Rotary in a year, and when their term ends.

Rotaractors also have regular meetings like Rotary clubs, but “it is more need and project-based and there is greater flexibility. We encourage two general body meetings a month, which enables everybody to connect. But they end up meeting more often, both online and in person. The pandemic has made people crave for personal connections and they want to meet face to face, be on the ground, get more involved and create an impact,” she says.

As an assistant RPIC she is responsible for putting forth the work and service not only Rotaractors and Rotarians, but also Interactors and Inner Wheel members across all districts are doing, for a global audience. She feels a “huge shift” is happening within Rotary to look at all

its arms, including Inner Wheel, as a single entity.

So how is she, with a youngster's perspective, trying to promote Rotary's public image, and push it as a brand that can, and is changing lives?

"The world only sees the stories that we share. The world knows about polio and our contribution. But Rotary is doing much more than that. We do heart and cataract surgeries, projects with huge environmental and climate impact, such as the *Dhanyavaad* project that our DGE (Dakoju) has initiated. The challenge is to portray the stories of every single club and district and their impact. That story needs to reach people through various kinds of media, including digital, and by talking to people. We need to be proud ambassadors of what we do as Rotarians, Rotaractors, because the world hears/sees the stories we share. What we don't share is not visible."

While promoting Rotary as a "service-oriented organisation, a humanitarian platform and a brand that can change lives, I want to make it a household name, and a movement which changes lives, as it has people who are compassionate, can create an impact in society and shape the future. To do so, we have to harness the strength of the media, using Rotaractors' ability to go digital, and make use of all kinds of media as simple as a WhatsApp forward."

Asked about the use of AI in promoting Rotary's stories or growing membership, Janice says that while Rotaractors are using AI already, "for public image, we haven't largely harnessed the complete capabilities of AI. For our processes, administration and other things on which lot of time is used to plan, work and write, AI can take off majority of the load. Event organisations, plannings, creatives, so many things are harnessed easily using AI."



Janice with DG Elizabeth Cherian (L) during her installation as DRR.





Rasneeda Bhagat



Solo trek to the Everest Base Camp.

Right: With (seated, from R) DGE Ravishankar Dakoju, RI President Olayinka Babalola, RI Director K P Nagesh, RID 3191 DG B R Sridhar and PDRR Karthik Kittu at a Rotaract event in Bengaluru.

So can Rotaractors savvy with AI train club leaders? “Absolutely. And Rotaract also opens doors.” Giving her own example she says that having heard that putting Rotaract on a resume creates the impression of a young and friendly leader, she did so while interning with United Breweries. Luckily, the vice-president interviewing her was a Rotarian who had been a Rotaractor, and when she got the position, she asked if there were no technical questions for her. “They said if you’ve come till here, it means you have the ability and if you are a Rotaractor,

we know that you have the ability to manage your role in every walk of life. And it was just a walk in for me.”

This not only opened a door for her, it also “gave me a platform where I can share my stories and pushed me towards leadership.”

Today, adds the DRR, Rotaractors are doing community service projects through CSR, working with the government, police, traffic wardens, forest departments, other NGOs, etc. “Rotaractors are looking at how we can collaborate with multiple partners to maximise our impact through service projects.”



We need to be proud ambassadors of what we do as Rotarians, Rotaractors, because the world hears/sees the stories we share. What we don't share is not visible.

The Rotaract Club of Ramaiah College has done a project collecting e-waste, generating funds from it and using it to construct a playground in a tribal area. This was recognised by the government, forest department and the RI President. Work like this is happening on a large scale. People are moving away from small projects like food or blankets donation towards funding cataract or heart surgeries. They are doing projects for ₹4 or 5 or even 10 lakh in collaboration with partners for artificial limbs fitment or creating infrastructure for schools.

At the end of the day, is she happy about the respect Rotaractors are getting from Rotary? “Yes, I am happy that there has been change but scope for improvement and better integration remains as this has happened only in pockets and not across all the districts. Perhaps in 20 clubs in my district. Not everybody is open to integrating Rotaract; things are better in the south and places like Bengaluru, Chennai, Coimbatore or Mysuru. But in the North, even in Delhi and Mumbai, things need to improve in integration.”

She feels every Rotary club should look at this integration and how to

involve Rotaractors at every board meet, allow them to contribute ideas, and so on just as envisaged by RI.

Will both the incoming RI President and Vice President, being Rotaractors, help grow Rotaract. “Definitely and to a large extent it is going to help; people who have been in those shoes, who have contributed and worked as Rotaractors, and understand their thinking and potential will help a lot. They already know how much Rotaractors can contribute. We don’t have to bridge the gap or explain that we can be equal partners.”

Rotary clubs can harness the strength of Rotaract by guiding, handholding and encourage them in organising and managing events. Of course, Rotaractors will have to step up to undertake responsibilities so that they can maximise their impact, or else it’ll be a wasted opportunity.

She is happy that not only some clubs but districts are also doing this. “At the district level doors are being opened for past DRRs to be a youth services director or assistant governor.”

At the end of the day, youngsters should realise that being a Rotaractor increases your self-confidence, gives you better articulation and leadership skills. “They have so many strengths;

At the district level doors
are being opened for
past DRRs to be a youth
services director or
assistant governor.



Janice with RI President Francesco Arezzo, RID 3011 District Interact Representative Aahana Roy and Anna Maria Arezzo at the Tejas zone institute in Delhi.

they are willing to take leadership, speak confidently, are sure of themselves, know how to put together an event. They are both responsible and accountable. They don’t shy away from larger leadership roles.”

The other strength of Rotaract is the gender balance; though Janice is the first woman DRR of the newly minted RID 3192, in the undivided 3190 there were four more women DRRs before her, and her district has a large number of women presidents.

But, she concedes, there are the usual gender stereotypical challenges in being a woman leader here too. “To get this platform and opportunity, you have to prove yourself and work twice as hard. While I’d love to say that perspectives have changed, this does exist. What has changed is that women are creating opportunities for other women to step in. And the male Rotaractors want to work with women.”

Where do you see yourself 10 years from now in Rotary? “I want to be a leader who can contribute to paving way for many other leaders.”

This smart and self-confident woman sees herself as her Rotary club’s president in the next two years; she was secretary last year and “I fortunately belong to a club that encourages Rotaractors! Eventually, how much impact I can create, being an ordinary person, is the best part of Rotary. It allows ordinary people to do extraordinary things together with other ordinary people, and change people’s lives, even as you grow as an individual.”

Her final take on what Rotary has given her. “Personally, the leader I am today is all because of Rotary. The way I speak, my vision of giving back to society, and so many opportunities, to be a part of the Tejas Zone Institute, and I hope to attend my first Convention in Taipei!” ■

Mexican Rotarians embrace Indian hospitality

Jaishree

Five Rotarians from RI District 4110, Mexico, embarked on an 11-day tour of India in the first week of March following an invitation from K Nagesh, Rotary Friendship Exchange (RFE) chair of RID 3203, which covers Tirupur, Pollachi, Erode, the Nilgiris and Coimbatore.

“This is our third exchange,” says Nagesh, recalling how he reached out to Anna Mier, RFE chair of RID 4110, inviting Rotarians from Mexico to experience the culture and service initiatives of RID 3203. “She immediately

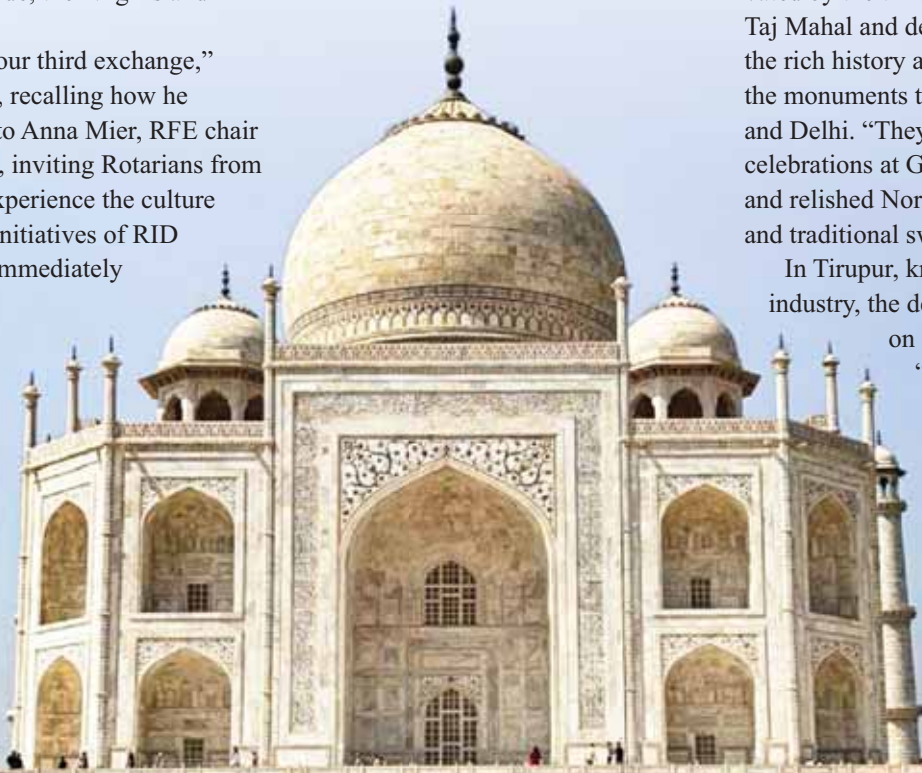
agreed. It reflects the trust, friendship, and strong bond our districts have built over time.”

Anna had one special request on behalf of the visiting team — a chance to see the Taj Mahal and spend a few days exploring Delhi.

RID 3203 DG B Dhanasekar coordinated the arrangements with RID 3011 DG Ravi Gugnani, who entrusted the hosting responsibilities in Delhi to district RFE chair Vikram.

The Mexican guests were captivated by the timeless beauty of the Taj Mahal and deeply impressed by the rich history and architecture of the monuments they visited in Agra and Delhi. “They enjoyed the Holi celebrations at Gugnani’s farmhouse and relished North Indian cuisine and traditional sweets,” says Nagesh.

In Tirupur, known for its hosiery industry, the delegation was taken on an industry tour. “They were fascinated to witness the entire journey — from yarn to finished garments. It was exciting for them to see the



Rotary Friendship Exchange team from Mexico at the Taj Mahal, Agra.



Visiting a Horse Show in Pollachi, TN. RC Pollachi president Satish Chandran and secretary SV Sreekanth are on the right.



Celebrating Holi in Delhi.



At the Qutb Minar in Delhi.



RID 3203 DG B Dhanasekar welcomes the team at Coimbatore. RFE Chair K Nagesh is seen on the left.



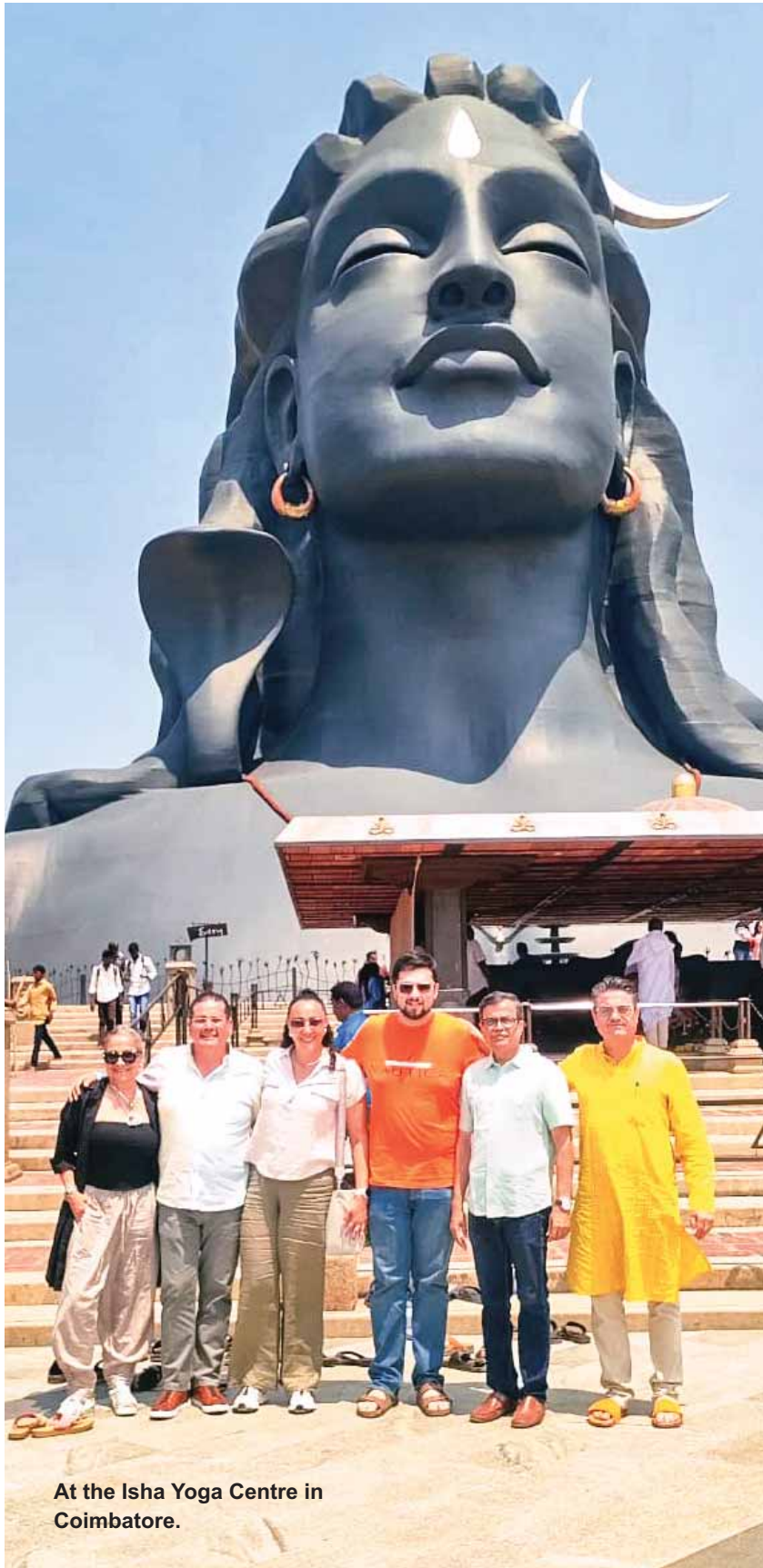
RYE members with students of the Rotary School in Tirupur.

scale, precision and efficiency of our textile ecosystem.”

The visitors were also introduced to several landmark service projects of the district, including the upcoming ₹100-crore Cancer Centre at the Tirupur Government Hospital, the Rotary Blood Bank, Rotary Crematorium, Rotary Dialysis Centre and the Rotary School established in 1963.

At Mettupalayam, situated at the foothills of the Nilgiris, the team visited three major projects of RC Mettupalayam — *Heal*, a mobile mammogram and cervical screening vehicle; *Care*, a post-operative intensive care unit; and *Lifeline*, a blood component separation facility. RID 4110 had partnered internationally in supporting these initiatives.

Rotarian families hosted the guests in their homes, offering them an authentic Indian family experience. “They were delighted to learn to eat with their hands — a cherished part of our culture — while enjoying South Indian breakfast favourites such as idli, dosa, pongal, upma and poha. Of course, eggs and bread were



At the Isha Yoga Centre in Coimbatore.

Experiencing the warmth of the Indian joint family culture was deeply meaningful. It was new for us, but it helped us understand the significance and value of family bonds.

also served to suit their comfort,” smiles Nagesh.

For the visitors, the experience went far beyond sightseeing. “Experiencing the warmth of the Indian joint family culture was deeply meaningful. It was new for us, but it helped us understand the significance and value of family bonds. The language, cuisine and culture were entirely different from the North, yet equally beautiful. It was here that I truly understood the essence of unity in diversity,” wrote Luis Roqueñi Rello, one of the RFE guests, in an email to Nagesh after returning to Mexico. He described visiting the Taj Mahal as “a dream come true” for the entire team.

During their stay, the Mexican Rotarians attended club meetings in Tirupur, Erode, Ooty, Mettupalayam and Avinashi, strengthening fellowship across multiple clubs in the district. To showcase India’s cultural richness, RID 3203 organised performances featuring Bharatanatyam, yoga demonstrations, the vibrant sounds of nadaswaram and thavil, and rural folk music.

“Though the stay was short, the connections we built were deep and meaningful. In just a few days, we became more than hosts and guests; we became family,” says Nagesh. ■

Young leaders find confidence and friendship at RYLA

Kiran Zehra



DG Amit Jayaswal and his wife Pallavi with RYLA participants.

Set against the forested landscape of Balaghat in Madhya Pradesh, part of the Kanha–Pench tiger corridor, 125 young participants from across India and 10 International Youth Exchange students came together for RID 3261’s international and inter-district RYLA, a three-day leadership camp that combined training sessions, outdoor activities and cultural exchange.

Hosted by RC Balaghat Royal and RC Raipur, the programme was conducted in association with Team

Amit – *Aseem Mitrata Ki Taqat* (the power of boundless friendship), the leadership theme of RID 3261 under DG Amit Jayaswal. “RYLA is not just about leadership training, it is about helping young people build confidence, understand social responsibilities, and develop a global outlook through friendship, cultural exchange and teamwork. When students from different states and countries come together in an environment like this, they return not only with new skills, but with

a broader perspective on leadership and society,” said DG Amit Jayaswal.

Baljeet Singh was the RYLA chairman; Naveen Bhawasar and Kawaljeet Singh Chhabra were the advisors. The IYE students were from the US, Mexico, Brazil, France, Belgium and Germany.

Sessions on communication skills and public speaking were led by Dr Santosh Rai, a Chhattisgarh-based educationist and founder of the Dr Santosh Rai Institute, who is recognised in the Golden Book of World Records for earning over 20 academic degrees within ten years. “His workshop focused on confidence-building and leadership development among participants,” said Uttam Kumar Garg, president, RC Raipur.

Yoga and Zumba sessions followed by workshops on career guidance, ethics in leadership, mental wellness and stress management, were part of the event. A jungle trekking activity was one of the highlights of the RYLA, “as participants worked together in teams through unfamiliar forest terrain, building trust, coordination and camaraderie,”

he said. Mona, a participant from Chhattisgarh, said the programme helped her step out of her comfort zone and connect with students from around the globe. “The best part of the RYLA for me was making new friends and experiencing the jungle trek. We had to work together throughout the activity, and that helped us bond very quickly. I’m leaving with a lot more confidence and many good memories.” Cultural programmes, including a Baiga tribal dance performance, added a local dimension to the camp experience. ■

Rotary egg pushcart ventures launched in the North East

Rasheeda Bhagat

I am not a rich man; I am a common man who has only two hands to help the people around me, but because I am a Rotarian, along with Rotary I have thousands of hands to help those in need,” says Hari Kishan Valmiki, a member of Rotary Club of Secunderabad, RID 3150, founder of several Rotary Egg Banks and his family charity the Valmiki Foundation.

Passionate about promoting nutrition through eggs for India’s malnourished children, especially those living in orphanages, senior citizens, and other underprivileged people, Valmiki’s efforts go back to 2003 when he set up his Foundation, and later the Egg Bank in 2017, when he couldn’t find the required funding support to buy eggs at a

subsidised rate for the 45 children in his orphanage.

When he couldn’t find a single donor then, his Rotary club came to his rescue, and with its help, he not only helped his own orphanage but organisations beyond his RI district of 3150.

He soon struck a partnership with the National Egg Coordination



Hari Kishan Valmiki, member of RC Secunderabad, greets Pami Das, past president, RC Guwahati Luit. Rotarians from RCs Guwahati, Guwahati West, South and Metro are also present.

Committee (NECC), the largest non-government organisation of poultry farmers in India.

Coming to the latest in his egg-promotion journey, in which 50 egg carts have been given to unemployed persons in the North East, Valmiki says he was recently contacted by the NECC which wanted to promote the intake of eggs in the North East region of India where there are many challenges associated with nutrition and income generation. The organisation wanted to give 50 pushcarts to non-employed people, through which they could earn a livelihood by selling dishes made from eggs to the local people.

“But the challenges they faced were the fabrication of the pushcarts, identifying bonafide and worthy

beneficiaries capable of working hard and sincerely. They were looking for a trusted partner and approached me as they were aware of the work done by me through the Rotary Egg Bank,” says Valmiki.

Now began the real challenge and hard work for this Rotarian. For almost a year the Egg Man, as he is fondly known in Rotary and other associated circles connected with food and nutrition, travelled tirelessly across all the ‘Seven Sisters’ of the North East to “rope in partners, convince leaders, inspire caring hearts and build belief to start Egg Banks in the four NE states of Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura. Everything had to be done at the grassroots level and the involvement of the local Rotary leaders was essential,” he says.



The total funding required for these 50 egg carts, ₹25 lakh, was given by the NECC. Valmiki then identified Rotary clubs in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Manipur, and the local clubs raised ₹5 lakh that was needed to fund the burner stoves, utensils, electric bulbs and stools for each push cart. Of course, the funds required for his extensive travel across the North East to identify the opportunities came from his own pocket.

The search began for the beneficiaries who would be given the egg carts, and it was here that Rotarians from the local clubs did the needs assessment in various localities. They identified and shortlisted the beneficiaries by evaluating their eligibility and ability to run a petty business by working smartly and diligently. “Once they were identified an agreement was signed by them on a ₹200 stamp paper saying that they would not sell the push carts given to them. If for some reason

We will teach these vendors 100 different kinds of egg recipes. If they only sell boiled eggs or bread and omelette, they will not make much money.

they could not run the venture, they would hand over the egg cart to the Rotary club which would then identify a new person.” One was happy to note that gender equity has been kept in mind and half the beneficiaries are women!

Valmiki adds that each beneficiary was given ₹16,000 to help them get the venture up and running. He is very excited about the coming days as “we have plans to teach these vendors 100 different kinds of egg recipes. If they only sell boiled eggs or bread and omelette, they will not make much money.”

An expert at forging partnerships, Valmiki has roped in the International Institute of Hospitality Management to teach these egg cart operators interesting egg recipes so that there will be great value addition to the dishes they offer. Valmiki estimates that these vendors will be able to generate daily sales of around ₹10,000, of which their profit can be between ₹2,500–3,000.

In order to kick off this project egg banks have been established in all the four states with help from the local Rotary clubs. The project was officially inaugurated by RID 3240 DG Dr Kameswar Singh Elangbam, who came down to Guwahati from Meghalaya, while Dr Ezhil Annamalai Kumar,

chief operating officer of NECC, and Valmiki came from Hyderabad. For the hitherto unemployed 50 vendors from the four NE states, it was a day of hope and new beginnings.

Dr Kumar thanked Rotary for helping them do all the groundwork, and said even though the NECC had funded the cost of the pushcarts, they had no clue how to go about getting them fabricated in these states or transporting them to reach the beneficiaries. Valmiki acknowledged the hard work put in by assistant governor Vikash Bajaj, a member of Rotary Club of Guwahati Metro who volunteered to take up the challenge of identifying a local fabricator and meeting the deadlines by chasing and getting the best pushcarts made on time. Another Rotarian, Dinesh Manglunia, added value by narrowing down on the best deals for vessels, burners and other items.

Fahmina Rahman, one of the beneficiaries from the Harijan Basti in

Guwahati, thanked the Rotarians and others for giving hope to her and her family by providing this livelihood opportunity and promised to work hard with sincerity to make the venture a success and justify the trust that had been put in her. Valmiki said this was only phase-1 of the project, and in the next phase 100 more such egg carts will be given to beneficiaries in the other NE states.

Valmiki's egg stories are making waves and since he comes from Hyderabad, and is well known here as the 'egg man,' Telugu superstar Chiranjeevi, who runs a charity of his own, and is constantly on the lookout to encourage and promote social welfare projects, soft-launched this project in Hyderabad, a day before it was formally inaugurated in Guwahati. An excited Valmiki told *Rotary News*: "He has been monitoring our Foundation for some time... we had earlier taken 500 orphan children on a joy flight and he had seen that news too. So the



Chiranjeevi Charitable Trust invited us first to understand the magic of the egg bank, and during that discussion he asked us to bring a placard of the egg bank and the pushcart initiative in the NE, and he unveiled the placard in his office."



Rotarians promote egg consumption.



Above: DG Kameswar Singh Elangbam launching the egg cart project at Guwahati. Valmiki is on his right.



Valmiki with Telugu actor Chiranjeevi.



He also thanked *Rotary News* for carrying the first article about his initiative in September 2020 (<https://rotarynewsonline.org/reaching-eggs-to-the-nutritionally-deficient/>) after which several Rotary clubs and others had started asking for his help and partnership for doing egg-related projects.

Apart from another 100 egg carts in rest of the northeastern region, Valmiki is now working on establishing the first egg bank in Africa “with the help of African Rotarians and Rotaractors. As we all know, there is a lot of malnutrition in African countries and eggs are an excellent source of rich nutrients. Before I became a Rotarian, I was both an Interactor and a Rotaractor, and I know the power of the youth in taking forward such work for the poor and underprivileged people. The beauty of Rotary is that when you want to work on something good, you are not alone, so many pairs of hands will join you.” ■

RIPE Babalola's moments in Madurai

Team Rotary News

RIPE Olayinka Babalola visited Madurai, Tamil Nadu, in February during his India tour. His mission: to assess Rotarians' efforts to strengthen membership, expand humanitarian outreach and promote inclusive service.

A touching moment awaited him at the airport where special children from the Bethsan Special School welcomed him warmly. Later that evening, the President-elect presented the charter to the school's newly-formed Interact club and installed its president and secretary. Supported by the Rotary Club of Madurai North West, RID 3000, the school serves children with developmental needs. "Babalola interacted affectionately with the children and insisted on personally accepting the small bouquets each of them held out for him," said club secretary SS Sivakumar.

Babalola, accompanied by RI director M Muruganandam, also participated in a cervical cancer vaccination camp sponsored by the club, where 50 Interactors from the Interact Club of Guhan Matriculation School received the vaccine.

Addressing a joint membership summit, he elaborated on *Vision 2030*, Rotary's global call to increase membership to 1.25 million Rotarians and maintain Rotaract membership at 125,000 by 2030, the year Rotary celebrates its 125th anniversary. Representatives from RIDs 2981, 2982, 3000, 3203, 3206 and 3212 participated in the event. Urging district governors-elect to



Above: RIPE Olayinka Babalola being welcomed with bouquets by students of the Bethsan Special School. RI Director M Muruganandam is behind him.

Right: RIPE Babalola interacts with a girl at a cervical cancer vaccination camp. Also seen (from R): RID Muruganandam, DG J Karthik, DGE Subramani Ramanujam and RC Madurai North West secretary SS Sivakumar.





Left: RIPE Babalola and RID Muruganandam with Rotaractors.

Below: PRID C Basker lighting a lamp at the membership summit as RIPE Babalola, RID Muruganandam and Sumathi look on.

begin work immediately to expand and strengthen membership, he said, “I want you to reflect on how Rotary has changed you as a person. For Rotary to grow, every Rotarian must be able to share that story with friends and family and inspire them to join Rotary.” He stressed that personal transformation stories are central to meaningful membership growth.

He also called on Rotary leaders to value Rotaractors for their abilities and leadership potential.

Muruganandam explained the Red-Amber-Green (RAG) classification of clubs based on membership strength across the four zones and outlined a comprehensive seven-point agenda anchored in a “1:2:3 formula” — adding 100 Rotary clubs, 200 Rotaract clubs and 300 Interact clubs, along with 100 new Rotary Community Corps. This initiative, he said, would result in “a net growth of 10,000 Rotarians and 10,000 Rotaractors every year for the next four years.” He also called for a five per cent increase in women’s membership.

Highlighting existing gaps, he noted that nearly 3,000 clubs had not chartered even one Rotaract club, while 3,800 clubs had yet to start an Interact club. He urged district leaders



to address this immediately. “The future of Rotary lies in how well we nurture our Interactors and Rotaractors today and welcome them as Rotarians tomorrow,” he said.

PRID C Basker, along with DGs, PDGs and district leaders from the six participating districts, attended the summit. Earlier, Babalola and Muruganandam interacted exclusively with Rotaract representatives.

Several major service projects were also launched at the summit. These included a ₹1.12 crore GG project to install 14 dialysis machines in healthcare institutions in Puducherry and the distribution of sewing machines to 300

disadvantaged women by RID 2981. RID 2982 launched a \$137,362 GG project to construct a diabetes care block at the Government Mohan Kumaramangalam Hospital in Salem, and a check dam in Hosur.

RID 3000 aims to vaccinate 10,000 girls against cervical cancer, construct 40 school toilet blocks, and install smart boards to support digital education in schools.

RID 3206 plans to provide reconstructive surgeries to burn survivors and dialysis support to 720 patients every month. Each of the 125 Rotary clubs of RID 3212 will adopt a village and transform it during the next year, announced DGE Gandhi Krishnan. ■

Rotary creates lasting impact

V Muthukumaran

Rotarians are creating lasting impact, and more than the cost of these high-tech machines, the lives they will be saving are of enormous value,” said RIPE Olayinka Babalola at the installation of medical equipment at the Institute of Child Health, Egmore, a government hospital for children in Chennai.

Congratulating the Rotary Club of Chennai Upscale, RID 3234, for doing

the medical project, he pointed to the ‘larger community impact’ such efforts by Rotarians will have “as they not only save precious lives, but *Create a Lasting Impact* in their communities.” A high frequency oscillatory ventilator (HFOV) worth ₹41 lakh, an anaesthesia workstation (₹8 lakh), and a set of furniture at the pre-operation assessment area (₹46,000) — all through CSR grants from Ford Business Solutions

India — were installed at the hospital. “HFOV is one-of-its-kind ventilator that was much in demand as the hospital was not able to cater to the specific needs of children in the age group of 10–18 years... hence, following a request from them, we imported the machine from Japan,” said DG Vinod Saraogi. He lauded club president Jagjit Singh for taking the initiative and completing the project in time.

In her address, Jagjit said the HFOV was a “highly flexible ventilator that will cater to children from different age groups, from low-weight infants (300gm) to 13-year-old children weighing 40kg. This is a life-saving technology that bridges a critical gap in paediatric post-operative care.” The anaesthesia workstation would relieve children from prolonged pain following a surgery or complications, “and this



RIPE Olayinka Babalola inaugurates an anaesthesia workstation at the Institute of Child Health in Chennai. Also seen are (from L) RID 3234 DG Vinod Saraogi, RC Chennai Upscale president Jagjit Singh, RI Director M Muruganandam, PDG J Sridhar and PRID Mahesh Kotbagi (extreme right).

equipment is generally used for doing biopsy where the patients are under sedation.” Both the machines would reduce mortality, improve outcomes by strengthening paediatric care, and instil a cosy environment in the ICU, she said. Each of this high-tech equipment would benefit 130–150 critically ill children being treated at the ICH, Egmore, in a year. The club also gave clinical tables, chairs, and other furniture for patients.

Mobility aids

Around 35 clubs of RID 3234 came together to distribute 140 pairs of hearing aids, 25 push carts, 20 wheelchairs and 13 AI-enabled smart vision glasses to beneficiaries across age groups. The total project, valued at ₹30.15 lakh, is funded by a mix of CSR grants and member sponsorship. At the



RIPE Babalola presents a pair of hearing aid to a girl child. From L: DG Saraogi, PDG Abirami Ramanathan, Trustee Elect PRID A S Venkatesh, RI Director Muruganandam, PRID P T Prabhakar and DGND Ravi Sundaresan (2nd from R).

RIPE Yinka Babalola interacted with the beneficiaries and listened to their response to his query: “How do you think your life will change now after getting this Rotary gift?”

packed hall of the Alumni Club of Anna University, hundreds of special children, differently-abled students, their parents, and other project beneficiaries were happy to receive the mobility aids from RIPE Babalola.

He interacted with them and listened to their response to his query: “How do you think your life will change now after getting this Rotary gift?”



At the launch of pushcarts, along with RI Director Muruganandam.

RC Meenambakkam was the lead club in providing hearing aids to children, thanks to a ₹18.9 lakh CSR grant from Meridian Global Ventures. Fourteen clubs mobilised funds to provide 25 push carts, each costing ₹19,000; RC Chennai Mambalam gave 20 wheelchairs (₹1.5 lakh), sponsored by the Freedom Trust being run by Dr S Sunder, a rehab specialist and a club member. “Over the last 10 years, our club has distributed artificial limbs to around 1,000 amputees; it is an ongoing project being held across South India,” he says; and RC Madras East donated 13 AI-enabled smart vision glasses (CSR fund: ₹5 lakh).

DG Saraogi thanked the club presidents for the service projects and assured that pink autos would be given to 27 women shortly, once the vehicles were ready. “RID 3234 clubs have given 128 pink autos, each costing ₹3 lakh, through a mix of CSR grants and member contributions,” he said. Santhosh Kumar from RC Madras Ashoknagar was the event chair.

Pictures by Muthukumaran

Kerala flood victims get homes

Rasheeda Bhagat

When Kerala was devastated by floods in 2019 and the homes of hundreds of people were turned into rubble, RI District 3211 PDG Dr Giju Alexander George, and his wife Ramani, both AKS members, were thinking of helping out in some way with the funds they had donated to TRF, by converting some of their donation into a directed fund. Through this route, the Rotarian can get back 95 per cent of his contribution for doing a service project of his own choice.

Their keen desire to help has resulted in 12 beautiful homes being built for flood victims in Kottayam district at a cost of ₹1.14 crore.

The homes were inaugurated by RI director M Muruganandam in April.

Inaugurating the project, Muruganandam, who was accompanied by his spouse, Sumathi, said that this humanitarian project aimed to provide housing to 12 flood-affected families. “I am happy that the houses are built on land allotted by the local panchayat in the names of the beneficiaries, ensuring ownership, dignity and long-term security to these people.”

This “great gesture, made possible through a directed gift from PDG George, and carried out despite so many challenges, obstructions

and obstacles, stands as a tribute to compassion and service. It will help devastated families to rebuild their lives with stability, hope and a renewed sense of purpose.”

Recalling the genesis of the project to build these homes, Dr George says that around that time, their Rotary district had a project to put up shelters and build houses, and PDG E K Luke was in charge of this project.

The Kerala government had published a list of people who had lost their houses in successive natural calamities and needed assistance and funds to rebuild them. “So, every panchayat and every municipality had a list of names, as the devastation caused by the floods was huge. In the Thalevala Parambak, near Vaithiyam, the list had 12 people whose homes had to be rebuilt. Luke contacted me and asked me if I could help,” he recalls.

Candidly, Dr George admits that initially he was not interested because he lives in Kollam, which is far off, about 100km, from this place. “So I said, I have got no interest in doing this project. But my wife, who is from Kottayam district, and a past Inner Wheel District 321 chairman, said, ‘why are you reluctant; this is my district, and why don’t you take care of my district?’”



The husband came on board and agreed that they would direct some of their AKS funds toward building these 12 homes.

But a terrible tragedy struck him when in 2022 he lost her following a massive heart attack.

By this time, the stone-laying ceremony was already over, and their club RC Quilon West End suggested that since this was a directed fund which had gone into a global grant to build these homes, it should be named Rotarian Ramani George Memorial Housing Project, which has been done.

Dr George is grateful to RC Quilon West End members “who



RI Director M Muruganandam and his wife Sumathi with (from L) PDGs E K Luke, Thomas Vavanikunnel, Giju Alexander George, DG Tina Antoney and DGN Meera Daniel at the housing site. PDGs K Srinvasan, John Daniel, Shirish Kesavan, K P Ramachandran Nair, A Mani and DGE Krishnan G Nair are also seen. PDG George's daughter Anjana is seen on the left.

helped me to complete the project. Some of the members supervised the construction work. Two of our members have worked as chief engineers in their careers and another member is an architect, and they all helped me in a big way to ensure supervision of the project.”

Asked to elaborate on what Muruganandam was referring to when during the inaugural

This great gesture will help devastated families to rebuild their lives with stability, hope and a renewed sense of purpose.

M Muruganandam
RI Director

ceremony he complimented him for continuing and completing the project despite many challenges, obstructions and obstacles, Dr George explained that the first challenge was related to the area being a hilly region which was badly eroded by the landslides during the floods.

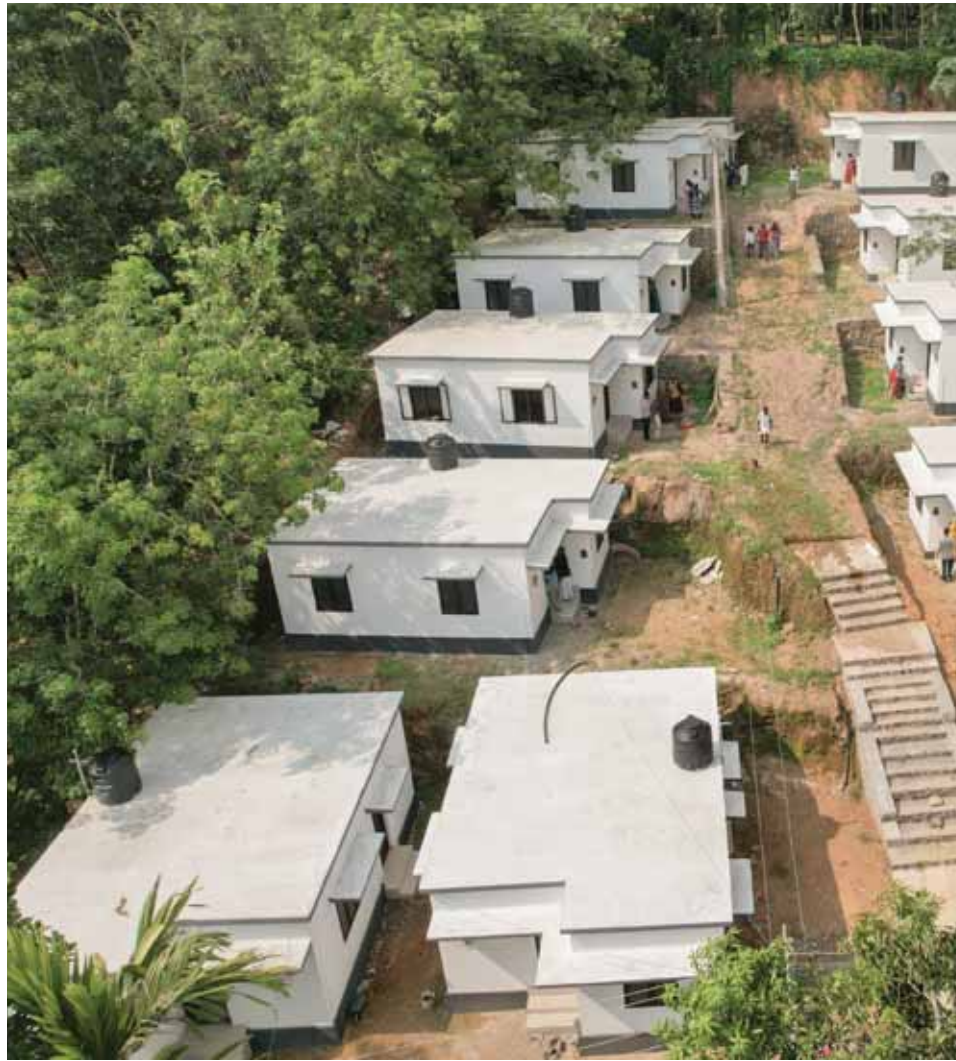
A plateau had to be created and a lot of digging and removal of the earth were required, which again involved getting government permissions. Even as they would get permission, more rains would follow,

and the district collector would ask them to halt all work.

“There were huge environmental concerns, and it took almost two years for us to get the plateau formation done. On top of that, the contractor who had taken on the job, fell ill, resulting in additional delay of another year.”

RID 3211 DG Tina Antony, who had another dream project to build a Rotary village on land donated by a Rotarian, saw that project fall through due to some problems related to rules and regulations, and “was very happy to get involved in this project. It was a much smaller project but she was keen that it should be completed during her term, which happened.”

Dr George also acknowledged the interest taken by PDG John Daniel, “who lives barely 10km from my house and was always available to help out with information about global grants — he was a former RRFC — and he also took keen interest in this project. Earlier, during



RID Muruganandam presents key to a house to a beneficiary. His wife Sumathi, DG Tina, Anjana George, PDGs G A George, Ramachandran Nair and DGN Meera are also in the picture.





A bird's eye view of the homes built for flood victims in Kottayam.



Flood-hit families waiting to receive the house keys.



DG Tina presents a key to a woman as Sumathi looks on.



Plaque being unveiled at the housing site.

Covid time, we had worked together to give out ventilators worth ₹3.6 crore.”

He adds that the enthusiasm and interest of so many people ensured the completion of this project, which was a global grant, “with a silent international partner from UK, who acted as an observer, without making any monetary contribution.”

His daughter and a member of the same club (RC Quilon West End), Dr Anjana George thanked all the members of the club for their support and the district panchayat officials who had helped in completing the project. The event was attended by club members, DG Tina, DGN Meera John, her husband John Daniel and other past governors and RI officers. ■

The journey of an exemplary Rotarian

Atul Bhide

He was born on a makeshift bed under a staircase in his grandmother's home in Calcutta, even as threats of bombs landing from Japanese forces during World War II loomed large. He was sent to a boarding school at the young age of six due

to parental discord, only to be moved again to another school over 1,200km away from home. Past RI President Kalyan Banerjee's early years could have resulted in limitations, but instead, they built resilience. Through the 200-odd pages of his biography titled *Tirelessly Yours - the life and*

work of Kalyan Banerjee, written by Ganesh Vancheeswaran, what we come across is a journey of a fighter, who prefers to look within, believes in himself and takes action.

From marrying Binota, a girl of his choice, going against the family's wishes due to financial, educational



PRIP Kalyan Banerjee and Binota on their 50th wedding anniversary celebrations at Vapi, Gujarat.

and caste background of the girl to opting for a small 10-year-old firm to starting a career after graduation from a prestigious institution like IIT Kharagpur, or leaving the bustling city of Mumbai, most suitable for one's professional growth, to join a new company in an indescriptive tiny place called Vapi (in Gujarat), Banerjee has always believed in himself and his strengths, this book tells you.

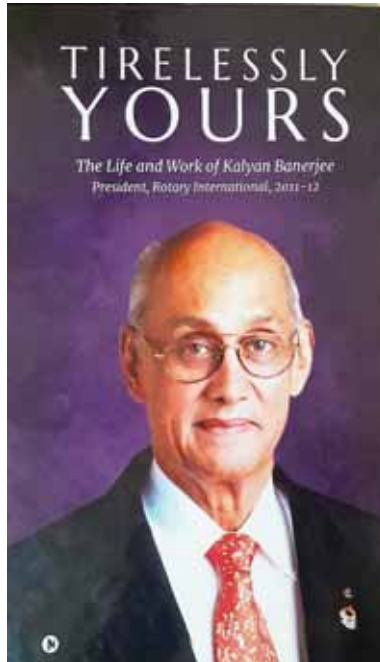
What makes him stand out from other successful people is his compassion towards fellow humans and his tireless efforts to not just look beyond himself but act upon it as he continued to grow in his profession.

Schooling in three different institutions, the young student made the best out of each of those schools. From mastering stage through poetry recitations and elocution at Tagore's Shantiniketan, learning life etiquettes in Lady Hartley, a British school, to honing public-speaking skills at the Scindia Public School in Gwalior, Banerjee, a boy with a twinkle in his eyes, as fellow schoolmates recall, excelled in many fields during his early years.

The young Banerjee was a favourite of the senior boys at Shantiniketan, also for another interesting reason — he was adept at carrying their love letters to the girls' hostel located two blocks away!

While Shantiniketan laid the foundation of ideals and ethics, the Scindia School developed love for sports in young Banerjee. An athlete and a good football and hockey player, he is a big supporter of the East Bengal football team.

He also stood first in the Senior Cambridge Exam at the Scindia School. His friendship with the late former Union minister Madhavrao Scindia and sitar maestro Anand Shankar, forged at the school, played an important role subsequently in his life.



Tirelessly Yours

**The Life and Work of
Kalyan Banerjee,**

President,
Rotary International, 2011–12

Author:
Ganesh Vancheeswaran
Notion Press

Price: ₹1,465
Amazon: Hardcover: ₹1,319;
Paperback: ₹1,179

In 1960, he secured admission to IIT Kharagpur. After graduating in Chemical Engineering from IIT-K, Banerjee took a bold decision on the advice of his cousin to join a fairly new company in Mumbai, Excel Industries, owned by K C Shroff.

Impressed with his talent and hard work, Rajnikant, Shroff's cousin, invited Banerjee to join the founding team of a new company from scratch in the small town of Vapi in Gujarat. Here too while his father was unhappy over his decision to leave Excel Industries, the young man stuck to his decision,

shifted to Vapi and gave his best for building a new company, United Phosphorus Ltd (UPL).

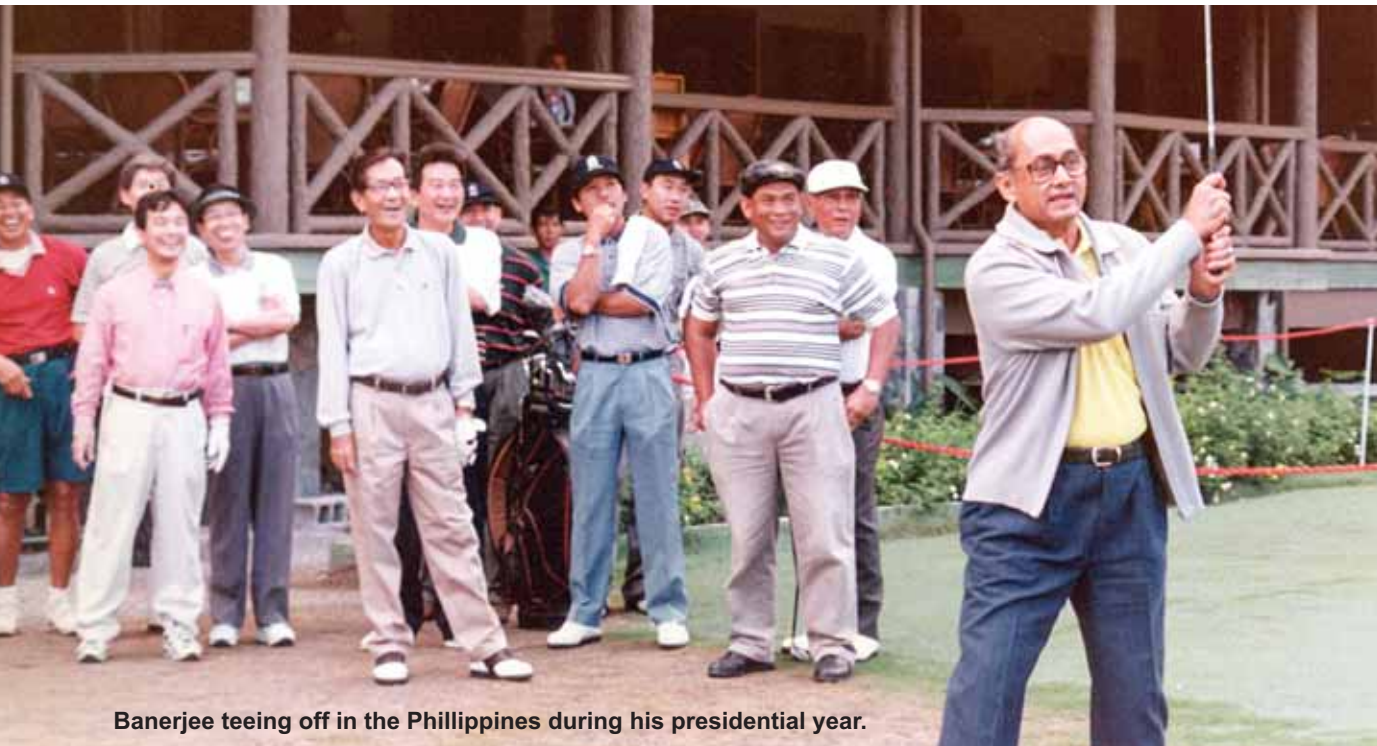
That was in 1967; ever since Rajju Shroff and his wife Sandra Shroff, the founders of UPL, have been mentors and great supporters of Banerjee both in his professional and Rotary life. Moving on, Banerjee continued to accept new challenges, proved his mettle and helped UPL grow across India, and eventually at the global level.

A dynamic person all through, Banerjee's wedding to Binota and the circumstances leading to their court marriage, amply show his belief in himself, trust in fellow beings and passion for life. Starting a new life with a partner in an unknown small town, culturally and linguistically so different from what he was used to, shows strength of character and trust in his spouse.

Rotary: World of fellowship and service

In 1972 the Rotary Club of Vapi invited Banerjee to become a member. This opened new horizons both for him and the club. Over the years, supported by the Shroffs, Banerjee started building infrastructure for the betterment of the company's workers in sports, education and healthcare, and Rotary's canvas provided a new platform for his vision of doing good for the larger society. Eventually, he played an important role in Vapi's transformation from potholed roads, no restaurants and water scarcity to the modern town it slowly became.

While their own company made good progress, Banerjee understood the importance of having an industry body for voicing concerns to the government, and he played a crucial role in the formation of the Vapi Industrial Association along with Rajju Shroff and a few other industry leaders. His leadership and ability to pursue with the authorities to address the industry's



Banerjee teeing off in the Philippines during his presidential year.



concern resulted in his becoming the association's president.

Along with his growth in UPL and appointment as director on the UPL board, Banerjee's deeper involvement in Rotary increased and led to bigger responsibilities such as club president in 1975–76 to district governor in 1980–81.

As Rotary governor, he achieved the feat of getting a current RI President to attend his district conference which saw a record 1,500 registrations. Soon he was noticed at the Rotary headquarters and thanks to his deep knowledge of Rotary and great articulation skills, he was invited as a trainer at the 1983 International Assembly.

His active involvement in not just building healthcare and educational facilities but also maintaining the high quality of the service projects he initiated through Rotary are all worth reading and emulating. His minute observations about the community's needs also led him to undertake initiatives such as providing a better underground drainage system for Vapi.

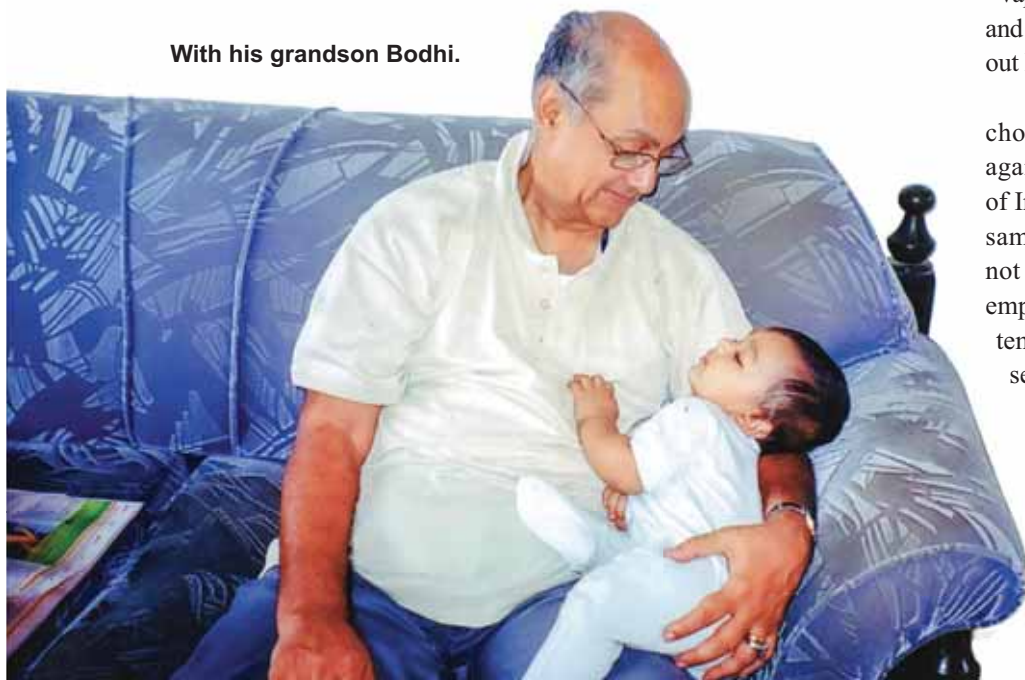
Many Rotary leaders do support large infrastructure projects for community service but Banerjee's personal involvement in ensuring the highest quality projects was rare and set him apart. Even today, as an octogenarian, he continues to visit hospitals, schools and colleges built by Rotary to monitor and guide their operations.

The expansion of the Rotary hospital in Vapi from a 2-bed clinic to a 200-bed multispecialty institution, the setting up of educational institutions, and the initiatives he drove for the farmers in Dang district are truly inspiring.

“People establish transactional connections, Banerjee establishes real relationships,” says Rtn Madhav Mohan, aptly describing what friendship means to Banerjee. No wonder this soft-spoken, classical music lover (Indian and Western — Amjad Ali Khan to Gianni), could get Indian Railways on board, through his school friend Madhavrao Scindia, to get important trains to stop at Vapi.

Banerjee’s humungous efforts in both polio eradication and literacy are listed in this book. His monumental work including personally visiting rural areas, meeting Muslim communities to overcome their resistance to polio vaccination, and stubbornly travelling to a war-torn Afghanistan as RI President, against the advice of RI, which even sent Binota back home, while he was in Afghanistan to meet its President to discuss the importance of polio vaccination for Afghanistan’s children, shows he has always walked the extra mile for Rotary’s service initiatives across the globe.

With his grandson Bodhi.



Binota shakes hands with the Pope as Banerjee looks on.

The book has interesting nuggets on his tenure as RI President, and how he became an Arch Klumph Society member before assuming charge as trustee chair of TRF, so that he would have moral ground to ask for similar donations from others. There are also numerous anecdotes from Rotarians, based on interviews with club members and world leaders, Kanubhai Desai, the former accountant in UPL and now Gujarat finance minister, personal friends and relatives, which make the book really interesting. The role and importance of his late wife

Binota in Banerjee’s life — personal, professional and in Rotary — comes out vividly through these interviews. The way he took care of her during her illness reveals another side of the man as a loving and caring partner. The book also has interesting pictures from various periods in Banerjee’s life

The narrative begins with foreword by Mohan Patel, an industrialist, friend and ex-Sheriff of Mumbai, and ends with observations from Rtn Krushit Shah, who came up with the idea for this book, which was commissioned not by Banerjee but the Rotary Club of Vapi. “Vapi would not be Vapi without Kalyan and Kalyan would not be Kalyan without Binota,” shares Rtn Sandip Shah.

Kalyan Banerjee’s story is about choosing purpose over comfort — again and again. Like the Milkman of India Dr Verghese Kurien from the same land of Gujarat, Banerjee did not just build a career; he built and empowered communities, an ecosystem and a legacy that will continue to serve for long years.

His is an ideal example of transformative leadership.

*The writer is a member of
RC Thane Hills*

Bicycles for girls; blood for thalassaemia patients

Rasheeda Bhagat

Around 30 clubs of RI District 3142 have raised funds to gift 500 bicycles to Adivasi schoolgirls from underprivileged families in some rural areas of Maharashtra in places such as Kalyan, Bhiwandi, Shahapur and Titwala.

The project which cost over ₹16 lakh was made possible through funding from corporates including Vivo (₹4 lakh), and contributions from various club members. The cycles were recently handed over to the girls at a gifting ceremony organised by RID 3142's Literacy team at the Pranayu

Hospital, owned by two Rotarians, at Bhiwandi.

These cycles will ensure that girls in secondary schools in classes from 7 to 10, who were at the risk of discontinuing their education because of long commute of 3–4km, will now continue their education.



The Literacy team of RI District 3142 after distributing bicycles to schoolchildren.



Students with the bicycles gifted to them by RI District 3142.



Giving details of how the project, titled *Kanya*, originated, District Literacy chair Vinaya Hebbar, who is a member of RC Navi Mumbai Link Town Airoli, said, “Our team does many projects on improving the facilities and infrastructure at government schools. For a couple of months, while I was touring government schools in the rural and tribal areas of these places in search of schools to convert them into Happy Schools, talking to the principals and teachers we found that the biggest issue troubling them was that girl students were dropping out in the higher secondary

schools because their homes were 3–4km away.”

It is common knowledge that in rural areas parents are wary about sending teenaged girls to schools when walking a long distance is involved to reach the school and get back home. To ensure the girl’s physical safety, they take them out of school, putting a cruel end to their education. “We were told that girls regularly attend classes without any problem in primary schools because these are more in number and closer to their homes. But high schools are often about 3–4km away from their homes and with proper public transport not being available in these villages, many girl students drop out from schools.”

The tragedy was that generally girls are very enthusiastic about continuing their education but have no say when the parents put their physical safety first. The parents of these girls work mostly as farm labourers, in brick kilns or are engaged in other daily wage work. “So we decided to change the project a little and extend help to empower these girls

This bicycle is not just transport, but a powerful enabler of education, dignity and independence.

and ensure they remain in schools by giving them bicycles,” says Vinaya.

The result was 500 happy faces and bright futures. The best part of this project is helping not only the 500 girls who received the bicycles. As the demand from the various schools for bicycles was 850, and the project team originally set out to collect funds for about 1,000 cycles, they were not able to raise that kind of money.

Now both the Rotarians and the school authorities are encouraging the girls “to help other fellow girl students by offering them a ride whenever possible, promoting a culture of care and inclusion. We are so happy that many of the girls now don’t have to drop out of school after Class 5

and can complete their education with safety, dignity and confidence,” says Vinaya.

She adds that “actually the boys had also requested us to give them cycles; since we couldn’t meet everybody’s wishes, we have decided to continue the project this coming year too. Because at the end of the day, we feel that we should not discriminate between boys and girls.” The beneficiaries were chosen on the basis of the distance between their home and the school, and some of them who have only single parent were also chosen.”

To ensure a higher reach of this project, the Rotarians have asked the principals to ensure that the girls with bicycles, who do not have younger

sisters in school, should hand them back to the school once they complete Class 10, so that the cycles can be given to other girls.

The bicycles were handed over at an event attended by DG Harsh Makol, DGE Nilesh Jaywant, project coordinator BV Raviprakash, Vinaya Hebbar, assistant governor Rohidas Bhoir and Pranayu Hospital MD Dr Rajesh Bhoir, a Rotarian, along with representatives of the key sponsor Vivo.

Raviprakash shared details of the project and acknowledged contributions from Vivo, Ventura Securities (₹1.5 lakh) and Cirrus Tours & Travels (₹2 lakh), along with the presidents and donors of the involved



clubs, “proving once again the power of collective service.” DG Makol said: “These are not just bicycles — they are pathways to education and stepping stones towards a brighter future for these girls.”

Vinaya added, “The joy, excitement and gratitude on the faces of the girls were truly indescribable. For them, this bicycle is not just transport, but a powerful enabler of education, dignity and independence. DGE Nilesh Jaywant encouraged the students to pursue their education with determination.”

Thalassaemia centre

On the same occasion, a significant healthcare initiative — the inauguration



Left: District Literacy chair Vinaya Hebbar (6th from L), project coordinator B V Ravi Prakash (in yellow t-shirt) and Literacy deputy director Kailash Sonawane (on Prakash’s left) after gifting bicycles to schoolchildren.



of a Thalassaemia Care Center — was also launched, reinforcing Rotary’s commitment to both education and health.

The centre is located at the Pranayu Hospital owned by the Bhoir brothers, both Rotarians. This hospital is in Bhiwandi and this is the fourth thalassaemia project that the Rotarians of this district have set up.

On how the blood which is given at this centre free of cost to thalassaemia patients is procured, Vinaya says that various Rotary clubs in the district organise regular blood donation camps at engineering and other colleges, gurudwaras, etc, where volunteers donate blood.

Speaking at the event, Dr Rajesh Bhoir gave details of this initiative

and emphasised the urgent need for awareness and timely treatment of thalassaemia, a genetic blood disorder that requires regular blood transfusions and lifelong care. “This centre will provide free treatment for thalassaemia patients, offering much-needed relief to families facing financial and medical challenges. This initiative will also focus on early detection, counselling, and spreading awareness to help prevent and manage the condition effectively.”

The event stands as a powerful example of Rotary’s commitment to education, healthcare, and community upliftment — ensuring that young girls can continue their education and that critical health services reach those in need, added Vinaya. ■

When Indian wives fed our starving cricket team in Africa

S R Madhu

My addiction to India's favourite sport began as a six-year-old kid playing cricket with tennis balls in a neighbourhood *maidan* in Bangalore. My talent was zero — I scored few runs and took fewer wickets — but I commanded attention with a fund of cricket anecdotes and statistics, thanks to books like Jack Fingleton's *Brightly Fades the Don*. My uncle, a cricket

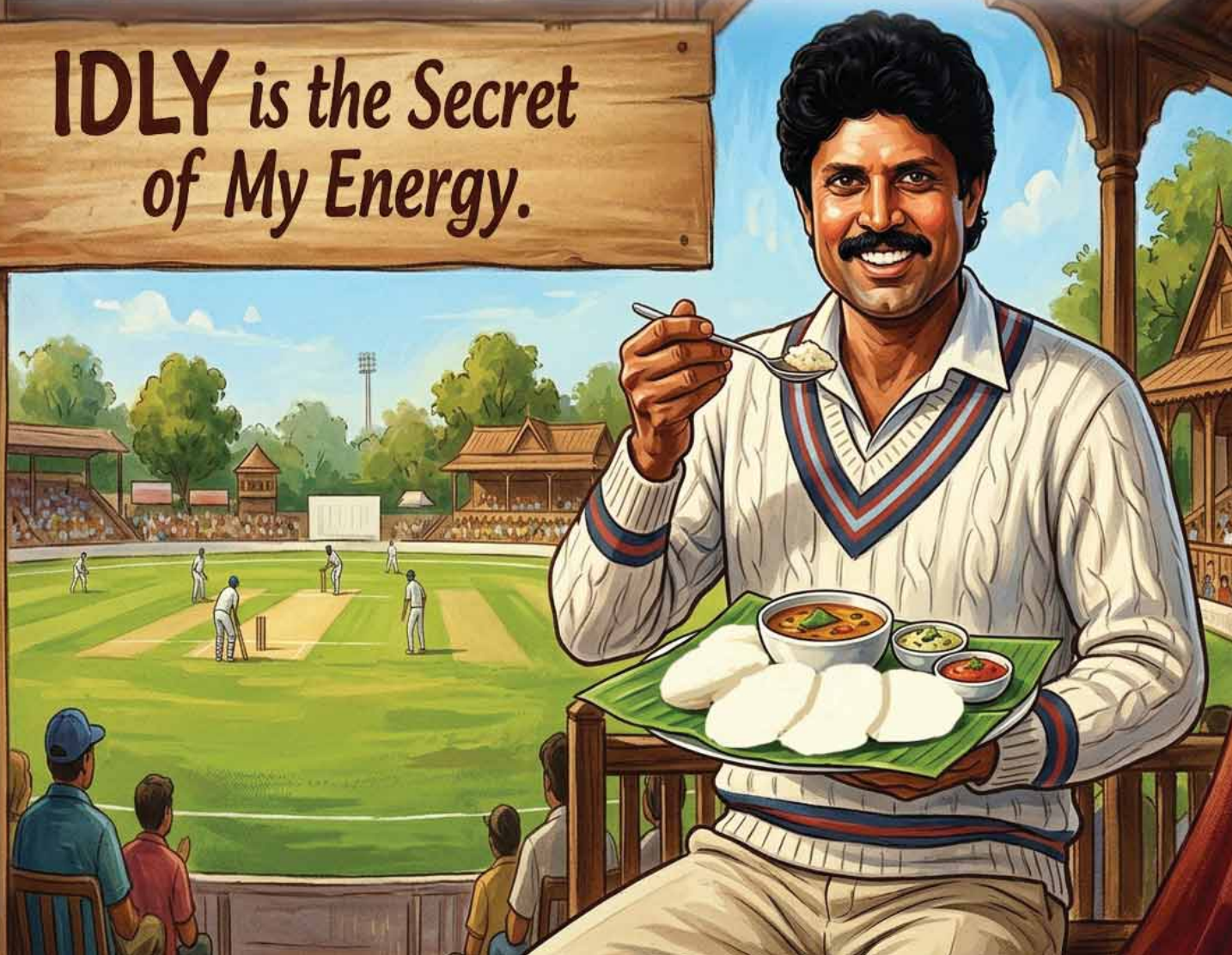
aficionado, was in charge of his office library. He ordered every book on cricket which I promptly borrowed and returned after making copious notes. I was fond of quoting legendary cricket writer Neville Cardus, particularly his most famous sentence "The batsman dismissed the ball from his presence," which commentators from Mumbai to Melbourne parrot even today.

I adored BBC commentator John Arlott, who was also a poet and a wine

connoisseur and spoke with wit and panache. When South African spinner Tufty Mann tormented English batsman George Mann with his offspin, Arlott remarked "This is a clear case of Mann's inhumanity to Mann."

When I grew up, my cricket mania only got sharper. Like all kindred souls, I hid my transistor in the office desk drawer for clandestine cricket commentary. When India won the World Cup in 1983, I celebrated by buying my wife

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Nirmala a gold necklace. Her relatives ribbed her, asking what she had done for the victory.

But Nirmala disliked cricket, complaining about the time I wasted on it. During a London vacation, she was upset when I was totally absorbed in an England vs India Test match on TV. Tendulkar was in sublime form, and there was no way I could move away. She had an outing on her own, joining a guided tour of the Buckingham palace.

However, Nirmala once performed a noble service for the Indian cricket team — something I wasn't capable of doing. It happened in October 1992 in Harare, Zimbabwe, where I was working in a UN project for four years. The Indian community was thrilled when our cricket team arrived in Zimbabwe en route to South Africa where they were to play three Test matches. In Harare, it was a single Test match and a single one-day match. Azharuddin was the skipper, star players included Kapil Dev, Tendulkar, Manoj Prabhakar and Javagal Srinath.

The Indian government deputed an official in Zimbabwe, Arun Kajla, to liaise with the national cricket team and provide any services the team required. He gave us some disquieting information: the cricket team was starving because the food at their hotel was atrocious. He remarked that the team was deliberately being served bad food so that they would play badly. I laughed, thinking this was a joke, but Kajla looked grave and said "This is not a joke, this is true."

The Indian ladies in Harare were outraged when they heard about the plight of our cricketers. "We'll look after them," they exclaimed.

Nirmala joined the rescue army of female chefs. She had brought a special idli-making machine from Chennai to Harare. She got up at 4am the next day, and packed some 100 idlis, fluffy, flower-soft and irresistible, along

with spicy, delectable *sambar*. Kajla arranged to collect the precious parcel.

Half of the idlis came back uneaten. Kajla apologised, saying, "The team loved your idlis, Nirmala. But how much can they eat? They had loads of Punjabi, Gujarati, Bengali, South Indian food... The Gujarati ladies in particular sent huge quantities of delicious stuff. Yesterday it was famine, today it was a feast, thanks to you lovely ladies."

But he promised her that on "Saturday, I'll take nothing from the other ladies. You make masala dosas which you do so well." Nirmala was dismayed. Making masala dosas for some 25 hungry sportsmen was no joke, when she had no assistance and the right ingredients wouldn't be available in Harare. She said, "No, let the Gujarati ladies have the pleasure."

In October 1992 when the Indian team visited Zimbabwe to play a series of matches, the players were deliberately being served bad food so that they would play badly.

The food problem got sorted out, thanks to the energetic Indian ladies and the resourceful Kajla. And the hotel food got better too, after protests from India.

Coming to cricket, the India-Zimbabwe Test match was historic as it was the latter's first-ever Test match! They acquitted themselves creditably, India did not. The Indian team was unused to playing at Harare's altitude, and the bowlers in particular found it tough. The match was drawn, mainly because the Zimbabweans batted very

slowly. Not even three of the four innings were completed.

The one-day match was held on Diwali, a Sunday. Nirmala ruefully recalled the Diwali family get-togethers back home. But I was too excited to be nostalgic. What better way to celebrate Diwali than watch a one-day match, I exclaimed. The entire Indian community turned up. Again, India didn't exactly sparkle but managed to win. They scored some 205 runs in their 50 overs, Zimbabwe fell short by 16 runs. I was relieved, I couldn't have accepted an Indian defeat — nor could the other vociferous Indian spectators!

We were guests at two pleasant dinners in honour of the cricketers held by the Indian High Commission and Air India. Wives were present in strength. At the High Commission dinner, male and female guests sat in separate groups. Someone remarked: "The ladies have come to see the cricketers, and they are all with the men." Kapil Dev gallantly picked up his plate and sat with the ladies. He asked them about their Indian origins, about how they liked their life in Zimbabwe, thanked them for feeding the team on their first few days in Harare. "We really hogged, the food was so good," he remarked.

At the Air India dinner, we found Sanjay Manjrekar waiting for the hotel elevator. I promptly struck up a conversation with him. When I got off, I was elated to meet the entire Indian team, who thought I was a friend of Manjrekar. I shook hands with them, even chatted with my idols Tendulkar and Kapil Dev. Some of the cricketers chatted up with Nirmala, complimenting her on her Conjeevaram saree, much to her delight.

"Cricket is a boring game," pronounced Nirmala, "but our players are a nice sort."

The writer is a member of Rotary Club of Madras South

Restoring lost sound

Jaishree



Above: Krit Bhatiya with his mother and grandmother.

For three-year-old Krit Bhatiya, the world has begun to sound different. The laughter of family members, the voices around him, and the rhythms of daily life — sounds many take for granted — are now part of his growing world. Krit is among the 10 beneficiaries of *Gift of Sound*, a cochlear implant project undertaken by the Rotary Club of Mumbai Bravehearts, RID 3141, in partnership with the Rotary Club of Baneshwar, RID 3292, through a global grant.

“The cochlear implant programme has changed our lives. It has given our child a chance to hear and speak,” said Krit’s mother Nirali, echoing the emotions of many families touched by the initiative.

The surgeries were performed at the Criticare Asia Hospital in March 2026. The beneficiaries ranged from an 11-month-old infant to a 17-year-old teenager. All of them have now undergone the first stage of switch-on therapy and have begun auditory verbal therapy to help them develop speech and language skills.

The project was initiated after club members learnt about the alarming gap in access to cochlear implant surgeries for underprivileged children. “We came to understand the magnitude of this need through our club member Dr Sanjay Helale, who has nearly three decades of experience working with cochlear implant patients,” says past president Khuzem Sakarwala. “For most families, the surgery is financially impossible. Rotary saw an opportunity to step in and transform lives.”

According to Dr Helale, head of ENT and Cochlear Implant Programme at Criticare Asia Hospital, early intervention is crucial. “Hearing is the foundation of speech and language development. If hearing loss goes untreated during the early years, it can severely impact a child’s cognitive, emotional and social growth,” he explains.

Nearly four out of every 1,000 children born require cochlear implants, yet only around five per cent currently receive them. The remaining 95 per cent children often grow up unable to hear or speak, especially when their



families cannot afford the expensive treatment.

A cochlear implant surgery in a private hospital can cost anywhere between ₹8–10 lakh. While some government hospitals offer support schemes, access remains limited and success rates are often inconsistent because of infrastructural constraints. Criticare Asia Hospital, known for its expertise in ENT care and cochlear implant surgeries, performs the entire process at a subsidised cost of around ₹6 lakh per patient for this Rotary programme.

The initiative covers not just the surgery, but also the extensive rehabilitation that follows. “The surgery is only the beginning. The real success lies in post-operative therapy, consistent follow-up and family

support. Without that, the child cannot fully develop speech and listening skills,” says Dr Helale.

The programme therefore includes pre and post-operative care, speech and language therapy, auditory verbal therapy (AVT), counselling and long-term monitoring. To ensure professional rehabilitation support, the club has signed an MoU with Education Audiology and Research (EAR), an institution dedicated to educating children with hearing impairment. EAR also offers online AVT sessions for beneficiaries living outside Mumbai. The AVT process may extend to 3–4 months for adults and up to three years for pre-lingual children.

The selection of beneficiaries is done with meticulous care. Children and

adults suspected to have hearing loss are first referred by ENT specialists or audiologists. After medical assessments at Criticare Hospital, the hospital’s medical social worker evaluates the financial condition of families before the cases are reviewed by the club members.

“Rotarians and Anns personally visit the children during surgery and recovery. We wanted families to feel they are not alone in this journey. The emotional support matters as much as the financial assistance,” says Sakarwala.

The club aims to complete 200 cochlear implant surgeries over the next two years under this GG project. Awareness generation has also become an important part of the mission. In December 2025, the club organised *Sound of Music*, a musical fundraiser that highlighted the need for cochlear implant support. A documentary film on the project created by Sakarwala and Adi Pocha has further helped spread awareness.

“Every child deserves the opportunity to experience the world through sound. When a child begins to hear and speak for the first time, it changes not just one life, but the future of an entire family,” says Dr Helale.

RCs Bombay Bay View, Queen’s Necklace and Mumbai Elegant have supported this project. Another GG for the programme is almost through to support more children with hearing disorder, says Sakarwala.

Other GG projects

RC Mumbai Bravehearts is driving three other healthcare GG projects — addressing Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) in infants, for which the treatment cost per child is around ₹35,000; paediatric heart surgeries (at a subsidised fee of ₹1.75 lakh) at the Sathya Sai Sanjeevani Centre for Child Heart Care; and menstrual hygiene awareness and distribution of reusable sanitary packs for women and girls. ■

Below: Baby Chhayanshi Tiwari after the cochlear implant at the Criticare Asia Hospital with (from L) parents Bhagyesh and Priyanka Tiwari, club president Zeenat Hasta, joint secretary Manek Chittalwala, medical director Dr Sanjay Helale and club secretary Sulakshna Herekar.



Scotland's Rotarians provide playground equipment for disabled

Sam Murray

Aberdeen, Scotland, got its first wheelchair accessible swing and trampoline, thanks to the Rotary Club of Aberdeen Bon Accord, RID 1010, Scotland.

It all started in the spring of 2024 when a club member mentioned that his wheelchair-dependent granddaughter enjoyed being on a swing, and even though a public wheelchair swing had recently been installed, it was in a town 19 miles away.

We decided to do something about this, so our club began planning how best to raise the funds needed to purchase and install a suitable swing in Aberdeen. It was decided to put swings for both the physically challenged and the able bodies so that the companions, friends or caregivers could also enjoy a swing ride.

This was an important consideration as there may not be many things that a wheelchair dependent person and an able-bodied person can do together.

In the course of our research, we established that the NHS (National Health Service) supports over 9,000 wheelchair users in our area, and, as the equipment is suitable for adults also, this created an extensive local user base, and would also be an asset for visitors to the area.

One of the anecdotes which motivated our efforts came from a 33-year-old wheelchair dependent lady who had never experienced the pleasure of being on a swing until a wheelchair



A girl on a wheelchair enjoying a swing ride at the Duthie Park.



A set of wheelchair swing installed at the park.



Club members at the inaugural.

swing had been installed near her home.

Following discussions with the Aberdeen City Council, which was revamping the play area at the Duthie Park, they agreed to include a wheelchair accessible swing, if we could raise the £24,000 needed.

Our fund-raising appeal and awareness campaign titled *AllPlay*, raised an astonishing £43,000 through public donations, contributions from fellow Rotary clubs, donations from local organisations and companies as well as grants from funding bodies, which included NHS Grampian Charity, The Stafford Trust and the UK Government's Prosperity Fund.

What helped was our club's charitable trust status and with the amount raised we not only purchased the much-needed swing but also an accessible trampoline. Both are now fully operational.

At the end of the day, we were bowled over by the generosity shown by all of those who have helped us reach and exceed our target. From considerable grants to school pupils holding a bake sale and a young lad cleaning shoes, our community rose to the challenge and delivered.

Our reward has been seeing the smiles on the kids' faces as they experience the joy of being on a swing and bouncing in the air.

Rotary is all about working for the good of the community, which this project exemplifies.

Club members were joined by invited guests at a short ceremony in the city's Duthie Park where the district governor Graham Leith officially handed over the play equipment to Aberdeen City Council's environmental manager Steven Shaw.

The writer is a past president of the Rotary Club of Aberdeen Bon Accord, RID 1010

A Silver jubilee rooted in service

Jaishree

The expedition team with local Rotarians at the Gol Gumbaz tomb in Bijapur.



Chikkamagaluru, the scenic hill station in Karnataka, now has a striking Rotary Tower Clock at a prominent marketplace and a revamped crematorium spread across three acres — both created to mark the silver jubilee celebrations of the Rotary Club of Chikmagalur-Coffee Land, RID 3182.

The 25th year celebrations also featured a remarkable 2,300km expedition undertaken by 25 club members in six cars. The rally, flagged off by DG K Palaksha, covered Pune and returned after five days. “We met and exchanged flags



Club president Nagesh Kenjige (fifth from R), along with club members, gives an infant mattress and kit to a woman at the Government Maternity Hospital, Chikkamagaluru.



Service initiatives carried out during the jubilee year include planting 15,000 saplings across the town, renovating a public park, and organising a month-long mega cleaning drive. The club also transformed a 75-year-old government school into a Happy School by providing furniture, electrical fittings, a fresh coat of paint, smart classroom facilities, water purifiers, handwash stations and toilet blocks. Students received uniforms, footwear, water bottles and stationery kits. Large umbrellas were distributed to vegetable vendors and street food sellers.

“We developed a Rotary Theme Park at the 80-year-old Government Maternity Hospital,” he said. The park includes cement benches, play equipment and a public announcement system to help communicate with caregivers of patients. The club also contributed ₹6 lakh to TRF to mark the year.

Looking back on the club’s journey, Kenjige, who has been associated with the club for 17 years, recalls two projects from the charter year in 2001 as especially memorable — sponsoring a jeep for the local police station and constructing 50 toilets for women across Chikkamagaluru. S Vijay Raj was the club president then.

The club has also sponsored two Interact clubs and a Rotaract club at the Chikkamagaluru Institute of Medical Sciences. Recently, members of the Interact Club of Amber Valley Residential School added colour and vibrancy to a government school through a campus beautification initiative. The club, with 152 members, is actively involved in community outreach programmes. The Interactors regularly visit orphanages, old-age homes and homes for the visually challenged, spending time with the residents and organising activities to cheer them up.

RC Chikmagalur-Coffee Land has 67 members including four women members. ■



From top: A tower clock installed at the marketplace; Helmets distributed to riders en route the car expedition.

with 25 Rotary clubs across five districts during the journey,” said club president Nagesh Kenjige.

More than 10,000 seed-balls were dispersed en route to encourage environmental conservation, while helmets were

distributed to young riders to promote road safety. At several stopovers, the team conducted awareness campaigns highlighting the importance of protecting the environment and following safe riding practices.

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- ★ New year Diary & Calendar.

Spotlight on thalassaemia camps

This surgeon is passionate about creating awareness on preventing thalassaemia; “this is our flagship project. We have done over 300 medical and blood testing camps (GG: \$35,806) that have screened around 10 lakh people, and will organise 100 more camps by the end of this Rotary year,” says Dr Ramendu Homchaudhuri. A pathology van (GG: \$45,000) was flagged off for blood-testing drives.

With 150 clubs having around 4,000 Rotarians, his target is to cross the 4,500 membership mark. “So far, we have formed 10 new clubs, including three satellite clubs.” More than 5,000 school, college girls were vaccinated under cervical cancer awareness and immunisation camps (last year’s GG, in phases), “we will reach out to another 550 girls by June 30,” he says.

The clubs are partnering with the Headmasters and Headmistress Association that controls over 1,000 government schools in Bengal, and have tied up with 1,000 marriage registrars and diagnostic centres for thalassaemic and blood testing camps. “Newly married couples are given counselling, while medical centres charge only ₹100 per test,” says Dr Homchaudhuri. At Dhaska village adopted by the district in Purulia, multiple projects (worth ₹20 lakh till now) such as digging ponds, irrigation lines, and potable water are being done through club funds.

With the help of a Tata group company, “we provided drinking water to government schools (GG: \$36,000).” For TRF-giving, the target is \$200,000. He joined Rotary in 2006, and took up a ‘pre-hospital trauma care service’ by running 12 ambulances that benefitted over 2,500 accident victims in Kolkata. Rotary provides a ‘huge canvas’ to serve the poor, where one can reach out to infinite beneficiaries, he smiles.



Ramendu Homchaudhuri
*Orthopaedic surgeon
RC Calcutta Sun City
RID 3291*

Meet your Governors

V Muthukumaran



Vinod Saraogi
*Garments
RC Madras Central
RID 3234*

Touching lives for lasting impact

Rotary gives an opportunity to serve the underprivileged and create a lasting impact in their lives, says Vinod Saraogi. “Clubs must engage members in project activities, so that every Rotarian has a sense of belonging, ownership and feels he/she is contributing to make a difference.” With 84 clubs and over 3,500 Rotarians, he is confident of a net membership growth of 800 and formation of 10 new clubs.

One hundred dialysis machines are being installed at various government and charity hospitals (multiple GGs: ₹8 crore) across Tamil Nadu; 750 congenital heart surgeries at Apollo Hospitals (CSR grant: ₹3 crore) by RC Madras East; a mega HPV vaccination drive reaching out to 15,000 school and college girls (multiple GGs: ₹4 crore); 50 Happy Schools (GG+CSR fund: ₹3 crore) benefitting 15,000 students; and distribution of 150 pink autos to single women to earn a livelihood (GG+CSR fund: ₹2 crore) are the highlights of RID 3234 clubs.

Under a flagship programme, 125 tribal houses have been built till now (GG+CSR fund: ₹8 crore). His TRF-giving target is \$2.5 million.

His wife Usha participates in all his outreach activities, and supports Anns in women-centric projects. The Saraogis have committed to become AKS Chair Circle members. Having joined Rotary in 1982, the DG is happy “making friends and helping the needy.” ■

RC Kumbakonam celebrates 75th year

V Muthukumar

At the platinum jubilee event of RC Kumbakonam, five service projects were launched by RI director M Muruganandam who praised all the 75 past presidents for taking this Rotary club to where it is today. “Ours is the second oldest and largest club with 155 members in RID 2981, having set up many permanent projects for the welfare of the people,” said PDG S Balaji, a club member for 15 years.

Elated over the completion of new projects that included gifts, property deliveries, upgrade of the Rotary centre and eye surgeries, club president VC Baaskaran said, “Rotary is known for doing highly beneficial initiatives for the people in and around Kumbakonam, a temple town dotted with heritage sites that showcase

Tamil culture in Thanjavur district, in southern Tamil Nadu.” Muruganandam and DG J Leone gifted milch cows with calves (₹45 lakh) to 75 rural women “to enable them earn a sustainable livelihood through dairy farming.” This was followed by distribution of sewing machines to 75 young girls, widows and poor women who completed a month-long training at the club’s vocational centre and two private skilling centres.

Before his death in September 2025, Baaskaran’s grandfather SP Rasu Thevar (75), a landlord, had willed his commercial building worth ₹1.25 crore to the club. “At the gala event, we got the property documents of the building (2,500 sqft) which has a supermarket that will fetch the club a monthly rent of ₹20,000.”

Also, the club has purchased the hitherto rented premises of its 10-year-old Rotary Blood Bank for ₹1.5 crore.

Muruganandam launched an eye surgery project done through a GG valued at \$60,000 and being done in partnership with the Jothi Eye Care Centre, Puducherry, and Mahatma Eye Hospital, Trichy. “We will do eye surgeries including cataract, and other sight disorders for 3,000 patients identified at the Rotary Orange Vision Centres.” The partner hospitals will also be investing an equal amount in the surgery project.

Rotary edifices

More than 40,000 units of blood have been collected, sorted, processed, and delivered to local hospitals and clinics by the Rotary Blood Bank since its inception. “Around 2,500 donors can give blood at the centre each year. The blood centre is a popular landmark in Kumbakonam,” says PDG Balaji. It was set up with the “efforts of then club president Mohamed Ziaudeen and his team with support from local philanthropists and CSR funds, totalling ₹1.25 crore.”

In 2019, a Rotary Dialysis Centre with five machines (GG: \$35,000) was set up at a building of the municipal corporation. “We had entered into an MoU with the City Union Bank and the corporation for joint operation of the centre in which a nominal amount of ₹700–750 is charged for a session. So far, 5,000 kidney patients have benefitted,” explains Balaji. The monthly expense of ₹1.5 lakh



RID 2981 AG S Venkatesan gifts milch cows and calves to less privileged families. RC Kumbakonam president VC Baaskaran is seen behind him.



RI Director M Muruganandam being welcomed with a memento at the Platinum Jubilee event. From L: Event chair P Radhakrishnan, club president Baaskaran, PDGs S Balaji and PS Ramesh Babu, RID 2981 DG J Leone and PDG R Palanivelu.

is met by the bank, and around 250 patients undergo dialysis at the centre each month, he says.

Rotary Orange Vison Centre is one among 16 such eye centres (GG: \$300,000) set up in RID 2981 four years ago. “At the Kumbakonam vision centre, we perform 100 free

cataract surgeries and diagnose 1,500 patients a month,” says Balaji.

Recalling some of the iconic projects and initiatives of the club, DG J Leone said at the celebrations that RC Kumbakonam has set a good example for other clubs in RID 2981 to follow, executing diverse programmes

including long-term, permanent ones that keep spreading Rotary’s message of goodwill and community service among the people. Thirty past presidents were felicitated by the RI director. In Rotary year 2025–26, the club has done service projects worth ₹5 crore. ■

Bringing relief to juvenile homes

Team Rotary News

As summer temperatures in Hyderabad climbed above 42 degrees Celsius, daily life became increasingly difficult for children living at the Government Juvenile and Observation Home for Boys in old Saidabad.

The facility houses around 110 boys in ages 8–18, many from vulnerable backgrounds marked by abandonment, poverty and neglect.

RC Banjara Hills Hyderabad, RID 3150, in collaboration with Sparsh Hospice, donated 10 air coolers and a horizontal deep freezer as part of the *Project Helping Hands* initiative. Project contact Durga Prasad Madasu says this was done to “improve the children’s comfort and health during the peak summer season. The air coolers were installed in residential areas of the home, while the freezer will help preserve food and essential supplies.”

The initiative also extended to the Government Juvenile Home for Girls, where the club donated a jute loom



From L: DG Raam Prasad, club president G Neeraja and AG Durga Prasad Madasu at the inauguration of the facilities.

machine intended to support vocational training and skill development for girls aged 7–18. ■

Kangaroo baby bags for women

Team Rotary News

Taking a leaf out of wildlife, RC Shimla, RID 3080, has designed a kangaroo-type baby carry bags allowing career women or those in physically demanding jobs to keep their infants close to them while on duty. In fact, the club has rejigged a hospital-based neonatal care technique into a practical solution for working mothers.

The baby carry bag adopts the principles of kangaroo’s mother care, a WHO recommended care for premature and low birth weight babies that promotes skin-to-skin contact between mother and the newborn. “Many women usually carry babies on their backs or leave them unattended during working hours,” says club president Karan Bamba. The new kangaroo-type bags allow mothers to carry infants securely against their chest while continuing their daily work at construction sites and during other labour-intensive jobs.

DG Ravi Prakash, who inaugurated the project, praised the club’s effort to bring “a globally recognised healthcare norm into community-level practice.” Fifteen bags were distributed at the launch event, and the club plans to deliver 100 such bags by the year-end.

The project highlights concerns around maternal health and “the pressures faced by economically disadvantaged women who return to work shortly after giving birth — often with few options for safe infant care,” adds Bamba.

Hospital gets diagnostic boost

The club upgraded healthcare facilities at the Kamla Nehru Hospital by

inaugurating an ultrasound machine worth ₹48 lakh, funded through a CSR grant from the Indian Oil Corporation.

Local MLA Harish Janartha inaugurated the machine and appreciated the club for “providing advanced diagnostic equipment which would

improve healthcare access for patients who depend on government facilities.”

The club will be donating a colposcope worth around ₹5 lakh for early detection of cervical cancer, further strengthening preventive screening services at the hospital. ■



Women carrying their babies in the kangaroo bags.



DG Ravi Prakash (fifth from R) with club president Karan Bamba, AG Manu Aggarwal and vice-president Amit Pal Sood after inaugurating an ultrasound machine at the Kamla Nehru Hospital.

Important Rotary updates

RI South Asia Office

Appoint District Foundation positions for 2026–27

To achieve the fundraising goals for 2026–27, appoint the following key roles for your district: Endowment/Major Gifts chair; CSR chair; Annual Fund Subcommittee chair; Paul Harris Society coordinator; Fundraising Subcommittee chair and PolioPlus Subcommittee chair. Report the appointments to RI so that the leaders gain access to vital reports and resources that will strengthen your fundraising efforts. To submit appointments, log in to *My Rotary*, go to Manage, and select the District Administration tab.

2025–26 Annual Fund Challenge

TRF trustee Bharat Pandya and RRFs from Zones 4, 5, 6 and 7 have launched the 2025–26 Annual Fund Challenge, running until June 30, 2026. Contribution milestones are categorised as Platinum and Gold.

At the district level, Platinum requires at least 75 per cent clubs to contribute \$1,000 each; Gold requires 50 per cent. At the club level, Platinum requires at least 75 per cent members contributing \$75 each; Gold requires 50 per cent.

Additionally, districts can compete for the Paul Harris Society Championship Award, which recognises those enrolling at least 20 new PHS members and achieving 80 per cent overall PHS eligibility (% of PHS members fulfilling their commitment). To download the promotional flyer refer: https://www.highroadsolution.com/file_uploader2/files/af_challenge_flyer.png

TRF guidelines for reclass (correction) of contributions

Submit your correction (*or re-class*) requests from one gift designation to another, eg. Endowment or Grants or Polio to Annual Giving (Annual Giving to Grants is not permitted) by June 22, 2026. This will help process such requests by June 30, 2026. Adherence to these guidelines will maintain the integrity of the annual audited financial report as well as the District Designated Funds.

Timeline for TRF Recognition Points transfer processing for 2025–26

The completed Recognition Transfer Request form dated no later than June 30, 2026 must be received at the RISAO by 5pm on July 3, 2026, to be credited to the Rotary year 2025–26. Forms received at SAO after the mentioned time will be credited to 2026–27 by default. Email duly filled and signed scanned copy (in PDF format) of the form to

the Fund Development and Donor Services team at SAO. Contact Manju Joshi (Manju.Joshi@rotary.org) for details.

District & club qualification for participation in Rotary Grants

Districts must become qualified to receive grant funding in accordance with TRF guidelines. Clubs that want to apply for global grants and CSR grants must also be qualified. The qualification process helps ensure that districts or clubs understand their financial responsibilities, including stewardship, and is prepared to take them on. A reminder has been sent to incoming DG, DGE and DRFC on May 1 prompting to authorise the MoU to qualify the district.

District qualification

The DG, DGE and Rotary Foundation (India) chair should read through the district qualification MoU in the Grant Center, answer a series of questions, and agree to the MoU. Kindly refer to the District Qualification FAQ for further details; conduct grant management seminars for clubs. The seminar shall cover essential topics for successful stewardship with valuable insights into effective community assessment, sustainability practices, conflict of interest, financial management, and best stewardship practices.

Club qualification

District is responsible to qualify the clubs. Any club wishing to apply for GG and CSR grants must ensure:

- ❖ Club president and president-elect must authorise the club qualification MoU. Kindly refer to the Club Qualification FAQ in *My Rotary* for further details.
- ❖ At least one member of the club must complete the grant management seminar training as outlined by the district, either in person or online, or a combination of both.
- ❖ Complete any additional steps as per district requirement
- ❖ Additionally, strengthen the financial management of grant funds by encouraging club to adopt a written financial management plan. This commitment ensures consistent and responsible administration of grant funds, empowering the club to make a lasting impact.

For assistance with the Grant Management Seminar, contact the Stewardship Department: tamu.malhotra@rotary.org. ■

Project Vignettes

Team
Rotary
News

Dental healthcare initiative

RC Agartala City, RID 3240, launched a mobile dental clinic under its first global grant project, to provide oral healthcare services to underserved communities in Northeast India. The clinic, developed in partnership with RC Biratnagar, RID 3292, was handed over to Ramakrishna Mission, Agartala.



Club members handing over the key of the mobile dental clinic to Ramakrishna Mission, Agartala.

Teaching e-waste management

RC Erode Nexus, RID 3203, has been recognised by the India Book of Records for conducting a large-scale e-waste segregation awareness initiative involving 304 children under age 10, including special children. The ₹7 lakh project focused on teaching children and families responsible e-waste disposal and environmental sustainability.



Club president S Bharanidhar, secretary R Madhumathi and PDG EK Sagadhevan, along with participants.

Celebrating local talent

RC Wainganga Balaghat, RID 3261, organised the 19th Trade and Cultural Fair, also known as the Balaghat Mahotsav, from April 3–12, drawing nearly 2.5 lakh visitors over 10 days. The event featured trade exhibitions, inter-school competitions, and cultural programmes celebrating local talent and community participation. School education minister Uday Pratap Singh who visited the fair, announced donation of a cardiac ambulance and 3,000 sqft land to the club.



A performance by students at the Balaghat Mahotsav.

Preventing diabetic foot complications

RC Madras South, RID 3234, donated diabetic foot care equipment worth ₹30 lakh, sponsored by Ford Motors, to VHS Hospital under project *Padam Kappom* (Save feet) aimed at preventing diabetic foot complications and amputations. The new equipment includes advanced diagnostic and wound-care devices that help detect poor blood circulation, nerve damage, abnormal foot pressure, and wound healing issues in diabetic patients.



A beneficiary being tested using the new machine.

Physically-challenged couples get Rotary homes

V Muthukumaran

Thirteen physically-handicapped couples were excited to receive the keys to their newly-built houses from RC Chennai Sun City, RID 3234. “They expressed their gratitude to Rotary for such a lovely, life-long gift,” says M Krishna Sai, primary contact of *Project Happy Shelters* done jointly by his club with RC Chennai Port City and the National Association for the Blind. Both the spouses of the beneficiary families are either visually or physically challenged.

Each of the houses with a built-up area of 350 sqft has been

given 1,200 sqft of land “gifted by the state government. So, we have 850 sqft of open space in front and back, in each plot so that fruit trees such as mango, coconut or guava can be planted and nurtured in this Rotary colony,” explains Sai. He is the managing trustee of RC Chennai Sun City Charitable Trust which built the houses at Pakkam village in Thiruvallur district near Chennai. Out of the project cost of ₹65 lakh, CSR-funding of ₹58 lakh has come from Anjan Drug, and the partner clubs have contributed

₹7 lakh. Among the 13 beneficiaries, nine were visually impaired.

A flagship project

Looking back on the journey so far, Sai recalls that they have been building houses for the last four years, beginning with the Covid pandemic. “Till now, our 16-year-old club has built 28 houses across three project sites at Kalpakkam (near Mahabalipuram) with eight units for fishermen; Padappai in Kancheepuram district for seven visually-challenged families; and now Pakkam in Thiruvallur



benefitting 13 marginalised families.” The total value of the completed projects is ₹1.7 crore, raised through CSR funds and member contributions.

It all started when club member V Ganesh, a committee member of NAB, floated an idea to the club “to help the blind association in providing affordable shelters to families with visually-challenged members across Tamil Nadu.” While doing joint research with the NAB, “we came across an NGO, Nivasa, engaged in

building rural facilities like community halls, schools and toilet blocks in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. With the help of Nivasa, we built houses for fishermen’s families in Kalpakkam, our first housing project,” explains Sai. Henceforth, the club plans to build at least 8–10 homes (₹60 lakh) every year in the neighbouring districts of Chennai, funded jointly through CSR grants and member contributions.

Two borewells were dug by the club to provide running water through overhead tanks at each house. “Eleven more wells will be provided, and will be funded by the families themselves. We have ensured there is plenty of water for the bathroom, kitchen and gardening.”

After going through decades of great hardships, the family of James Selvaraj (47, physically challenged) sees, “the new house as a god-sent gift to us. It has given us dignity, security, and hope for a better future. I thank Rotary and all the donors who made



RC Chennai Sun City president Somesh Balakrishnan (maroon jacket), Anjan Drug director C Kalaichelvan (on his right) and RID 3234 project chairman C Muthusamy (behind Kalaichelvan) after giving the house keys to the beneficiaries.

the dream come true for families such as ours,” he says.

Another project beneficiary, N Vijayalakshmi, 40, and visually challenged, says, “receiving this new home feels like a blessing from god. It gives us safety, comfort, and peace of mind that we never had before... I am deeply grateful to Rotary for this noble initiative that has brought happiness and stability into our lives.”

The club has done projects worth ₹1.53 crore across the seven Focus Areas of Rotary this year, says Somesh Balakrishnan, its president. “We have set up a dialysis centre with six machines at the Right Hospitals, Kilpauk, in which patients covered under the CM’s Comprehensive Medical Insurance Scheme are given free treatment.” A dialysis machine was set aside for HIV and hepatitis positive patients at the centre which was set up

at a cost of ₹52 lakh, funded by a CSR grant and member donations.

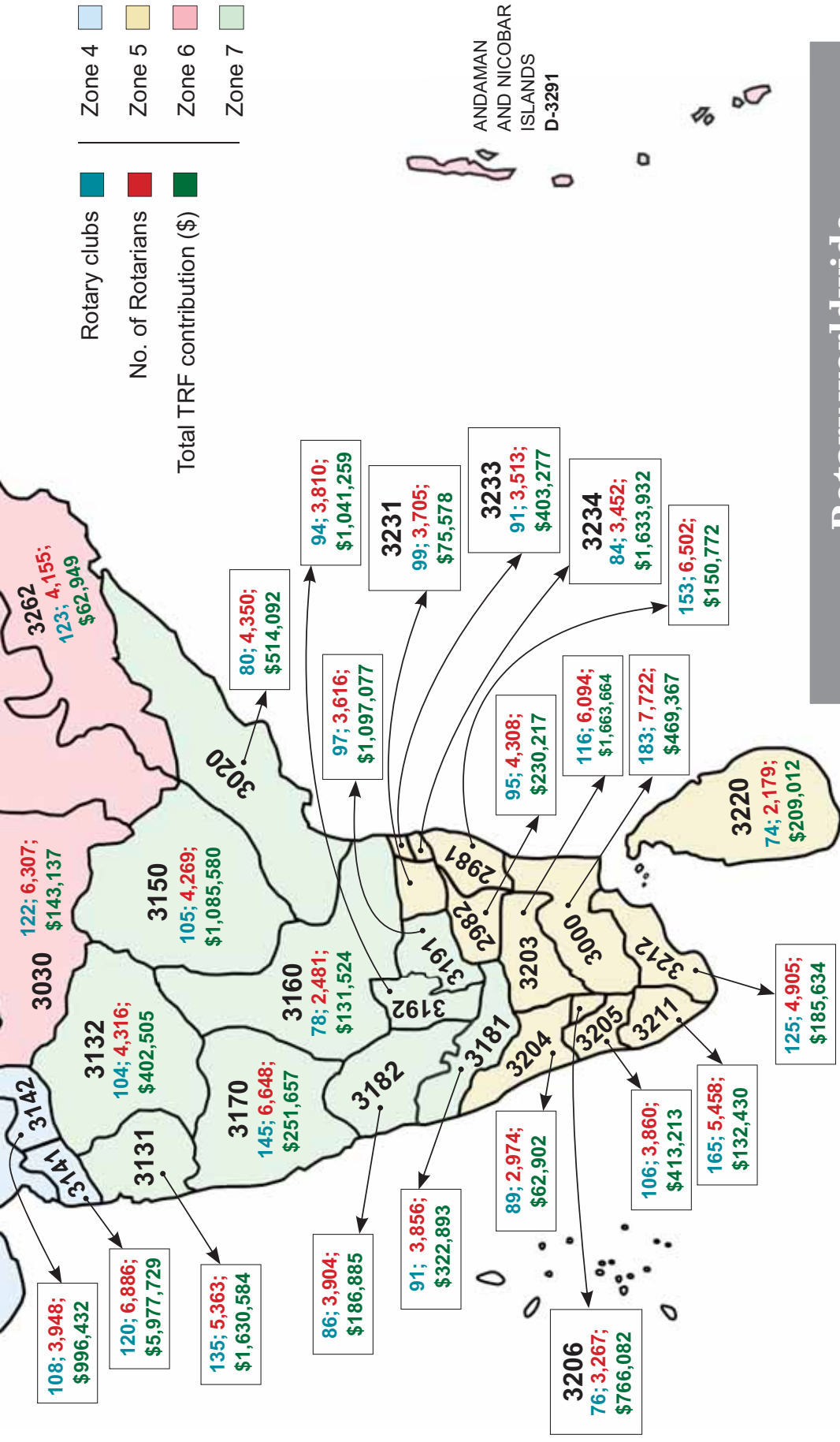
RID 3234’s Happy Shelters

So far, 28 houses have been built by various clubs in Thiruvallur and Kancheepuram districts near Chennai under the district’s flagship *Project Happy Shelters*. Forty more dwelling units will be ready by June 30, all for the differently-abled families, “A total of ₹3.4 crore has been spent on building these 68 houses. Our initial target of 100 houses will be completed next year,” says district project chairman C Muthusamy from RC Chennai Port City. He inaugurated the new houses.

The housing project is funded by an amalgam of CSR funds, global grants, member contributions and donations. RID 3234 has partnered also with the state government to build seven houses. ■

Membership & TRF contribution summary





ANDAMAN
AND NICOBAR
ISLANDS
D-3291

Rotary worldwide

Rotary clubs	: 56,724	Rotary members	: 1,172,417
Rotaract clubs	: 9,510	Rotaract members	: 150,048
Interact clubs	: 19,719	Interact members	: 453,698
RCCs	: 14,396		As on May 20, 2026

*Membership figures as on May 1, 2026.
*TRF contribution figures as on April 30, 2026.

Making a difference

50 houses for visually challenged

RID 3000 DGND Meena Subbiah handed over the keys of the 50th house (₹4.5 lakh) to the family of a visually-challenged person at the Rotary Bright Homes in Sakkimangalam village near Madurai, TN.

Fifty houses were built and handed over to families of visually challenged by RC Madurai Star under the housing project.

Club president D Balasubramanian, IPP R Vasudevan, project contact S L Setumadava, regional coordinator C Ramesh and AG Suresh Pandian were present at the village for the handover event. ■



RID 3000 DGND Meena Subbiah unveils the plaque of the new house at the Rotary Bright Homes near Madurai. Also seen are members of RC Madurai Star.



Girl students with academic books.



Rotary's gesture to tribal students

In a move to support the state's Tribal Affairs department which is nurturing 100 tribal girl students through a merit-based selection process, RC Mumbai Juhu, RID 3141, has donated a printer and photocopier machine to a training centre at the Government Ashram School in Padgha village in Bhiwandi taluk, Thane. The project cost is ₹1.5 lakh.

The machines will enable the faculty to prepare and distribute study material, practice papers, worksheets, and reference content for NEET and JEE aspirants, said Mukul Jain, club secretary. In addition, the club has donated text books to the tribal students.

The initiative was made possible with generous support from their CSR partner Crystic Resins India. ■

RYLA for school students

Around 100 students (Class 9–12) from 10 schools were groomed in leadership qualities at a one-day RYLA hosted by RC Nagda, RID 3040, at the Sheshshayi College of Professional Studies, Nagda, an industrial town in Madhya Pradesh.

District RYLA advisor PDG Dhiran Datta shared insight about RYLA and its importance to the youth. IPDG Anish Malik, PDG Datta, Dr PB Reddy and Vinitha Awasthi addressed the students.

A group activity enabled students to present their vision of India after 10 years. The event was anchored by Preeti Sharma, assistant professor. ■



RID 3040 RYLA chair PDG Dhiran Datta mentoring students.



Solar power at a Kashmir village

Around 50 villagers from 12 houses in Keran village of Kupwara district, Kashmir, now have solar lights, thanks to a 3kW off-grid solar power project done by RC Pune Heritage, RID 3131, in partnership with the Aseem Foundation.

This initiative will have a lasting impact on the community, supporting its daily needs and economic activities, said Subhro Sen, club president. Keran is a hilly, arduous terrain near the Line of Control, and the solar power project has unveiled the potential of renewable energy in empowering rural households in Kashmir, he said. ■





Direct impact of global warming on your health

Preeti Mehra

What you can do to keep cool in extreme heat situations.

Grant Ennis, an environment expert from Monash University, while speaking on climate disinformation at a webinar I attended last month made a pertinent point. He said we keep using the expression “climate change,” which does not convey the real threat to our planet explicitly. Instead, he said, it would be better if we use “global warming” so that people realise where we are headed — to a hotter planet which impacts us immediately rather than a slow change in the climate which may seem distant.

He is absolutely on target. Global warming it is, and this month is predicted to be one of the worst in terms of heatwaves across our cities. Urbanisation and concrete infrastructure that is encouraged in cities has brought

about the phenomenon called the Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect. This means that the city areas are significantly hotter than surrounding rural areas. This is caused by the concentration of buildings in cities, which means they have more concrete surfaces like pavements and less green spaces and few trees. The concrete surfaces reflect heat, increasing temperatures considerably.

This is a dangerous trend. During heatwaves, temperatures can touch the 50-degree Celsius mark, with serious consequences to environment, human and animal health. The poorer and more vulnerable the population, the more the impact of heat on their lives, health and livelihood.

Before we look at what damage extreme heat can inflict on our health, let us look at how we can gauge the severity of a heatwave and prepare ourselves. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) issues colour coded heatwave warnings that indicate the severity of a heatwave.

This is primarily to alert the disaster management authority and health officials to initiate appropriate action. But it can also help citizens. The four colour codes are: Green, which means things are normal; yellow tells us to keep a watch and stay updated; orange



During heatwaves, temperatures can touch the 50-degree Celsius mark, with serious consequences to environment, human and animal health.

asks everyone to remain prepared; and red asks you to take immediate action.

Heath concerns during a heatwave are at several levels. It can lead to hyperthermia, a condition where the body's core temperature rises above the normal temperature of 98.6 deg Fahrenheit due to failed thermoregulation when the body absorbs or produces more heat than it can release. This, in turn, can lead to a heat stroke when the core body temperature touches 104 deg F and requires emergency hospitalisation. Lesser manifestations to heatwave conditions include heat cramps and heat exhaustion which results in muscular pain, excessive sweating, weakness and dizziness.

In tropical climates, extreme hot weather can result in droughts and drinking water shortages which can turn into a health emergency unless supplies of potable water are rushed to the affected areas. Bacteria also thrive in a heat-intense climate leading to the spread of diarrhoea, cholera and infective gastroenteritis. Additionally, recent studies indicate that dengue and cardiovascular diseases see a spike during peak heat season in India.

Needless to say the poor, old, children and those with pre-existing health conditions are the most vulnerable. So too are those engaged in work that exposes them to the sun like construction workers.

What can we do as citizens to protect ourselves and those who work for us? The IMD had drawn up some recommendations. Among those is the general directive of avoiding exposure to heat. This may be difficult for those who are engaged in outdoor work. But the ill-effects of such exposure can be minimised by keeping oneself hydrated by drinking plenty of water with ORS (Oral Rehydration Solution) added. Some ORS formulations come in a powder form in sachets and are mixed with water and drunk. At home

one can keep lemon water, buttermilk and summer drinks in the fridge to cool off in the summer.

The IMD suggests avoiding working outside between noon and 3pm. This may be impossible for workers who are on eight-hour shifts but if they must work then they should be advised to carry drinking water and ORS replenishments to combat the heat. Also, a sensible management would consider giving them five minutes rest in the shade every half hour or 40 minutes.

This last recommendation from IMD needs to be taken seriously by parents with regard to their children. Behind the apartment block I live in is a stretch of open ground where children from the neighbourhood come and play cricket in the blazing sun. True, with summer vacations in full swing they have all the free time in the world. But cricket in the heat after an early lunch is not a healthy activity. However, they justify it by saying that IPL games are also played in the height of summer!

The ground rule is that strenuous outdoor activity must be avoided and those travelling must carry water and light juices. Coffee, tea and carbonated drinks like colas must be avoided since they dehydrate the body. Loose fitting cotton clothes are ideal for the heat and carrying an umbrella or wearing a cap can provide shelter from direct sunlight.

More than anything else, if there is any discomfort like dizziness, weakness, body pain, exhaustion, fever and headache, move to a cooler area and call for medical assistance. Till help arrives try to drink water or better still, oral rehydration solutions.

Extreme heat must not be treated lightly. As socially conscious citizens we must also pressurise the government and the civic authorities to be prepared. We might be doing our bit by

If there is any discomfort like dizziness, weakness, body pain, exhaustion, fever or headache, move to a cooler area and call for medical assistance.

reducing our carbon footprint, which is no doubt a commendable act. But that may not be enough. Grant Ennis noted in his presentation at the recent webinar that reducing your individual environment footprint may be good, but the difference you will make is small. Instead, we should be urging our governments to take climate action seriously, and pressure them to take the right policy decisions. While many of the cities now have Heat Action Plans, there are several loopholes in them and implementation on the ground is not as good as it should be.

The policymakers must act. A recent study by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) revealed that 57 per cent of districts accounting for 76 per cent of the population are currently in the high-risk category. At high heat risk are ten states — Delhi, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Goa, Kerala and Rajasthan.

So, do try to do your very best to look after your health and stay cool this summer. As a green warrior, it is equally important for us as privileged citizens to try to make the world a cooler place.

The writer is a senior journalist who writes on environmental issues



RID 3012

RC Delhi Mayur Vihar

New clothes were distributed to girls at the Arya Kanya Sadan, Faridabad, by PP Rajeev Gupta and his wife Shashi. Household articles were gifted to a newly-married girl by PP Arvind Jain, president Vimal Agarwal and AG Brijesh Gupta.



Club matters



RID 3053

RC Jodhpur Padmini

Over 500 saplings were distributed across villages under *Project Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam* that blends emotions with environmental responsibility. RCC president Raghunath Vishnoi, Rajendra Chabarwal and Ashok Thory extended support to the greening mission.

RID 3055

RC Aadarsh Ahmedabad

AC cabins were installed at the Kubernagar Police Chowk (part-CSR fund: ₹1.91 lakh) in the presence of senior police officials. Over 25 police officers took a pledge to prevent crime and protect over 25,000 families in their jurisdiction. RC Ahmedabad Airport was co-partner.





RID 3100

RC Moradabad Navyam

A career guidance programme was held for school students at the Panchayat Bhawan in the presence of DG Nitin Agarwal and local MLA Ramveer Singh. Speakers from the corporate world urged students to develop new skills, set goals and move forward with discipline and dedication.

RID 3030

RC Nagpur Horizon

A metro train ride was arranged for 200 special children from the local Metro Station to Automotive Station to mark Autism Awareness Month. Nagpur Corporation-Standing Committee chairperson Shivani Dani flagged off the joy ride.



RID 3110

RC Agra Royal

PDG Neerav Nimesh inaugurated gender-segregated toilet blocks at two government primary schools in Heta village.



RID 3120

RC Lucknow Awadh Rajdhani

A modern surgical table (over ₹1 crore) was inaugurated at the Sanjay Gandhi PG Institute of Medical Sciences with CSR funding from GIC Housing Finance. Company CMD Sachindra Salvi, hospital director Dr R K Dhiman, PDGs Bal Inamdar, Ranjit Singh and K K Srivastava were present.

A guide to manage diabetes

Gita Mathai

Diabetes is not a new disease, as frequently thought, precipitated by our present-day inactive, affluent lifestyles with an abundance of high-calorie, trans fat-laden food. It was described as early as 1550 BC in Egyptian literature and later in the 6th century BC by the Indian physicians Sushruta and Charaka. It was recognised as a condition characterised by increased appetite, paradoxical weight loss, frequent urination, and ‘sweet’ urine that attracted ants. This description still holds true today.

India is currently in the grip of an epidemic of diabetes, with around 100 million people affected. We have the largest number of diabetics in the world, even more than China. This figure does not include those who are undiagnosed and unaware of their condition, individuals with prediabetes balanced on the edge, or pregnant women with gestational diabetes. Alarming, though everyone has a relative with diabetes, a large proportion of people do not fully understand the disease or receive appropriate treatment.

The food we eat is digested and converted into glucose which is released into the bloodstream. This happens with all foods, but a common misconception relates this to only sweets or refined ‘white’ foods.

As soon as the pancreas senses a rise in blood glucose, its beta islet cells release a peptide hormone called insulin. Insulin facilitates the absorption and utilisation of glucose by the body’s cells for energy. It acts as a key

metabolic regulator. Diabetes occurs when this process is disrupted. It may be because the pancreas does not produce enough insulin or because the body becomes resistant to its effects (insulin resistance).

Diabetes is diagnosed through blood tests:

● **Fasting blood glucose**

Normal: <100 mg/dL
 Prediabetes: 100–125 mg/dL
 Diabetes: ≥126 mg/dL

● **Random blood glucose**

Diabetes: ≥200 mg/dL

● **HbA1c**

Normal: <5.7%
 Prediabetes: 5.7–6.4%
 Diabetes: ≥6.5%

Diabetes was once considered a disease of genetically predisposed middle-aged, overweight, sedentary urban adults. However, research has shown that it can occur at any age.



There are several identified subtypes affecting people across all age groups.

Few people realise that even babies can develop diabetes within the first six months of life. In about 50 per cent of such cases, it may persist lifelong or disappear after a few months, only to reappear later in life.

Another subset is gestational diabetes, which develops during pregnancy. Risk factors include being overweight or obese, leading a sedentary lifestyle, having Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS), and a family history of diabetes. Many women may have no symptoms, which is why screening between 24–28 weeks of pregnancy with a glucose tolerance test is essential. If undiagnosed or uncontrolled, it can lead to complications such as a large baby, the need for a caesarean section, premature birth, and other delivery problems.

For the 3-hour glucose tolerance test:

- Fasting: <95 mg/dL
- 1 hour: <180 mg/dL
- 2 hours: <155 mg/dL
- 3 hours: <140 mg/dL

In most adults, especially the middle aged, symptoms include increased thirst, dry mouth despite adequate fluid intake, fatigue, weight loss, numbness and tingling in the feet, slow-healing wounds, and frequent skin infections. Similar symptoms can unexpectedly occur in adolescents and young adults who are then found to have Maturity Onset Diabetes of the Young (MODY). This is increasingly recognised.

Some individuals produce little or no insulin. As a result, cells cannot utilise glucose for energy, and blood sugar levels rise dangerously. This form often presents in two peaks, between 4–7 years of age and again during adolescence, but can also occur in adults. It may be genetic, follow viral infections (such as Coxsackie or mumps), or arise from an autoimmune process in which the body produces antibodies that destroy the insulin-producing cells of the pancreas.

The mainstay of diabetes management is diet. Daily caloric requirements (usually 1,500–2,000kcal in adults) should be calculated based on ideal body weight and activity levels. The diet should be rich in fibre (25–40g per day) to improve blood sugar control and lower cholesterol levels. Protein intake should be about 0.8–1g per kg body weight. A simple guideline is:

- 40% of the plate: non-starchy vegetables
- 30%: lean protein
- 30%: healthy carbohydrates

The calorific value and composition of the food consumed can be found online.

Do not fear diabetes. Though not curable, it can be managed with discipline, diet, exercise, and medication. Diabetics can lead healthy, fulfilling lives.

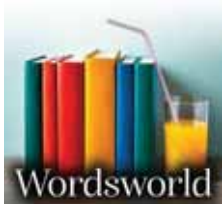
Regular exercise plays a crucial role by improving insulin sensitivity and lowers HbA1c. Aim for 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity per week (such as walking, swimming, or cycling), along with two weekly strength training, balance exercises, and, if possible, yoga sessions.

Medication is required if blood sugar remains uncontrolled. Older drugs like metformin can be used alone or in combination with newer agents. Newer medication, including semaglutide, have shown significant benefits by reducing appetite, aiding weight loss, and improving blood sugar control.

High blood glucose levels can cause short-term symptoms such as excessive thirst and hunger, fatigue, headaches, confusion, blurred vision and skin infections. In the long term, diabetes increases the risk of heart disease, kidney failure, dementia, vision loss and nerve damage, which can lead to non-healing foot ulcers.

Diabetes need not be feared. Although it is not curable, it is highly manageable. With discipline and adherence to diet, exercise, and medication, people with diabetes can lead healthy, fulfilling lives.

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



Manga Magic

**They're not comics, they're a way of life.
They show a way of living, according to
Japanese and other fans.**

What we have found at our monthly book club meets is that the more we like a book, the less we are likely to have to say about it barring platitudes. Give us a book that raises hackles and we spew out a torrential storm of multifaceted comments! That's how it was with *The Daughters of Madurai* by Australia-based Rajasree Varriar: while the theme (female foeticide/infanticide), and the intent (laying bare a social evil) were admirable, the execution fell short. The book is based on information garnered from reliable sources, so no quibbles there. However, it stumbles when it comes to character building, understanding of social milieu, logical unfolding of the plot, and even names characters inappropriately. The biggest drawback is the fact that it ignores a fundamental premise directly connected to caste hierarchies and their implications. To top it all... But let's not get into that. Let's move on to what Marie Kondo sparked off. Yes, Marie Kondo of the 'magic of tidying' fame.

A friend who dropped by also dropped off a gift: *Letter from Japan* by Marie Kondo (with Marie Iida). It's a book that explains, in simple terms with plenty of



Sandhya Rao

examples, the Japanese way of life, and its philosophies encapsulated in words and phrases. All of us are familiar with the concept of *harakiri*. I recently attended a *kintsugi* workshop where we deliberately broke a mug and tried to reassemble it in an attempt to understand there's beauty in imperfection. Everyone knows about cherry blossoms, *sakura* in Japanese. Did you know that *sakura*-viewing has been a 'thing' for years? The word for it is *hanami*.

Then again, take *oshikatsu*. "In 2021," Marie Kondo writes, "the term was even nominated for Japan's annual buzzword contest. *Oshikatsu* is a portmanteau of *oshi*, meaning someone or something you support, and *katsu*, meaning 'activity'. In short, *oshikatsu* refers to the various activities fans engage in to support their object of passion." Your *oshi* can be an actor (Vijay), a work of fiction (*Pride and Prejudice*),

animals (elephant), even food (pizza). Through words loaded with philosophies the book conveys the 'Japaneseness' of the Japanese and offers an inviting, even provocative way to understand a people and a culture.

One of the chapters in the book is devoted to *manga*. Manga refers to illustrated books, comic books in other words, extremely popular in Japan and, indeed, so popular that the word itself has caught on globally. Marie Kondo talks about her husband's favourite *manga*, *Slam Dunk*, by Takehiko Inoue. This 31-volume series features a character called Hanamichi Sakuragi who transforms from a high school rebel into a skilled basketball player. As a schoolgirl, Marie remembers visiting her father's childhood home and ransacking his storeroom where she stumbled upon his huge collection of *manga*. "The bookshelf





was lined with bestselling *manga* from the time when my father was young. Spanning genres from sports and slapstick to martial arts, each title offered a surprising insight into my father, whom I had always thought of as a rather reserved and serious person.”

When she asked him to name his favourite *manga*, he thought for a bit and then pulled out *Black Jack* by Osamu Tezuka. “Osamu Tezuka,” she writes, “often referred to as the God of Manga, created the foundation of Japan’s postwar *manga* culture. *Black Jack* is one of his most well-known masterpieces.” It features a brilliant surgeon and the *manga* “explores a physician’s dilemmas, questioning whether a doctor’s duty is always to prolong a patient’s life through treatment, and whether such treatment can truly bring happiness to the patient.” For her father, says Marie Kondo, “*Black Jack* wasn’t just entertainment; it served as a guide to his life of service.” Her father is a physician.

Clearly, *manga* isn’t just for children, it contains lessons for life and is something the Japanese “refer to all their lives.” Imagine, then, my *kawaii* (which means something like a feeling of warmth and delight) when I suddenly remembered a set of fat illustrated books nestling in the

back of the top shelf of a cupboard that I opened frequently but hardly ever reached up into, certainly not the back row! This set of fat illustrated books is *The Buddha* by none other than Osamu Tezuka himself, apparently among the last of his epic *manga* works. As the title suggests, it tells the story of Gautama Buddha — with lightness, detail and a quirky sense of humour.

Thank you, Marie Kondo, for reminding me of them. I had forgotten their presence, although I had read them ages ago on the recommendation of some students in Ahmedabad back in the day when I was in my first job! I recall that the series was considered with the *Bhagavad Gita*-like reverence by some design and architecture students I was friends with at the time. Many years later, I found the entire series in my son’s home in San Francisco, all purchased from Half-Price Books. While he was in the throes of packing his entire apartment into two suitcases prior to taking a sabbatical in order to travel, I inherited the entire series!

The series numbers 14 in the original, and eight in the English (international) edition. The illustrations are dynamic, dramatic, flagrantly free-flowing, the text is vivid, friendly and extremely contemporary. There are fictional elements that inject action into the narrative but the story of Gautama Buddha has truth and integrity. Indeed, there’s a sense of vulnerability that underlines the telling juxtaposed with unexpected frames of slapstick and unconventional references. For instance, sometimes Tezuka himself pops up all suited-booted with an “Oops! It’s me!” style entry!

Book 1 Kapilavastu features the birth of the Buddha, but there’s plenty more as well to set the stage for the times, the kingdoms and the people. In *Book 2 The Four Encounters* we get a glimpse of Siddhartha as an impressionable young boy. *Book 3 Devadutta* sees Siddhartha encountering the real world riddled with suffering. *Book 4* continues where *Book 3* leaves off. Open *Book 5 The Deer Park* randomly to pages 218–219 where Devadutta asks to become Buddha’s disciple. The sequence is both casual and deep: “I’ve ordered a sofa, a bed and carpeting,” he says. “You should have a more dignified room.” “Forget it,” responds Buddha. “You should return to the city and continue your work. No matter what kind of work you do, no matter what your caste may be, you can attain enlightenment. You must consider the following: What have you been doing? Is it important to you? Is it important to someone else? Or is it important to many others? Is it important to your country? Is it important to the world? Is it vital to all living things, all nature? If it isn’t, then you should stop. Because everyone in this world is connected.” *Books 6, 7 and 8* take the story forward to *nirvana*.

For the uninitiated, *The Buddha* is a wonderful entry-point to *manga*. So, again, thank you Marie Kondo who, through *Letter from Japan*, reminds us of the value of words. *Ikigai*, for instance, which is all the rage now. It translates as “a reason for being”; it could also be “the feeling that your existence matters.” A good word, a great feeling, good reason to read. That’s books for you: writer at one end, you at the other. Connected.

The columnist is a children’s writer and senior journalist



RID 3131

RC Pune Royal

Sixty women attended an entrepreneurship workshop in which they were mentored through multiple sessions. Anand Kulkarni, Rajashri Bhujbal, Gajanan Mungal and Sarita Ballal, from different clubs, interacted with the participants.



Club matters



RID 3211

RC Mannarasala

A safe drinking water project including a borewell was done at the Government Upper Primary School, Haripad. It was handed over to the school authorities in the presence of students.

RID 3212

RC Srivilliputtur Town

Club member R Mahalingam inaugurated a Rotary time clock near the Srivilliputhur Andal Temple. RI's Four-Way Test and polio awareness messages are announced by the clock at the strike of every hour. DG Dinesh Babu, AG M Radha and M Chinnathambi were present.





RID 3234

RC Anna Nagar Madras

As many as 240 students of Government Model HS School, Arumbakkam, were screened at a dental camp held jointly with the Saveetha Dental College. Tooth brushes and toothpastes were distributed to the students.

RID 3150

RC Nizamabad

The club with support from the Dhanpal Lakshmi Bai Vittal Gupta Charitable Trust distributed hearing aids (₹4 lakh) to 18 individuals at the Rotary Centre.



RID 3240

RC Bolpur Rangamati

Around 50 beneficiaries were given prosthetic limbs at an artificial limb camp held at the Institute of Total Education, Bolpur, in partnership with the Mahavir Seva Sadan. DGE Asim Adhikary and AG Sudipta Acharya were present.



RID 3261

RC Damoh Greater

A Rotary Square was constructed at an intersection in Chauraha for city beautification following a request from a municipal officer. The project boosted the public image of Rotary in Damoh.

Compiled by V Muthukumaran



The whimsical dog walker

TCA Srinivasa Raghavan



Eight years ago, my daughter-in-law decided to get a dog. My son and she both work overseas but she wanted an Indian dog. So on one of their visits, she went to a dog shelter and picked out a puppy which, in due course, was taken to their home in Europe. But the dog could not adjust to the foreign country and two and a half years ago it came back to India. My wife and I decided to keep it even though it is an anxious idiot with a highly exaggerated sense of territory. In some ways she is like my younger son who, as a toddler, would let out an anguished howl if his elder brother came within six feet of him.

All pretty straightforward, right? Well, yes and no. The dog in the house was fine but neither my wife nor I were keen to take her out morning and evening for her ablutions. The routine, we felt, would be like dropping our children, when they were young, to school and fetching them every day, no breaks, no relief; heat, rain and cold notwithstanding, it's got to be done. So we decided to employ a dog walker, which is a very new profession in India because of the new rules regarding hygiene and, occasionally, some consideration for others. This 'walker johnny' relieved us of a great daily strain and we were hugely pleased with the arrangement.

But this is India, where an agreement is subject to varying interpretations. There is an elasticity to words that is often used to justify non-observance of an agreement. And, of course, no one can beat an Indian, except perhaps another South Asian, at making the same excuse a dozen times — illness, death, marriage, and the new word in the lexicon, emergency. We are all familiar with this flexibility.

Anyway, after the first couple of blissful weeks when he was regular and punctual, our man started reverting to type. He wouldn't turn up and that too without warning. The poor dog would be in great discomfort holding back her urges. Eventually when it seemed cruel to make her wait anymore, my wife would take her out to the designated spot in our residential complex. At first this happened infrequently but gradually the bunking started happening more frequently. The original deal was that the dog walker would come 14 times a week but that has been reduced unilaterally by him to 8–9 times a week. That by itself wouldn't matter so much because the payment is per visit and is deducted. What does matter, however, is his steadfast refusal to inform us in advance.

The price is paid by the dog in terms of excessive discomfort but the fellow doesn't care. My wife has told him scores of times to inform us in advance but to no avail. He simply refuses. But because he has a virtual monopoly — he takes a dozen dogs for walks in small groups instead of singly as agreed — we have had no choice. We have had to accept that, well, he is a South Asian when it comes to business ethics.

The big unsolved riddle is why he keeps taking days off. One reason could be that it's a boring job. Another could be that what we regard as excuses are real reasons. A third, to which I subscribe, is that he actually rotates his customers because he earns more by using the time not spent on our dog on doing something else that pays enough to compensate for our deductions.

Whenever I tell my friends about this behaviour they come out with their own stories about petty contractors, tailors, plumbers, electricians, gardeners, even the guys who take blood samples and so on. Clearly, it is a dog's life for us all when it comes to casual workers. ■

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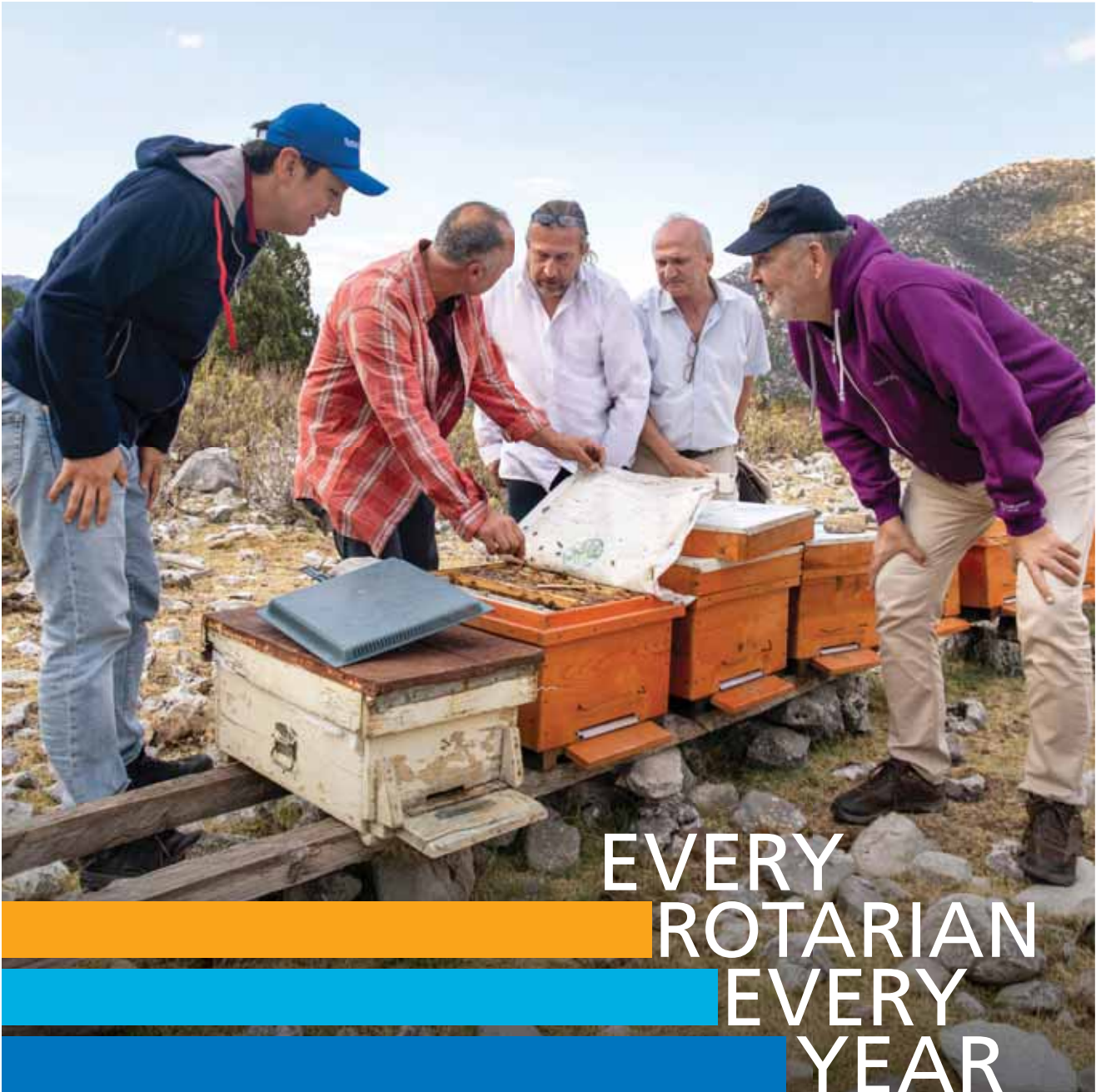
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