

Rotary News

India

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Dayinka Hakeem Babalola
RI President
2026 - 2027

Rotary
District 3212



**CREATE
LASTING
IMPACT**



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2026 - 2027

DISTRICT PROJECT 2026 - 2027

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Important Announcement Revision in Subscription Rates

Dear subscribers,

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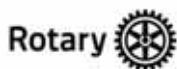
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Editor



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Thoughtful messages

RI Vice President and director M Muruganandam's message 'Aim High' is impressive with regard to RAG (Red-Amber-Green) analysis for growing clubs. A similar RAG principle can be applied for club projects.

If it is found that a club project is being wrongly executed, that model of execution should be immediately changed by adopting a more appropriate execution strategy. This itself results in going from Red to Amber and finally to Green. It is true that a club with a lesser number of members will encounter certain obstacles to complete a project within the stipulated time. That is why membership growth is important. Thus, the ratio 1:2:3 (Rotarian, Rotaractor and Interactor) is an ideal approach to boost membership for long-term sustainability of Rotary clubs, as recommended in the Director's message.

Niranjan Kar, RC Bhubaneswar — D 3262

RI President Olayinka Babalola in his July message has said, "The more you change your community and the world, the more you will change." However, J Krishnamurti, the world-renowned philosopher, has said that the community and the world cannot be fundamentally reformed without first transforming an individual's consciousness.

For, "you are the world and the world is you"; an authentic global change happens only when the individual shifts inwardly. Hence, the Rotary leaders must have inner transformation, so that they can move forward in community service.

K M K Murthy, RC Secunderabad — D 3150



RI President Babalola introduces a new dimension to this year's theme, *Create lasting impact*. He emphasises that impact is not just external, but internal as well, transforming the beneficiary. Change is merely the beginning, whereas impact is what endures. Many miss this crucial point: Service activities reshape our personalities, alter our outlooks, and change us from the inside out.

The power and reach of Rotary were on full display in the newly-elected Tamil Nadu Assembly, where 23 MLAs with a Rotary background were elected. Remarkably, a 29-year-old woman is among the five Rotarians inducted into the state cabinet. This is a rare occasion in the history of Rotary and a matter of pride. Hopefully, these leaders will bring about a lasting impact on society

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

I was inspired by RI President Babalola's message and learning about his remarkable journey in Rotary.

What resonated with me most was his powerful belief that sustainable service projects create a lasting impact — not only on the communities but also on our own lives. Today, change is no longer just a constant, it is accelerating. This is our opportunity to challenge ourselves and strive to do even better than our very best.

Let's get to work, and create a lasting impact.

*Piyush Doshi
RC Belur — D 3291*

The article *Skilling village girls* has been helpful in getting new members to our club. It was a well-crafted article which impressed others to join the organisation. The project work was well presented. Many thanks to Editor Rasheeda Bhagat for her support in membership development. It is the work done by Rotarians which speaks.

We would like to have extra 5–10 copies of the July issue for pursuing people to join our club.

*Radheshyam Modi
RC Akola — D 3030*

The health column on cholesterol (July issue) explained well the nature of cholesterol-related diseases,

and how high levels can affect the heart.

In today's hectic times, the public is consuming whatever they can get without sufficient awareness on what is good and what is bad food, and thus buying diseases for free. In such a situation, more medical camps should be organised to raise awareness

LETTERS

about heart diseases and their prevention, so that the public can benefit. A cholesterol-screening camp should be held by all RI districts.

In our RID 3231, an awareness programme on heart diseases was held at the installation of the new president and his team. Also, medicines for chest pain were given to everyone. It would be good if more such camps are held.

Sivaperumal Subramani
RC Walajapet — D 3231

In the editor's note, titled *A whiff of change in the air*, the importance of the young generation taking over the reins of the nation has been conveyed in a nice manner. The editor has rightly said, "if the youth is effectively managed and given the right opportunities, it can become a tremendous asset which can catapult India on the world stage as a power to reckon with."

On the flip side, if handled improperly, the young could become an unmanageable liability. Youth is the age of discovery and dreams. The greatest wealth and strength of a nation is its youth, and the quality of youth determines the kind of future the nation will have. Therefore, if we want to ensure a bright future for either our organisation or country, we first need to strengthen and empower our youth. It is our duty to mould our youth in a way that their energy is utilised for societal good.

The cover photo in the June issue is touching, and I read the article, *Visually challenged on road to self-reliance* by Kiran Zehra and was very touched because one's commitment and dedication can convert the impossible into possible. Hats off to the president, Joy A Thattil of RC

Cochin Global, and its members for doing a commendable service for the visually challenged for which I have no words to convey my compliments.

Raj Kumar Kapoor
RC Roop Nagar — D 3080

With a membership target of 1.25 million Rotarians and 1.25 lakh Rotaractors by 2030, it would be wise for Rotary to make it mandatory for even Rotaractors to subscribe to *Rotary News*. This would open up to Rotaractors a window to the Rotary world, motivating them to align and adapt to its guiding principles, locally and globally.

R Murali Krishna
RC Berhampur — D 3262

Day by day, *Rotary News* is getting a new look with lots of interesting information and articles to read in every issue. I feel one column for young Rotarians could be opened titled 'Young Rotarians Window'. It can attract comments and feedback from the young and even new Rotary members.

Paramesh Dev Choudhury
RC Gauhati South — D 3240

On the cover:

Purva Khedkar, a student of the Aaryan High School, Palghar, displaying her project developed in the school's IT Innovation Lab set up by RC Bombay.

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Messages on your club/district projects, information and links on zoom meetings/webinar should be sent only by e-mail to the Editor at

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My challenge to you

Photograph: Monika Lozinska



Peace does not happen by accident. It must be pursued deliberately, built strategically, and woven intentionally into everything we do. That is the challenge I am placing before the Rotary world this year.

Rotary recognises peacebuilding as one of our areas of focus. But I believe peace must be more than a category of work we set aside for certain projects. It must become a lens, one we choose to look through every time we plan, every time we serve, every time we ask what kind of impact we truly want to leave behind.

The Institute for Economics and Peace has identified eight Pillars of Positive Peace: well-functioning government, a sound business environment, equitable distribution of resources, acceptance of the rights of others, good relations with neighbours, free flow of information, high levels of human capital, and low levels of corruption. These pillars describe the conditions that make lasting peace possible. And when I look at them carefully, I see enormous potential for Rotary. Not because our work automatically advances peace but because it can when we are deliberate about it.

That is the key word: deliberate.

A water project does not build peace on its own. But a water project designed with the Pillars of Positive Peace in mind — one that asks how equitable access to resources strengthens community trust — can begin to lay that foundation. A vocational training programme does not guarantee reconciliation. But one

that intentionally brings divided communities together around shared economic opportunity can start to build it. The project does not change. The intention does.

In Colombia, Rotary's Pathways to Peace and Prosperity programme shows us what this looks like in practice. Working in communities shaped by decades of armed conflict and displacement, the programme combines economic empowerment with conflict resolution training and community-led reconciliation. Peace was not a hoped-for side effect. It was central to the design. That is the standard I am calling all of us to follow.

As you plan your next project, whatever the focus area, I want you to pause and ask one question: How does this create the conditions for peace? Consult the Pillars of Positive Peace. Find where your work connects. Then, make that connection intentional. Share what you discover with your club, your district, and your community. The more we talk about peace as a practice rather than a destination, the more naturally it will shape everything we do.

This is not about doing different work. It is about doing our work differently, with greater awareness, greater purpose, and a clearer vision of the world we are trying to build. Every Rotary project carries potential. Our task is to unlock it, not by chance but by choice.

Olayinka Babalola
President, Rotary International



The aspiration for education

Student protests, leaked papers, and police lathis have occupied our mind space in recent days. Leaving aside who is wrong and who is right, let's examine the core issue at the bottom of this whirlwind sweeping across our country. A single word that sums it all up beautifully is 'aspiration'! An aspiration that cuts across caste and community, class, religion, rural, urban, and whatever other classification you can think of. Both our young, and their parents, aspire to get the best possible education they can get. To do so, parents, especially from poor backgrounds, are willing to stretch their resources to incredible levels.

In my 45-plus years in journalism, I have travelled across small and big villages across India where families of small and marginal farmers, daily-wage labourers, women in self-help groups, and so on, have proudly said their children go to private schools. They are happily willing to sacrifice a meal a day, or squeeze down their meal to the bare minimum, in order to educate their children in private schools, because both the perception and reality of government schools are not too great. Most of us have heard this adage from our domestic helpers, casual labour we have employed, etc: "*Pate kaatke bacchey ko padhaya* (we sacrificed our basic needs, including food, to educate our child.)"

I can think of no better example to illustrate the huge importance Indians give to education and high marks, than the famous book *The World is Flat*, written in 2005 by eminent American political commentator and writer Thomas Friedman. In this book, written during the onset of globalisation, he tells his two daughters: "Girls, when I was growing up, my parents used to say, 'Tom, finish your dinner — people in China and India are starving.' My advice

to you is: Girls, finish your homework — people in China and India are starving for your jobs."

The context is that while travelling through Bangalore, Friedman was amazed by the way in which young, educated Indians had embraced technology, to provide a wide array of services, outsourced by developed countries such as his own, the US, at a much lesser price. The book talks about how, in a flattening world, well-educated youngsters in the poor or 'developing' countries such as India and China, armed with technological knowledge and expertise, were competing with American youth for well-paying jobs. And technology and digitisation allowed them to do so sitting thousands of miles away, in Bangalore or Beijing.

To cut to the chase, education means jobs; good education means better jobs and a bright future. Small wonder that our Rotarians place so much importance on literacy and education, particularly for the less privileged. You are putting up digital classrooms, libraries and swank laboratories, as done by RC Bombay in our cover story this month.

But compared to 2005, the job market is shrinking; too many contenders and AI is making youngsters insecure and jittery. Those in positions of power and influence have to do the utmost to fulfil the aspirations of our young... for they deserve an education system that is fair, transparent and promises a future filled with hope, prosperity and success. Thankfully the GoI has now appointed an exam reform task force headed by technology pioneer and Aadhaar founding chairman Nandan Nilekani. Let's hope for the best, for our children deserve nothing less.


Rasheeda Bhagat



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Director speak

It all begins at the club



Every year, Rotary quietly reinvents itself. Across the world, governors, assistant governors, club presidents and district leaders step into new responsibilities. Fresh ideas replace familiar routines, new teams come together, and clubs begin another chapter of service. Yet Rotary's future is rarely decided at an installation ceremony. It is shaped, week after week, in the life of every club — through the experiences we create, the friendships we nurture, and the opportunities we offer to serve.

RI President Olayinka Babalola, together with his gracious wife Precy, has called upon us to *Create Lasting Impact*. It is a theme that challenges us to look beyond activity and focus on outcomes that endure. Lasting impact is created when we strengthen communities, develop leaders, and build clubs that continue to inspire long after a project has concluded.

That makes August, the Membership and New Club Development Month, especially significant. Membership is often viewed through the lens of growth, but sustainable growth begins with belonging. Every new member arrives with enthusiasm, fresh ideas and a genuine desire to serve. Whether that enthusiasm grows or fades depends largely on the culture they experience within their club.

Across the Rotary world, member retention remains one of our greatest challenges. People stay where they feel welcomed, respected, involved and appreciated. Clubs that encourage participation, embrace new ideas, mentor emerging leaders, and create meaningful fellowship will always remain vibrant. Membership is therefore not the responsibility of a committee; it is the responsibility of every Rotarian.

This is why Rotary's Action Plan has become so relevant. Its four priorities — increasing our impact, expanding our reach, enhancing participant engagement, and increasing our ability to adapt — address the very foundations of a healthy Rotary. They are not simply strategic goals; they provide practical answers to many of the challenges our clubs face today. When we embrace them wholeheartedly, stronger membership, greater engagement, and more meaningful service naturally follow.

Equally important is our commitment to expanding the Rotary family. Our 1:2:3 growth mantra — strengthening Rotary, Rotaract and Interact — reminds us that growth is not merely about numbers but about extending opportunities for service and leadership. Every new Rotary, Rotaract and Interact club opens the door for more people to experience the joy of service, develop as leaders, and respond to needs within their own communities. In doing so, we ensure that Rotary remains vibrant, relevant and ready for the future.

As this new Rotary year gathers momentum, let us embrace the optimism that every beginning brings. Let us build clubs where people find friendship before fellowship, purpose before position and opportunities before obligation. Let us create experiences that members will remember long after the meetings are over, because while people may forget what we said or even what we did, they will always remember how Rotary made them feel.

If we get that right, membership will grow, leadership will flourish, and together we will truly *Create Lasting Impact*.

KP Nagesh

RI Director, 2025–26

Stay for a vacay



An added bonus of any Rotary International Convention is how it transports you to the heart of an exciting cultural destination — and Barcelona is no exception. The host city for the 26-30 June convention is one of the world's hottest tourist destinations, drawing millions to experience its vibrant street life, stunning art and architecture, and rustic Catalan cuisine.

It's also one of the best bases for exploring southern Europe and the Mediterranean. So, after you've discovered a world of cultures in the convention's House of Friendship and taken in the global entertainment and inspiring mainstage events, consider staying in Spain or touring Europe for a quick and easy vacation.

Barcelona is home to a wealth of family-friendly attractions, from the fairy-tale vibe of Park Güell to the sandy beachfront at La Barceloneta. To venture farther afield, the city's easy rail and air connections can whisk you off to the resort islands of Mallorca and Ibiza. Or head inland through Spain's mountainous north to the lush Atlantic coastal region, the endpoint of the fabled Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route.

Barcelona's high-speed rail hub also connects you to Madrid and other major cities throughout Spain as well as across the border to Paris, Lyon, Marseille, and other French cities.

Looking for travel buddies? Join one of the exclusive experiences and tours that Rotary's convention planners are designing. Or bring your family and travel companions with you. They will love the convention's big-stage sessions with their dazzling entertainment, renowned inspirational speakers, and stirring moments (think opening flag ceremony!). It's a vacation made easy. ■

Registration opens in September. Sign up for email updates and special promotional rates at convention.rotary.org.

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Magazine

Message from TRF Trustee Chair



Care without borders

As I sat beside my father in the hospital, listening to the quiet rhythm of machines that now spoke more steadily than his own voice, life felt stripped down to its essentials. Serious illness has a way of doing that. It reveals what matters most, and it reminds us — sometimes gently, sometimes painfully — of what should matter to all of us.

My father was facing advanced cancer. The path was uneven and often cruel, yet even in that difficult space I was struck by a simple truth: Every person, everywhere, deserves access to care that honours their dignity. Not just treatment but compassion. Not just medicine but the assurance that their life holds value.

Watching nurses move with practised grace and doctors offer both honesty and hope, I was struck by the thought that millions will never experience this level of support. Not because their lives matter less but because access to care remains uneven across countries and communities. This is not a political argument; it is a human one.

Every family deserves the same chance at healing. Through my years in Rotary, I have come to understand that The Rotary Foundation shows us how this belief is shared across cultures and nations.

At a time when international development funding for disease prevention and treatment is contracting, vital health projects risk losing momentum. Our Foundation — and you, our members — provide the community-driven support needed to keep that from happening.

We are funding vaccines in Pakistan, training health workers in Mozambique, and strengthening fragile health systems in Guatemala. Through the Foundation, international cooperation is not an abstract ideal. It is a responsibility, achievable when people choose to act with generosity, partnership, and shared humanity. I am so proud of our collective leadership.

Sitting there, holding my father's hand as he drifted in and out of sleep, I was reminded of how fragile and precious life is. The measure of a just world is not found in its wealth or its power but in how fiercely it protects the vulnerable.

My father's fight was personal; sadly, he died in June. But the fight for equitable, compassionate healthcare that honours every life equally is universal. It belongs to all of us. Through your generosity and commitment to our Foundation — and through the simple act of caring across borders — we move closer to a world where no one is left behind.

Jennifer Jones
TRF Trustee Chair

RC Bombay helps youth “hungry for knowledge”

Rasheeda Bhagat



Students with their prototypes developed at their school's IT Innovation Lab set up by RC Bombay.



An iconic project of the Rotary Club of Bombay, RID 3141, is its aggressive promotion of IT literacy and technical skills among the youth in underprivileged and lower-middle-class families through its IT Innovation Labs and Career Foundation Learning Centres (CFLC), aimed at students in underserved communities in areas such as Palghar, Wada, Boisar and Dahanu near Mumbai.

Conceptualised by PDG Sandip Agarwalla, a member of RC Bombay, “long before AI and other such skills became the buzzword, while preparing for my year as DG in 2022–23, I set up the first such lab in a charitable school in Palghar. Even though it was a Marathi-medium school and the students had absolutely no background in IT, we were resolute in our vision to enable these students to embrace careers of the future,” he says.

“Who knew that in a short span of four years AI would overtake the world? We have made students proficient in AI, Robotics, IoT, 3D Printing and Data Systems starting from batches from Class 8,” he adds.

The key projects include training in Robotics, IoT, 3D printing and Data Science. The club has established multiple stem labs in rural Maharashtra (Boisar, Palghar) to foster hands-on learning. Students from RCB’s IT labs have participated in national-level competitions, showcasing IoT and AI innovations. *Bhavishya Yaan* and *Lighthouse* are programmes that integrate IT learning and science-based education to improve employability for students. “These initiatives aim to bridge the digital divide by equipping students from underprivileged backgrounds with practical technical skills, improving their prospects in getting better paying jobs,” says past president of RCB Vineet Bhatnagar.

The co-chair of the IT Innovation Committee, Uday Sanghani explains that this is much more than just opening labs or computer centres and giving access to youngsters to computers and equipping them with basic IT skills. “We wanted to set up laboratories that would equip the young with very forward-looking, futuristic IT skills and technologies, which are not only innovative but will also enable them to get concrete results in areas such as 3D printing, robotics and other automated applications.”

These labs were conceived in partnership with a company called Grok Learning which was started by two NRIs from the Silicon Valley, who had returned to India and are based in Mumbai. They had set up a sample



A student explaining about her project to an audience.





IT laboratory in a Marathi school in Sahin, which Sanghani and some other members from RC Bombay visited, as they wanted to do an IT project for youth.

They loved the concept and the lab and decided to start a similar lab in Palghar, an Adivasi area, which comes under the purview of RID 3141. Hence, four years ago, in Palghar, these Rotarians identified a Trust-run school as a partner school, which gave them a 1,500 sqft-room, and along with their knowledge partner, they designed and converted it into a lab. A club member, Yogesh Mahansaria, came forward to give CSR funds through his company Mahansaria Tyres for this lab, and has continued to support other labs the club has set up in the last four years.

The next such lab was set up in a school in Wada and then Boisar. In all, four labs were set up for children from underprivileged families in charitable schools for Classes 7 to 11. The heartwarming part is that till now nearly 10,000 students have benefitted from this RC Bombay project and, 50 per cent of them are girls!

Equipped with basic to special IT skills, and armed with enthusiasm, many of the children trained at the first lab in Palghar have gone to college, mainly for degrees or diplomas in Engineering. Club president Bimal Mehta explains that the teaching and learning that happens in these labs involves “a grounding in IT innovation. Everything is practical, there is no classroom study as theory. They do hands-on projects, so they can better understand the concepts.”

Sanghani adds that the club does MoUs with schools “because we want this to be a permanent, sustainable project. There we stipulate that 50 per cent



Rasheeda Bhagat

of the past students who come into the lab can be from your school, but the other 50 per cent will have to be from the surrounding schools. The idea is to have a larger impact. Sometimes, we are unable to do it because there are not many schools around.”

The students don't have to pay anything at all. The entire ₹20 lakh, the approximate annual expenditure on this project, comes from the club and is sustained mainly by members' contributions and CSR funds, including from Mahansaria Tyres.

In its fifth year, the scope of the learning in this project has been notched up with the addition of what is titled *Career Foundation Learning Classes*. This involves training students from Class 9 onwards to prepare them for competitive exams and

is being done with another knowledge partner. This course includes classroom studies beamed on a smart television and involves virtual training. Both the courses are going on simultaneously.

On how this idea germinated, Sanghani says, “We've always wanted to be involved in literacy, and as parents we all know how important it is to acquire IT skills.”

Asked if these children are also being given some basic AI skills, Bhatnagar says this is being done at their latest and more advanced lab they have set up a few months ago at an ITI called the Elphinstone Institution, which is in the heart of Mumbai and

We first set up an IT lab in a Marathi-medium charitable school in Palghar. The students had no background in IT, but we wanted these students to embrace careers of the future.

PDG Sandip Agarwalla

A 'Smart Agriculture' prototype being explained to (from L) RC Bombay president Bimal Mehta; IT Innovation Committee co-chair Uday Sanghani; Swati Mayekar; Paritosh Rungta and the club's past president Vineet Bhatnagar.



next to St Xavier's College. At this Centre of Excellence inaugurated in Jan 2026, the focus is on Industry 4.0 skill development, including 3D printing, IoT and advanced AI training.

I walk into a glitzy lab at this centre, which has equipment you'd find in the best of private school labs. The large room has 12 desks with laptops. Around the tables are spread various bright coloured objects — such as test tubes, bulbs, plastic prototypes of a range of products, and other equipment you would find in any well-equipped science lab. The eyes also take in quite a bit of greenery, which comes from small potted plants and creepers growing as well as models of farmland depicted via grass.

It is very obvious that automated products and systems are being



assembled here. The Rotarians accompanying me explain how each product has been developed by using IT and IT solutions, which are the backbone of these prototypes.

The room can train 24 students in each batch and I find it filled to capacity with young boys and girls, immersed in various experimental projects/products they are working on. The club was happy to partner with the Elphinstone ITI because “we saw students really engaged and participating in the classes and involved in learning. Here apart from innovative IT, generative AI is part of their curriculum and they will be taught how to use some of the AI platforms like ChatGPT, Gemini, etc. They are also learning some machine-learning related coding,” explains Sanghani.

The Elphinstone centre was added to their IT innovation lab project as “it fits in very well with our theme for this year — RISE — which is ‘Realign

with the changing needs, Integrate and synergise activities, Scale it up with purpose, and Engage with the community and your stakeholders’.”

Adds Bhatnagar, “We know the needs of the communities around us are constantly changing, and an increasing number of applications are being made from AI, robotics, and such technology. Young kids need a different environment, and this kind of lab aligns well with their expectations and helps to integrate and synergise their activities.”

On one of the tables the Rotarians take me to, I find three youngsters working on developing the prototype of a robot arm that can be used for various functions in an industry. The Rotarians explain that in many manufacturing industries, several hazardous

and repetitive tasks such as welding, grinding, and all kinds of assembly works are still being done manually. But such manual jobs expose the workers to harmful gases, heat and mechanical risks leading to fatigue and injury. Automation using robotic arms can make these tasks faster, safer and more precise, improving production efficiency. The students were learning the designing and application of robotic arms which can automate hazardous and repetitive industrial tasks and reduce human exposure to risks. Such robotic arms can be used in packaging, logistics, food, recycling, and other industries.

At another table I see a model of

a 'smart and scalable irrigation system' which can automate the irrigation process based on the water needs of different crops using a particular technology (called LoRa). This, I am told, is particularly suitable for large farms in remote areas with limited or no internet connectivity.

Another group of youngsters was immersed in a model where sustainable farming can be done through hydroponics, a modern agricultural technique that grows plants without soil.

Instead of soil, crops are cultivated in a water-based, nutrient-rich medium like coco coir, perlite, etc.

Much of what the youngsters explain

goes above my head... like how they "integrate sensors and devices like pH, moisture and temperature sensors, along with automation tools such as water pumps, to grow lights. By doing this we can monitor and control the hydroponic environment and this enables efficient resource management and optimum utilisation of water, nutrients etc to get best results." But what is obvious is that they know what they were talking about... the excitement, the curiosity and the satisfaction they experience from what they were learning and doing, was amply evident.

The students were also working on projects such as smart parking management, smart printing etc. They get a three-month training in each component — IoT, Robotics and 3-D modelling. It is easy to see how this training will prepare them for jobs... because what they are getting here is much more than book knowledge. This project is clearly focused on skills that can create livelihoods in the current scenario powered by AI-based technology. And there are scale and sustainability too. "We in Rotary have always believed in scale, but not scale without a purpose. In whatever we do, we measure impact and outcomes. We now have five such IT labs, because we know that unless we scale up, the impact won't be felt. Just to do one lab and then forget about it doesn't make sense. Here the focus is on career development," says Bhatnagar.

The youngsters are also coached and mentored about the need for going to college, so that they have better opportunities.

Swapnil Anil Shigohan, 18, is the son of a security guard working in a company in Mumbai. He explains





all about how soil moisture sensors work, and how they can be automated to water plants without physical presence, and to save water.

Siddhesh, his companion, explains how this technology, when applied properly, will benefit farmers in far-flung areas. “I can operate the system on my mobile phone from a distance of 15km, and can see if and when there is less water in the soil.” He is confident that he will get a job as an IoT technician after completing this training. Rajeshwar, another student, explains about automated machinery with colour-coded sensors which can be used to replace manual packaging.

Talha Sheikh’s father works as a shop manager, and he smartly shows me how different coloured sensors will pick up different objects. Vishwas Rankhambe explains about spot parking management, and how the systems they are developing can be used in big office complexes, malls, hospitals etc, where drivers face difficulty in finding empty parking slots.

Atharva Desai, one of the teachers, says overall they teach about 300 to 350 students in three batches every day. He is all praise for these students. “Not only are they smart and hardworking and concentrate on learning, they are very hungry to take in the knowledge that this lab provides,” he smiles.

These youngsters, he adds, are “seeking a path to a good job and a bright future. With this lab, they have the opportunity to get that path. And they are very eager to learn new technology, which Rotary has made possible for them.”

The students are extremely eager to share what they have learnt and what they are doing. Vishwas Rankhambe continues to explain how the car park system “where we use reasonable and affordable components, such as proximity sensors, to detect a parking spot,” works. He adds: “Secondly, this has sensors so that the gate opens and closes automatically, when a parking spot is available. Also, the communication protocol gives real-time updates, and the system is connected to the cloud internet.”

While I struggle to comprehend the technology, I am impressed by his articulation in English; when I compliment Vishwas on his English

Innovative IT and generative AI are part of their curriculum and the children are taught to use AI platforms like ChatGPT, Gemini, etc. They are also learning some machine-learning related coding.



Rasheeda Bhagat

Sanghani looks at a Robot Arm developed by students at the Elphinstone ITI's IT Innovation Lab.

language skills, he demurs: “No ma’am, it’s not that good. But yes, I read a lot. Instead of playing games on my phone, I read.”

Komal Resheem’s father works in a private company, and she wants to join the police department and do IT work there! Mohammad Daduji is all excitement as he explains the hydroponics system they are working on to help farming in difficult conditions. “In today’s traditional farming, both the soil and weather conditions have deteriorated, and there is less land for farming. This mini hydroponics system we have designed works without soil, and in high-nutrient water, which helps the plants to grow well. The sensors will tell you about the nutrients, whether the water is acidic or alkaline and so on.”

I am attracted to a mint plant which is clearly thriving with fresh, green and fragrant leaves; there is both mint and tulsi. The youngsters want to gift me one... I choose mint!

Leaving the best part for the last, I ask teacher Desai that now these students have already completed their high school, and are armed with this nine-month training, what kind of salary can they expect.

He pegs the figure anywhere between ₹25,000 and 30,000!

Sanghani smiles and says, “This is an advanced learning centre. But even at the Palghar innovation lab, where 3D printing is taught, last year the students used the centre’s 3D printing technology to design and create personalised *rakhis* for Raksha Bandhan. After printing beautiful *rakhis*, they added coloured threads and glittering and decorative little items to make each piece colourful and glitzy. This activity helped students to understand how 3D printing works and gave them a chance to explore their creative talent while celebrating a traditional festival.”

Designed by N Krishnamurthy

Rotary International and the Government of India have initiated discussions to deepen collaboration in advancing national development priorities through community-led initiatives, following a recent meeting between Vice President of India C P Radhakrishnan and RI Vice President M Muruganandam in Delhi.

It was decided to strengthen the partnership between Rotary and GoI across key sectors such as education, healthcare, youth leadership development, water and sanitation, and other nation-building initiatives, leveraging Rotary's global network, grassroots presence, and decades of expertise in community service to deliver sustainable impact across India.

The Vice President, who acknowledged Rotary's leadership and legacy in the global fight against polio, said he supported Rotary India's aspiration to host a future RI convention in India. As a huge global event, it would bring together in India thousands of delegates from across the world, positioning it as a global hub for humanitarian collaboration, innovation and service while strengthening international partnerships.

Later Muruganandam said, "It was an honour to meet the Vice President

Rotary and GoI to work together for community welfare

Team Rotary News



Vice President of India C P Radhakrishnan with RI Vice President M Muruganandam.

of India and discuss opportunities to strengthen Rotary's contribution in India's development journey. His encouragement, particularly for India's aspiration to host a future RI convention,

is a recognition of our commitment to expand impactful service initiatives, and build stronger partnerships that create lasting change for communities across the country." ■

CNG autos to 50 women in Chennai

In a CSR-grant project to empower women through a sustainable income, RC Anna Nagar Madras, RID 3234, joined hands with Aptus Value Housing Finance India and ANEW, an NGO providing livelihood support, to distribute pink autorickshaws to 50 women.

Each vehicle costing ₹2.7 lakh got a funding of ₹1 lakh from the company, and all the beneficiaries were trained by the NGO.

The handover event of the second phase was attended by Anna Nagar MLA VK Ram Kumar, club president Mallika Thyagarajan, Rotarians, and ANEW chairperson Annalakshmi. "The distribution of pink autos marks a significant step toward enhancing mobility, and financial independence for deserving women," said DG Suresh Jain, RID 3234. ■



Aptus Value Housing Finance India chairman M Anandan delivers pink autos to beneficiaries. Also seen are RID 3234 DG Suresh Jain (3rd from L) and to his right is District Conference chair C Muthusamy.

Young people don't want to sit at the table for mere symbolism

Rasheeda Bhagat

A Sri Lankan Rotaractor, Fathima Haneekah Rahil, got the unique opportunity to participate in the 2026 ECOSOC Youth Forum held from April 14–16, 2026, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Asked how she got the opportunity to participate in this prestigious event, she says that she is presently the global coordinator for the Commonwealth Youth Peace Ambassadors Network (CYPAN), and along with another youngster from Pakistan got this opportunity at this UN meet.

Haneekah is both a Rotaractor and a Rotarian, and has already served last year as the president of the Rotary Club of Colombo North, a 56-year-old and prestigious club in Sri Lanka.

Her Rotaract journey was not “at all planned; a friend who was a Rotaractor introduced me to Rotaract, I joined the organisation and found my life partner there. He was the DRR,” she smiles.

Asked what Rotaract has given her, she says, “Rotaract has definitely shaped the way I look at the world and myself. Rotaract helps you network, meet like-minded people who can be relied on. So, Rotaract has been a very strong influence in my life.”

The New York meeting was a three-day programme where many young people were present and they all had the opportunity to meet the Assistant UN Secretary General.

On the kind of concerns the young people raised there, Haneekah says “one of the strongest messages was that young people do not want to be just consulted occasionally, but want to be meaningfully involved in finding and shaping solutions to the serious problems our world is facing today. They also want to be actively included in governance.”



Sri Lankan Rotaractor Fathima Haneekah Rahil (second from R) with fellow delegates at the UN Headquarters in New York.

The discussions touched varied aspects of life, including employment, education, digital transformation, mental well-being and climate resilience.

AI was, of course, discussed and another main topic on the table was the significant shift happening in the world due to AI. “A lot of attention was paid to how AI and emerging technologies will affect jobs, learning, and civic participation in the coming days.” She adds that she was amazed to find that so many delegates were “raising similar concerns, whether they were from the Caribbean, Africa, South Asia, or other countries. Many young people were asking the same questions: how do we access opportunities; how do we build resilient communities. Basically, what the young people wanted was a shift from participation to partnership.”

This young lady, who has a Masters degree in Law, also serves currently as the co-chair for Programs and Partnerships within the Task Force for the upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) 2026, which will be held in St John’s, Antigua and Barbuda, from Nov 1–4. In this role, she contributes towards youth engagement, strategic partnerships, and programme development connected to the summit.

Here, she told *Rotary News*, she will be co-chairing the programmes at Commonwealth Youth Forum, which is going to be part of CHOGM, with its main focus on youth employment, entrepreneurship, digital innovation and climate resilience. “It is the diversity of the Commonwealth nations that excites youngsters; so whether it is a small island state or an African or South Asian nation, young people are looking

for meaningful opportunities and consultations on employment, entrepreneurship, and so on.”

Asked whether the youth are looking at AI as a challenge or an opportunity, Haneekah says that would vary according to perspectives of different people. “It is an opportunity and not a barrier for the young because AI can support you in many ways. You can already see how many young people are thriving with AI. They’re not looking at it as an obstacle because there are certain things AI cannot do. AI is not a human, but can help humans. Once you think and understand that, you can make good use of AI and not think of AI as competition. That’s what I believe.”

Asked to elaborate on her view that young people should not be mere contributors, but active participants in shaping the policies of the world, she says, “Normally young people are included once decisions are made. They’re often invited into rooms and asked their opinion after the decisions are made. I have travelled to many countries representing CYPAN, and find this happening.”

But what young people want today, she continues, is for policymakers to “call and involve us while the decisions are being made... from the beginning and not afterwards. That will be meaningful participation. This will enable them to bring issues on the table, look at them from their lens, perhaps at a different angle, and help design solutions.”

But, she cautions, this doesn’t necessarily mean it’s youth versus older



generation. “I believe the goal is inter-generational partnership. Filling the gap is important.”

Haneekah is currently a director of the World Commerce Lanka, her family company dealing in import-export, apart from being the CYPAN coordinator which is also a paid position.

I next quiz her on the involvement of youth in the political upheavals; transformations in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and the vote of youngsters that brought about a change of government in Tamil Nadu, India. Does she think a time has come for young people’s active participation in the way governments are formed or work?

She says the specifics in the political environments of different countries are different, so they can’t be compared, “but what interests me is the broader trend of young people demanding greater voice in the decision-making process to safeguard their future. Also,

what is definitely undeniable is young people across the world becoming more engaged in public life, compared to the past.”

This she feels is a global trend and gives the example of the New York mayor Zohran Mamdani, and the social media campaign he ran for his election. “It attracted the young people because with social media and technology, we all have news at our fingertips. We are well aware about what is going on in the world, and the youth want to influence, I think, beyond elections... it can be digital, advocacy related, entrepreneurship, anything. Today’s youth want to get actively involved in these platforms. That is what is changing; global technology trends are influencing the young, they want to voice their views and their own decisions for the future... because we are the future, right?”

Does she really believe the young can make a tangible difference to our world today? “What I think is that young people do not want to sit at a table for symbolism. They want meaningful role in shaping the solutions. Only if this opportunity is given, whatever they say can make a tangible difference. Or else, what they say will just remain a voice, it won’t be driven into policy. That is the difference we are talking about. We can give interviews, go to conferences, as I have been to so many Commonwealth nations; but what we seek is to be involved in the



Haneekah with Rotary awards won by her Rotary/Rotaract clubs.

Right: With PRIP Stephanie Urchick.



With PDG Sushena Ranathunga (centre).

Right: At the ECOSOC Youth Forum.

Haneekah with
PRIP Gordon McNally.



decision-making process for us to change or shape the future for youth.”

Coming to what being a member of Rotaract and Rotary has given her, she says “A lot; even my involvement with Commonwealth and other agencies... the qualities I have, public speaking, being proactive, critical thinking, and knowing what to do when things are falling apart and take quick decisions... all these have come from what I’ve learnt in Rotaract and Rotary.”

On how she sees Rotary’s future, Haneekah says she joined Rotaract in 2018 and Rotary in 2020. In the last six years, first in RC Cinnamon Gardens as the youth services director, and later as the president of RC Colombo North (to which she moved as her husband was a member there), she found the Rotarians embracing a young Rotarian like her, and being just one call away if their assistance was required. “Sometimes, such transitions are not easy and smooth for everybody, but both the clubs’ members made it very seamless. I genuinely believe that is how the future of Rotary also should be; welcoming young people and willing to fill that intergenerational gap and giving them more responsibilities.”

If senior Rotarians can be welcoming the young members and support them, then the organisation would thrive. “I am very fortunate to have lots of past presidents... an army of past presidents... helping me out all the time.”

To arrest Rotary’s falling membership, there will have to be a better connect between Rotarians and Rotaractors. This year, she is the DRR for RI district 3220, Sri Lanka and Maldives, and she would work with the district governor and Rotarians to try and see that from the 80-odd Rotaract clubs in her region, a serious attempt is made to get at least half of the Rotaractors join Rotary clubs as members. ■

10 Indian districts among top 30 in TRF giving

Team Rotary News

India has rewritten its Rotary story — from being one of TRF’s largest beneficiaries to becoming its biggest contributor. At the close of the 2025–26 Rotary year, 10 Indian districts featured among the world’s top 30 TRF-contributing districts.

Topping the global rankings is **RI District 3141** under IPDG Manish Motwani with an exceptional contribution of \$10,469,481. The district’s performance was driven largely by RC Bombay Pier, which contributed \$3,674,188. It also welcomed 16 new AKS members, while nine existing members advanced to higher AKS recognition levels. Nearly 59 per cent of the district’s Rotarians contributed to TRF, resulting in an average per capita

giving of \$1,658.5. The district now has 87 AKS members.

RI District 3203, comprising Coimbatore, Erode, Tirupur and the Nilgiris, secured the second position globally with a total contribution of \$3,514,256. Led by IPDG B Dhanasekar, the district added one new AKS member, taking its total to seven. RC Tirupur South emerged as the district’s highest contributor with \$359,923. About 30 per cent of the district’s Rotarians supported TRF, resulting in an average per capita contribution of \$665.71.

Ranked sixth in the world was **RI District 3011**, covering Delhi and parts of Haryana, with a total contribution of \$2,749,190. Led by IPDG Ravinder Gugnani, the

district added six new AKS members, taking its total to 29, while one member advanced to a higher AKS recognition level. RC Delhi South Central led the district with a contribution of \$597,871. With 24 per cent member participation, the district recorded an average per capita giving of \$551.21, making it India’s third-highest contributing district.

RI Districts 3192, 3234, 3131, 3060, 3150, 3191, 3000 and 3012 also earned places among the world’s top 30 TRF-contributing districts. Together, these achievements demonstrate that Indian Rotarians are not only strengthening TRF financially but are also helping expand its ability to support life-changing projects around the globe.

Top 30 TRF-giving districts in the world for the RY 2025–26

Rank	District	Country	Total Contributions (\$)
1	3141	India	10,469,481
2	3203	India	3,514,256
3	3502	Taiwan	2,926,178
4	3501	Taiwan	2,901,341
5	3310	Brunei	2,858,489
6	3011	India	2,749,190
7	5020	Canada	2,703,853
8	3522	Taiwan	2,450,407
9	5340	USA	2,331,591
10	3192	India	2,212,825
11	9675	Australia	2,123,787
12	3234	India	2,122,462
13	3131	India	2,025,770
14	5170	USA	1,977,067
15	3060	India	1,932,713

Rank	District	Country	Total Contributions (\$)
16	3150	India	1,811,734
17	3191	India	1,802,283
18	5890	USA	1,781,181
19	3490	Taiwan	1,746,256
20	5420	USA	1,657,768
21	3461	Taiwan	1,504,483
22	3750	Korea	1,496,332
23	3510	Taiwan	1,494,923
24	3470	Taiwan	1,481,255
25	5110	USA	1,469,600
26	3481	Taiwan	1,466,357
27	3000	India	1,443,142
28	3590	Korea	1,412,956
29	3012	India	1,397,996
30	6970	USA	1,374,393

Top 30 Largest Rotary Membership Districts in the World

District	Country	# Clubs	# Members
3000	India	194	7,731
3141	India	122	6,423
2981	India	155	6,297
3170	India	142	6,255
3030	India	122	6,086
3203	India	116	5,711
3011	India	145	5,493
3292	Nepal	164	5,342
3211	India	164	5,264
9213	Uganda	151	5,253
1910	Austria	112	5,211
3630	Korea	118	5,144
3060	India	104	5,062
3131	India	132	4,807
1900	Germany	92	4,803
1810	Germany	89	4,715
3820	Philippines	159	4,693
1860	Germany	90	4,680
9214	Tanzania	150	4,642
1870	Germany	84	4,561
3212	India	121	4,555
1990	Switzerland	78	4,554
2760	Japan	84	4,521
2000	Switzerland	77	4,511
2060	Italy	96	4,440
2750	Japan	98	4,432
1980	Switzerland	69	4,423
64	Bangladesh	221	4,392
9141	Nigeria	178	4,379
3490	Taiwan	107	4,330

Top 30 Giving Countries in 2025–26

Rank	Country	Total Contributions (\$)	Rank	Country	Total Contributions (\$)
1	United States	197,515,018	16	Nigeria	2,266,923
2	India	45,390,039	17	Mexico	2,244,556
3	Canada	31,716,898	18	Belgium	2,229,562
4	Taiwan	19,645,509	19	Switzerland	1,670,174
5	Korea, Republic of	18,469,862	20	Thailand	1,435,117
6	Japan	16,462,230	21	Netherlands	1,064,026
7	Germany	7,314,378	22	Hong Kong	972,023
8	Italy	6,848,763	23	Austria	909,269
9	Philippines	6,703,763	24	Spain	621,977
10	Australia	6,486,841	25	Denmark	610,147
11	Brazil	6,400,544	26	Malaysia	592,381
12	UK	4,119,672	27	Cayman Islands	558,548
13	France	3,430,428	28	Turkey	535,192
14	Singapore	2,518,409	29	Côte d'Ivoire	510,736
15	Uganda	2,305,720	30	Nepal	502,637

RID 3141 tops the world in TRF giving

Once again RID 3141 has made India proud in TRF giving, with three clubs from Mumbai occupying the pride of place in the district headed by DG Manish Motwani.

Those clubs are RC Bombay Pier, led by Noopur Desai, contributing \$3,674,188; RC Bombay, led by Bimal Mehta (\$1,627,795); and RC Queen's Necklace, led by Apurva Shah (\$651,789).

AKS Members recent trend in Zone 4, 5, 6 & 7

Year	Z4	Z5	Z6	Z7	AKS
2020–21	11	5	2	3	21
2021–22	10	7	2	6	25
2022–23	21	7	3	15	46
2023–24	13	4	6	7	30
2024–25	21	10	6	11	48
2025–26	26	5	1	9	41



10 OUT OF TOP 30 GIVING DISTRICTS ARE FROM INDIA.



WORLD NO. 1 AND 2 ARE FROM INDIA.



K P Nagesh
RI Director



Dr Bharat Pandya
TRF Trustee



M Muruganandam
RI V-P & Director

Dakoju's call for Gratitude in Action

Jaishree

The installation of Ravishankar Dakoju as the fourth district governor of RI District 3192 in Bengaluru was unlike a conventional Rotary event. The venue resembled a forest, with lush greenery forming the backdrop. The national anthem

video celebrated India's forests and wildlife, and, in a moment that reflected the governor's love for animals, Dakoju's pet Indian-breed dog Ponyo walked onto the stage to greet him and his wife, Paola. The setting offered a fitting introduction to the governor's theme for the year — *Dhanyavaad: Gratitude in Action*.

The event also celebrated a remarkable act of philanthropy. Earlier this year, at the International Assembly, Dakoju and Paola had pledged to donate 85 per cent of their wealth — estimated at \$50–60 million — to TRF. It may be recalled that in 2022, Dakoju had announced his commitment to

RI Director KP Nagesh (second from L) hands over the gavel to DG Ravishankar Dakoju as (from L) IPDG Elizabeth Cherian, Paola Dakoju and former union minister and environmentalist Maneka Gandhi look on.



donate ₹100 crore to TRF. He had also auctioned his barely year-old Mercedes-Benz car, with a mileage of less than 3,000km; when the car fetched ₹42 lakh, he added another ₹8 lakh from his own pocket and donated ₹50 lakh to TRF.

Installing Dakoju as governor, RI director K P Nagesh described him as “a person with the ultimate attitude of gratitude,” adding that after serving people throughout his life, Dakoju now wanted “to give back to Mother Earth.”

“My deepest *dhanyavaad* goes to my late parents, Indira and D Kamesh Rao,” Dakoju said, recalling that his father had donated the family’s entire wealth to the Bhoodan movement. “Their values, sacrifices and blessings continue to guide me every single day.”



Explaining the district theme, he said it went far beyond simply saying thank you. “‘Thanks’ is just a word. *Dhanyavaad* is gratitude in action. It is the purest human emotion. From the moment we are born until the day we die, we depend on society. We have forgotten to say thank you,” he said. His vision is to restore gratitude as a way of life — not only towards fellow human beings, but also towards the Earth, animals and every form of life that sustains humanity.

The *Dhanyavaad* movement brings together 44 Rotary districts across India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives in a series of Rotary-led initiatives promoting ecological restoration and social responsibility, supported by the Paola Dakoju Foundation.

Among its major initiatives are the planting of one million trees, with support from institutions including the Ryan International Schools, and the distribution of one lakh water bowls for birds and animals in schools, communities and homes in partnership with the NGO Water for Voiceless.

“Forests alone can keep the planet green and healthy. If forests die, the planet dies,” said Dakoju. Calling tribal communities the true custodians of India’s forests, he announced a partnership with the Friends of Tribal Society to support 5,000 tribal schools, strengthening education in remote forest regions.

His long-term vision has been inspired by Rotary’s watershed development and afforestation work at Challakere, one of Karnataka’s driest regions. “Lakes are full today, animals are coming back, and in a few years there will be a thick forest there,” he said. He thanked TRF for supporting the project through grants.

“Thanks’ is just a word.

Dhanyavaad is gratitude in action, the purest human emotion. From our birth until the day we die, we depend on society, but have forgotten to say ‘thank you’.

DG Ravishankar Dakoju

The district will also establish a Transgender Skill Development Centre to provide vocational training and dignified employment, organise Paralympics and special sports meets, work with Rotaractors on anti-drugs campaigns, and collaborate with the Nari Shakti Foundation on women’s empowerment initiatives. Projects such as *Lakshya Kalpavruksha*, which aims to provide two coconut saplings to every rural household, and *Kamadhenu*, which supports rural women with milch cows for livelihood, will further strengthen village communities.

Observing that nearly 80 per cent of India’s population lives in rural areas while Rotary has traditionally flourished in cities, Dakoju said, “We will strengthen Rotary by taking it to rural India.” He also contributed ₹1 crore as a Directed Gift to TRF for environmental projects.

Parliamentarian, environmentalist and animal welfare champion Maneka Gandhi was named brand ambassador of the *Dhanyavaad* movement. Congratulating Rotarians for choosing stewardship over consumption and restoration over exploitation, she described



Maneka being announced as brand ambassador for *Dhanyavaad* — Gratitude in Action initiative. Also seen (from L): PDG Suresh Hari, IPDG Elizabeth, Director Nagesh, Paola, DG Dakoju and district secretary Mahadev Dambal.

ecological restoration as “an act of gratitude” to Mother Earth. Drawing on decades of work in environmental conservation and animal welfare, she said humanity’s future depended on recognising that people are part of nature, not separate from it. Forests, rivers, grasslands and wildlife

Forests, rivers, grasslands
and wildlife sustain both
biodiversity and human
life, and protecting them is
essential for a healthy society.

MP and animal
welfare champion
Maneka Gandhi

sustain both biodiversity and human life, and protecting them is essential for a healthy society, she said.

Urging Rotarians to plant more native trees, encourage kindness towards animals through schools and community initiatives, and make compassion the foundation of sustainable development, she said: “The measure of our success will be the condition in which we leave this planet.”

Handing over the governor’s mantle, outgoing DG Elizabeth Cherian said: “The world knows you as a great donor, but I know you as a passionate environmentalist willing to go to any extent to protect and conserve nature. Your passion to recreate and restore, renovate and reinvent is unmatched. I am confident that, with your unique thought process and a heart that beats for the less fortunate, you will deliver a year of compassion to all life forms.

Paola, your quiet but meaningful presence in his journey is precious.”

Organising committee chairman Vijay Tadimalla described Dakoju as someone who openly shares both successes and failures, and carries people’s stories with him long after meeting them. “He wears his heart on his sleeve,” he said.

As part of the installation, saplings were planted simultaneously across eight states and at 116 Ryan International School campuses, with the events livestreamed at the venue. Ryan Group CEO Ryan Pinto pledged to plant 10 lakh saplings across the schools during the year.

Past and future district leaders of RI Districts 3191 and 3192, along with members of Dakoju’s home club, RC Bangalore, and his alma mater, RC Bangalore Orchards, were present at the installation.

Pictures by Jaishree

Rotary and Usha stitch together livelihoods for 70 women

Kiran Zehra



Beneficiaries with their sewing machines.

A sewing machine is a useful household appliance. But in the right hands, it can also become the foundation of a business, says PDG Sanjeev Gupta, member of RC Indore Uptown, RID 3040. “That is the idea behind the partnership between our club and Usha International, which has helped 70 rural women build sustainable, sewing-based microenterprises rather than simply learn a vocational skill.”

The women, identified by the Usha Silai Schools, underwent an intensive two-day programme covering advanced tailoring, entrepreneurship and microenterprise management. The trainers, technical support and raw materials for the course were provided by the sewing machine corporate. After successful completion of the course, the club sponsored a sewing machine, along with a toolkit and training material,

while giving certificates to each of the women.

Sunita Bai now stitches school uniforms from a small room in her home in Panod, Indore. Six months ago, “I had no income of my own. Today, the money I earn through tailoring helps me pay for my daughter’s school fees and household expenses,” she says.

The total cost of the project was ₹4.48 lakh. Anuradha Saini from RID 5330 (USA), sponsored 25 sewing machines during her visit to the district as part of a Rotary Friendship Exchange programme in November 2025. Usha International enabled access to its Silai Mobile App to the participants to help them continue learning after the programme. It will also monitor and mentor the women as they establish their enterprises.

“When women have a marketable skill, the right equipment and continued

mentoring, they gain confidence to earn independently and contribute to their families’ financial security,” notes Gupta who guided the project.

Many of the participants have already begun stitching school uniforms, women’s garments, children’s clothing and bags, while others are taking local tailoring orders from their communities. For most of them, this is their first opportunity to earn an independent income, he adds.

The partnership hopes to establish 70 village-level sewing enterprises that will generate livelihoods, strengthen family incomes and encourage women-led entrepreneurship. “If successful, the model could be replicated in other communities,” adds Gupta.

IPDG Sushil Malhotra attended the programme as chief guest. The initiative was coordinated by club member Deepti Dubey, under the leadership of club president Manmohan Tiwari. ■

End Polio Now flame returns home to Taiwan

Rasheeda Bhagat

The End Polio Flame, initiated by the Rotary Club of Madras, RID 3234, in RY 2014–15, when the club was led by SN Srikanth, and launched in Taipei, Taiwan, when Gary Huang was the RI President, returned to the same city that hosted the RI Convention this June.

The man behind the project, past president Srikanth, who is also chair of End Polio Flame project, said the flame's return to Taipei this June was part of the seven-day, 540-km *End Polio Now Taiwan Cycling Tour* from Kaohsiung to Taipei, which ended in the city on June 13, 2026. During the ceremony, lead cyclist PDG Frank Hsu and PDG J P Horng ceremonially handed over the flame to PRIP Gary, who is from Taiwan. Gary had inaugurated the flame in Chennai in 2014. He congratulated the Chennai Rotarians

for continuing the flame's journey even after 12 years.

Till now the flame has travelled to 35 countries and helped collect an estimated \$10 million for The Rotary Foundation, "till we stopped counting!" On how funds for TRF are collected through this flame, Srikanth says that when it was first launched they had aimed to create a separate section in TRF to direct the donations towards polio but there were too many stumbling blocks in doing so, and hence whenever people across the world, whose attention was drawn to polio thanks to this flame, wanted to make a donation, it just went to TRF.

Recalling this project's long journey, he added, "The reception accorded to the flame in Taiwan in March 2015 was especially memorable, and its ceremonial entry at the opening plenary of the Sao Paulo Convention remains etched in

the minds of thousands. He added that the flame has already made two journeys through Pakistan, the first time across the Sindh region and the second time across Pakistan's Punjab region. It has also travelled to Afghanistan once: only to Kabul and that too during extremely difficult circumstances." Afghanistan and Pakistan are the only two countries from which polio is yet to be totally eradicated.

Srikanth added that on request from PRIP Gary, and the Taiwanese Rotarians, the flame will now be housed at the 'Light Up Rotary House' museum in Yilan, Taiwan. "The museum preserves the history and humanitarian milestones of Rotary and the flame is widely regarded as a major milestone. Of course, we have other torches that will continue the journey of the flame!"

Asked for how long, he smiles and says: "Looks like till polio is eliminated totally."

But this passionate Rotarian is now fully charged up about working in an area which is very close to his



RC Madras past president S N Srikanth presenting the End Polio Flame to PRIP Gary Huang (fifth from L) after the cycling tour at Taipei, Taiwan. RID 3234 DGN S Ravi (L), PDG J P Horng (fourth from R), Corinna Huang, RC Madras member Sivan Kannan and the club's past president N K Gopinath (R) are also seen.



Participants of the End Polio Bicycle Ride held at Taipei, Taiwan, in 2015.

heart — sanitation; “because when you can’t provide decent sanitation facilities, all kinds of health problems, including polio, arise.”

Years ago, he had poured all his efforts and attention into making a village near Chennai totally free of open defecation, and that had got him a lot of international attention and acclaim. IIM Ahmedabad too had taken this up as a case study.

He has now taken over the chairmanship of WASH-RAG, RI’s Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Action Group. He says proudly: “I am the first Asian to be given this responsibility and I have huge plans for it.” Having identified 150 ambassadors across the world, he hopes that Rotary will make a huge leap forward in this area.

Water is life and clean water means health, says Srikanth. “Sanitation has done more to increase human longevity than any surgery or drug. Yet, shockingly, over 2.5 billion people lack access to safe water and over 3 billion don’t have access to safely managed sanitation. The consequences are devastating — illness, disability

and death, with children being the most vulnerable.”

WASH-RAG (<https://www.wash-rag.org>) supports and facilitates sustainable WASH initiatives undertaken by over 40,000 Rotary clubs worldwide and works closely with TRF. “Our network includes experienced technical professionals, project advisors, grant reviewers, and dedicated WASH-RAG ambassadors across Rotary districts worldwide, and they can interact with and guide clubs.”

For those Rotarians who are proud of their clubs doing water and sanitation projects, Srikanth shares a disturbing number; he estimates that “at present our failure rate in WASH projects is 50 per cent.” He says that many clubs start water and sanitation project with a lot of passion and fanfare, but within two to five years, they are not effective at all. Due to this tendency to “do projects and not sustained long-term programmes,” he estimates that Rotary loses each year as much as \$25 million!

“I believe Rotary should stop this ‘projects’ business; I think building a

school here or a water tank there will not really make an impact. Instead of these isolated efforts by clubs, we need to take up sustained programmes at district levels. Yes, we need to make the transition from projects to programmes, and I have ambitious plans to do just that going forward.”

His plan is to encourage districts to take up long-term sustainable programmes which have the support and commitment of the DG, the DGE and the DGN; “what we need is a huge emphasis on sustainability and a determined attempt to scale up our activities. We are also planning a major initiative where three selected Rotary districts from around the world will become a living laboratory to achieve the equivalent of SDG 6 — or access to clean water and sanitation for all.”

Doing all this, says Srikanth enthusiastically, will make “Rotary a preeminent player in WASH-RAG in the world.” But of course, he adds, all this will require a lot of hard work and above all, the willingness of the clubs to work together.” ■

In conversation with Maneka Gandhi

Jaishree



MP and animal
welfare champion
Maneka Gandhi

For over four decades, former union minister Maneka Gandhi has been one of India's prominent voices for animal welfare and environmental conservation. Speaking to *Rotary News* on the sidelines of the installation of Ravishankar Dakoju as DG of RI district 3192, she shared her views on protecting forests, reducing meat consumption, managing stray dogs, and what continues to inspire her work.

What first sparked your commitment to animal welfare, and what keeps you going after all these years?

Maneka Gandhi: I've always had a strong sense of fairness. I believe all living beings are equal. Animals experience fear, pain and emotions just as humans do. Step on an ant, it will also run. Fish have the highest pain receptors of all beings. Just as human beings, they too feel emotions. We've all seen elephants mourn the loss of their young. Once you recognise that, you cannot justify treating them differently. Throughout my years in Parliament, I've believed that someone must speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. Every one of us has a responsibility to make the world a better place.

Among India's environmental challenges, what concerns you the most?

The loss of forests. Forests are the foundation of our water security, rainfall and biodiversity. When forests disappear, everything else follows. If we are serious



Maneka with (from L) RI Director K P Nagesh, RID 3192 DG Ravishankar Dakoju, Uma Nagesh and Paola Dakoju in Bengaluru.

about addressing climate change, protecting forests has to become a national priority.

One of the major pressures on forests comes from large-scale meat production. It also contributes significantly to methane emissions and environmental degradation. There's another aspect that can't be ignored — slaughter house effluents and the leather industry pollutes our waterbodies with hazardous chemicals.

But studies indicate that a majority of the global population (80–85 per cent) is non-vegetarian. How can they be convinced to stop eating meat?

It is important both for the environment and for public health. We need much greater awareness about how food choices affect our health and the planet. Meat production has environmental costs that many people don't fully understand. We have made meat aspirational, whereas many successful people today are

choosing vegetarian diets. Public awareness can gradually influence these choices.

In the US, when meat faced a backlash due to its environmental and health impact, it was called 'protein'. We keep disguising things.

You also believe nutrition deserves greater attention in medical education. Why?

Doctors are trained primarily to treat diseases, but nutrition receives very little emphasis. Better understanding of nutrition can help prevent many health problems before they require medical treatment. I also believe many commonly accepted dietary practices, including the widespread belief that milk is essential for good health, need to be re-examined in the light of scientific research. We need to educate both doctors and the public on the relationship between food and long-term health so that people can make informed dietary choices.

Stray dog attacks continue to worry many cities. What is the solution?

The answer is the ABC (Animal Birth Control) programme through scientific sterilisation and vaccination. It has worked successfully in many countries. Unfortunately, in India it has suffered because of inadequate funding and poor implementation. Dogs are often relocated instead of being sterilised, which makes them frightened and more likely to bite. If the programme is implemented honestly and adequately funded, it can effectively control stray dog populations while reducing rabies.

Looking back on your journey, was there one defining moment that changed you?

Not one moment. I learn every single day. My thoughts evolve as I continue to study, understand and apply what I learn. There are always new challenges that demand attention. It has truly been a lifetime of learning.

Pictures by Jaishree



Bhagalpur Rotarians create a habitat for the Garud

Rasheeda Bhagat

Rotary clubs in India are taking up projects related to protecting and safeguarding our environment but most of these projects are related to greening the earth by planting more trees, with focus on strengthening our biodiversity. While the 70 member-strong Rotary Club of Bhagalpur, RID 3250, has also decided to plant over

200 trees, there is an interesting twist to their perspective. This is related to planting mostly Kadamba trees, and with a specific purpose.

Anupama Kumar, immediate past president of the club, explains that this project's main objective is to provide ample and better habitat for the Garud bird, which is known to nest and thrive on the Kadamba trees. She says they found that in Khairpur Kadwa, about

27km from Bhagalpur, there is a government school, where there are a couple of Kadamba trees for the Garud birds to nest and thrive.

Her interest in doing this project is to create a favourable habitat to save the Garud (mythical name for the bird which was the *vahana* of Vishnu) or the greater adjutant stork from near extinction came from her interaction with Bihar's famous ornithologist

Arvind Mishra, who lives close to her house in Bhagalpur. Mishra had worked for 13 long years to save the greater adjutant stork from near extinction and with the help of locals had created a safe habitat for this species of birds to survive.

“Whenever a bird, such as an eagle, is injured in our neighbourhood, we call him and ask for his help. He told me that the Garud’s numbers had come down to a mere 200 and had been increased to 700 through the efforts of the group he had put together.”

Anupama says that through Mishra she had learnt several interesting facts about the Garud as also the Gangetic River dolphins which are found in the Ganges flowing through Bhagalpur and are an endangered species as well. “He said there are Garud and dolphin saviours and these people do honorary work to save these species. For example, if a Garud falls from the tree or is injured, they take it to a designated government sanctuary close by where they are kept in recovery rooms and treated, till they can fly back, and are then released so they can go back to their natural habitat.”

Enthusied with the idea of doing something to help the Garud, once



The greater adjutant stork, known as Garud in the Bhagalpur region, Bihar.

the Rotarians learnt that they live on Kadamba trees, which are ideal for these heavy birds, each of which can weigh up to 14kg, they decided to plant these trees. An ideal habitat for the Garud is a tree which has branches that are strong and firm but also flexible, so that they can take the weight of these heavy birds without snapping. The Garud can also nest in the banyan tree, but the Kadamba tree is considered ideal for them.

Interestingly, just like the Garud, the Kadamba tree, known for its ecological and medicinal properties, also holds deep spiritual significance in Indian mythology. The Kadamba is a fast-growing tropical tree which can grow up to the height of 45 metres and provides an ideal home for the Garud. Beginning in March 2026, under this project, some 200 Kadamba trees were planted on both sides of the road near this school, and in between the Kadamba trees, jackfruit trees were planted. Gabions (galvanised wire-mesh enclosures to protect the trees) were acquired and two people have been hired to water the trees.

Anupama says this conservation project has given them a lot of satisfaction as “we feel that we have done something to enhance the precious habitat and peaceful shelter for the majestic Garud birds, a rare species whose numbers were nearing extinction. Kadua, and some parts of Assam, are the very few places where this rare bird can be seen. More than just a plantation activity, the initiative is a meaningful step to protect our biodiversity, restore ecological balance, and ensure that future generations can continue to enjoy watching the beautiful Garud birds in their natural habitat.”

It’s good to know that women-led initiatives continue in the conservation space. In Assam, women have joined ranks to save the greater adjutant stork, known locally as the ‘Hargila,’ (like the Garud in Bhagalpur) which was considered locally a “dirty, smelly bird” that villagers would attack. The women, calling themselves the Hargila Army, incorporate the birds into their songs, prayers and weavings to help protect the species and spark appreciation for them. This has also helped to enhance their numbers. ■

If a Garud falls from the tree or is injured, Garud saviours take it to a designated government sanctuary, treat them in recovery rooms, and release them when they can fly back to their natural habitat.



Throttling their way to a more committed Rotary fellowship

Rasheeda Bhagat

A passionate group of Rotarians within the Rotary Fellowship groups, which are an integral part of the Rotary movement aiming to bring together Rotarians from across the world who share a common passion or hobby, is the International Fellowship of Motorcycling

Rotarians (IFMR). Its India chapter was established in 2003 by the late PDG Prithvi Raval, with its headquarters in Bengaluru, says Vinod Agarwal, a member of the Rotary Club of Bangalore Lakeside, RID 3191, who has just taken over as the president of the Indian chapter of this fellowship.

The fellowship itself originated in Australia in 1993 and has since grown

into a global network comprising 55 chapters with over 6,000 members. The India chapter today has over 700 members spread across 15 cities.

Explaining the core ethos of this motorcycling group, he says, “The true spirit of IFMR lies in combining the joy of motorcycling with Rotary’s commitment to service. By connecting Rotarians beyond club boundaries,



The IFMR India team at a pit-stop during one of their rides.

the fellowship strengthens friendships while supporting meaningful Rotary initiatives. Over the years, IFMR India has undertaken several impactful rides dedicated to causes such as literacy, relief during the Covid pandemic, mental health awareness, the End Polio campaign, and most recently, protecting the environment and promoting health awareness.”

One of its landmark initiatives had 28 Rotarians riding from Kanyakumari to Kashmir, carrying Rotary’s message of service across the country.

As with all the core areas/functions of Rotary, the leadership of IFMR India changes in July every year. As Agarwal took over the India chapter’s leadership, a group of 45 Rotarians came together to mark the beginning of the new Rotary year, and participate in a breakfast ride to Rocky Ridge

Bikers Café, a scenic destination located about 75km from Bengaluru.

At 6.30am on a cool, breezy morning on July 1, the group of Rotarians, including two women members, assembled at the starting point. This group included nine past presidents, three founder members, and many enthusiastic members from across the chapter. “After an enjoyable 90-minute ride, the riders reached Rocky Ridge — a haven designed especially for motorcyclists, complete with dedicated spaces for riding gear, helmet storage, and comfortable rest areas. We spent some time exploring the picturesque property, catching up with fellow riders, and clicking memorable

photographs before gathering for a sumptuous breakfast buffet.”

The highlight of the morning was installation of Agarwal as the India chapter’s 17th president for RY 2026–27. The installation ceremony was conducted by IFMR’s world secretary Prashanth Babu. Adding to the celebrations, three new Rotarian bikers were inducted into the fellowship. The newly-elected office-bearers were formally installed and presented with their name badges.

Addressing the enthusiastic bikers, Agarwal shared his vision and roadmap for the coming year, reaffirming the fellowship’s commitment to strengthening camaraderie while

advancing Rotary's service initiatives through responsible motorcycling. He also emphasised the India chapter's "enduring motto: Ride with passion, responsibly." By 10.45am, the riders began their return journey to Bengaluru, riding together in their signature disciplined formation.

Agarwal himself started his motorcycle journey during his college days in Chennai on an IndSuzuki motorcycle when he was 20 years old. Currently he rides a Super Meteor 650cc bike from Royal Enfield.

His dream bike? "An adventure bike from Harley Davidson of course. I have personally done all the bucket list adventure rides of India starting from Ladakh, Spiti Valley, Seven Sisters North-East States Ride, K2K — the Kanyakumari to Kashmir ride, an international ride to Bhutan, and many long-distance rides to Goa." He has



also participated in the Mental Health Awareness ride covering 4,000km in Zone 7 of Rotary in India.

Asked to elaborate on his advice to the riders who participated in the breakfast meet to always ensure they do *responsible motorcycling*, Agarwal says, "That means ours is a group of riders with a lot of discipline, no

overtaking, no night riding, no drinking while on rides, no racing, giving proper ride signals to other riders on the road, no leaving a rider in the lurch in case the latter is struggling with a breakdown. The list is endless!"

On what is in store for his fellow members during his year as the Fellowship president, he says, "Our biking calendar is full, and we have planned many overnight rides to places like Coorg, Goa, Cochin, Karaikudi, Udupi etc."

Breakfast rides on the first Sunday of every month covering distances between 150km and 400km are also on the list. A much more exciting long-adventure ride to Ladakh is in early stages of preparation, with 21 riders participating. This will begin on Aug 21 and end on Sep 5. On the anvil is also an inbound international ride early next year (Jan 13 to 24). "In this we are expecting over 20 international riders to join. We plan to take them to Gujarat to showcase the colourful Rann of Kutch festival and other interesting places such as Dholavira, the Gir forest, and the like," adds Agarwal.



Vinod Agarwal, president of IFMR India chapter.

Rotarians interested in becoming part of the fellowship can contact: +91 95913 82390

India leads the world in Rotaract, Interact membership during 2025-26

Top 30 districts with largest Rotaract membership in the world

Rank	District	Country	Clubs	Members
1	3233	India	70	5844
2	3000	India	146	5657
3	3292	Nepal	189	4470
4	3220	Sri Lanka	95	4142
5	9213	Uganda	148	3155
6	9214	Tanzania	117	2545
7	3080	India	82	2338
8	3131	India	100	2236
9	3192	India	86	2055
10	3150	India	53	2005
11	9104	Ghana	68	1933
12	3234	India	73	1876
13	3191	India	83	1875
14	3141	India	124	1873
15	3206	India	103	1767

Rank	District	Country	Clubs	Members
16	9010	Algeria	129	1607
17	3060	India	51	1459
18	3203	India	71	1449
19	9216	Eritrea	78	1428
20	3300	Malaysia	35	1416
21	3011	India	70	1392
22	9142	Nigeria	97	1370
23	3170	India	108	1281
24	9101	Burkina Faso	85	1264
25	9215	Kenya	60	1226
26	3820	Philippines	90	1163
27	3860	Philippines	88	1154
28	3142	India	57	1095
29	3030	India	81	1069
30	3450	Hongkong	68	1047

Top 30 districts with largest Interact clubs in the world

Rank	District	Country	Clubs
1	3262	India	685
2	3030	India	594
3	3000	India	478
4	3090	India	393
5	3131	India	361
6	3212	India	299
7	3170	India	294
8	3271	Pakistan	288
9	3132	India	279
10	3100	India	278
11	3011	India	262
12	3080	India	261
13	3191	India	256
14	3141	India	246
15	3192	India	237

Rank	District	Country	Clubs
16	3203	India	228
17	9141	Nigeria	201
18	3020	India	198
19	3150	India	193
20	3181	India	193
21	9213	Uganda	193
22	3182	India	186
23	3231	India	176
24	3234	India	163
25	3142	India	162
26	3220	Sri Lanka	158
27	9212	Eritrea	158
28	3292	Nepal	149
29	3300	Malaysia	139
30	3012	India	134



Leveraging Rotaract to strengthen Rotary

K P Nagesh

Rotary has always believed that leadership is built through service. Rotaract, on the other hand, has shown the world that young people are not merely the leaders of tomorrow — they are leaders of today. Together, Rotary, Rotaract and Interact form one family, united by a common purpose: creating positive and lasting change in our communities.

As someone who had the privilege of serving as district governor and witnessing the then RID 3190 achieve global recognition, I have learned that sustainable growth is never built by individuals alone. It is built when

experienced leaders trust young people with responsibility, mentor them with patience and celebrate their successes as their own.

Today, Rotaract is no longer a *junior version* of Rotary. It has evolved into one of the world's largest youth leadership movements. RI President Olayinka Babalola and Vice President M Muruganandam themselves are past Rotaractors.

Across India, thousands of young professionals and students are designing innovative service projects, solving local challenges, embracing technology, and creating measurable community impact.

What makes Rotaract unique is its combination of freedom and mentorship. Rotaractors bring creativity, energy, digital thinking, and fresh perspectives. Rotarians contribute wisdom, networks, governance, professional ethics and institutional continuity. When these strengths come together, extraordinary things happen.

Rotary's motto *Service Above Self* beautifully complements Rotaract's inspiring motto, *Fellowship Through Service*. Together they remind us that meaningful service begins with relationships, collaboration, and shared purpose.

Rather than functioning independently, Rotary, Rotaract and

RI Director K P Nagesh with Regional Rotaract Youth Advisory Council chair PDRR Karthik Kittu (fifth from L) and its office-bearers for Zones 4,5,6, 7 and 8.



Interact should increasingly work as integrated teams. Every Rotary club should actively mentor its Rotaract and Interact clubs, creating a seamless leadership pipeline where young members grow naturally into future Rotary leaders.

A common minimum programme

Every Rotary club can collaborate around a simple but powerful common minimum programme for their Rotaract/Interact clubs that creates learning, friendship, and service opportunities throughout the year. If you do not have a Rotaract club or Interact club, charter one, the goal is 1:2:3 — one Rotary club charts 2 Rotaract and 3 Interact clubs.

Together we can organise RYLA and leadership development programmes; enable global grant participation, organise sports meets, fellowship events, debate and public speaking competitions, industrial visits and corporate exposure, internship opportunities, heritage and historical

visits, and workshops on overcoming examination fear, stress and career planning.

These activities do much more than fill calendars — they shape confident, compassionate and capable young leaders.

Seven skills every Rotaractor should develop

Service projects build communities. Personal development builds leaders. I encourage every Rotaractor to consciously develop seven essential life skills:

1. Socialising: Build meaningful relationships across cultures and professions.
2. Critical thinking: Question, analyse, and solve problems with clarity.
3. Self-discipline: Success is built through consistency, not convenience.
4. Accepting challenges: Every difficult assignment is an opportunity for growth.
5. Handling emotions: Emotional intelligence is the foundation of effective leadership.
6. Self-expression: Communicate confidently with authenticity and purpose.
7. Respecting different perspectives: Great leaders listen before they lead.

If you cultivate these seven qualities, you will not simply become better Rotaractors — you will become better professionals, entrepreneurs, citizens and human beings. Rotaract is a true inhouse MBA programme for free.

Rotary's greatest contribution to Rotaract is not funding, it is mentorship.

Every Rotarian can make a lasting difference by focusing on five commitments:

- Guide through mentorship by sharing leadership, governance and professional experience.

Every Rotary club should actively mentor its Rotaract and Interact clubs, creating a seamless leadership pipeline where young members grow naturally into future Rotary leaders.

- Build partnerships by opening doors to government, CSR, educational institutions and NGOs.
- Ensure continuity by helping clubs preserve institutional memory and smooth leadership transitions.
- Uphold standards through training in ethics, compliance, financial transparency and safeguarding.
- Scale success by documenting and replicating impactful projects across clubs and districts.

When experienced leaders invest their time and trust in young leaders, communities benefit for generations.

India's greatest opportunity

India is home to one of the youngest populations in the world. This demographic advantage can become our greatest strength if we create platforms that transform youthful energy into civic leadership. I have always believed that Rotaract is not the future of Rotary — it is the present engine; Rotaract today is not just a youth programme — it is Rotary's leadership pipeline. It nurtures leadership through real-world experiences. It teaches project management, teamwork, financial responsibility, public speaking and community engagement — skills that universities alone cannot provide.

Many of tomorrow's Rotary presidents, district governors, social entrepreneurs, policymakers and business





Director Nagesh greets PDRR Arun Teja on his assignment as RSAMDIO president.

leaders are today serving as Rotaractors. The responsibility of Rotary is to mentor, challenge and believe in them. The future of Rotary does not lie only in increasing membership. It lies in strengthening relationships across generations.

As Rotaractors have also committed to raise \$125,000 — \$25,000 per zone and about \$3,000 per district — this would be matched by RID 3192

DG Ravishankar Dakoju, the idea is to make Rotaract in India the first AKS member in the world.

When Rotarians, Rotaractors, and Interactors work together as one family, service becomes more relevant, leadership becomes more inclusive, and communities become stronger. We have constituted a Regional Rotaract Advisory Council for Zones 4,5,6,7 and 8, chaired by PDRR Karthik

Kittu, past RI Rotaract and Interact Committee member, along with council members from Zones 4,5,6,7 and 8

Together, we will build not only stronger Rotary clubs — but stronger communities, stronger leaders and a stronger nation. One Family. One Purpose. One Future.

The writer is an RI director from India

High-tech mental healthcare in Ranchi

Team Rotary News

A state-of-art mental health facility was set up at the Ranchi Institute of Neuro-Psychiatry and Allied Sciences (RINPAS) by RC Ranchi, RID 3250, through a CSR-funded project worth ₹2 crore in partnership with Central Coalfields Ltd, a PSU company.

Project Manas has brought in a non-invasive treatment facility called dTMS (Deep Transcranial Magnetic



IPDG Namrata (fourth from L) with Jharkhand health minister Irfan Ansari (third from R) at the inauguration of the mental health treatment equipment.

Stimulation) at this government mental health hospital for patients suffering from depression, OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder), smoking addiction, and other neuropsychiatric disorders. “The dTMS facility has opened a new avenue of hope for thousands of patients across Jharkhand and neighbouring states,” said Amit Agarwal, immediate past president of the club.

With such an advanced mental healthcare accessible at the government hospital, “our project has also enhanced the awareness on mental health by reducing the stigma attached to such disorders, and improving the quality of life for many families,” he added. Jharkhand health minister Irfan Ansari inaugurated the new facility in the presence of district Rotary leaders, company officials and healthcare professionals. ■

Health on Wheels

A mobile diagnostic lab providing free healthcare services was launched for underserved communities in and around Hubballi-Dharwad through a global grant supported by RI districts 3170 and 5230. The van, inaugurated by union minister Pralhad Joshi, is equipped to offer blood and pathology tests, ECG, digital X-rays, and other essential screenings, while also supporting health camps organised by NGOs.



Union minister Pralhad Joshi, along with PDG Ganesh Bhat, inaugurates the mobile diagnostic lab.

Neonatal ICU on wheels

RC Madras East, RID 3234, in partnership with RC Irvine (USA), donated a ₹72 lakh neonatal ambulance to Kanchi Kamakoti Childs Trust Hospital in Chennai through a global grant. The NICU on wheels is equipped with a transport incubator, neonatal ventilator and advanced life-support systems. The ambulance will enable safe transfer of critically ill and premature newborns requiring specialised care.



RI Director M Muruganandam hands over the keys to hospital authorities in the presence of IPDG Vinod Saraogi.

Restoring mobility

RC Payyanur, RID 3204, in partnership with the RC Coimbatore Mid Town and RC Bentong, Malaysia, completed its signature project, *Walk Again*, by providing artificial limbs to 100 beneficiaries across Kerala. The initiative aims to restore mobility, independence and quality of life for people with limb loss.



Club members, along with a beneficiary, at the limb fitment camp.

Subsidised dialysis

RC Kothamangalam, RID 3205, inaugurated a seven-machine dialysis unit at MBMM Hospital through a ₹52 lakh global grant project implemented with partner clubs in Italy and RIDs 3205 and 2050. The new facility will provide free or subsidised dialysis to economically disadvantaged patients while reducing waiting time for treatment.



Club members after installing the dialysis centre at the hospital.

A green lifeline for the Sundarbans

Jaishree

Marking the World Environment Day on June 5, the Rotary Club of Salt Lake Metropolitan Kolkata, RID 3291, launched an ambitious mangrove restoration project at Mokamberia village

in the Basanti Islands of the Sundarbans. The initiative aims to plant one lakh multi-species, saline water-resilient mangrove saplings along a 10,000-hectare shoreline covering the villages of Mokamberia and Gadkhali.

The project is being implemented through a global grant

in partnership with Rotary clubs from around the world. International partners include RC Washington DC, RC Aarau (Switzerland), Stavanger International Rotary Club (Norway), and Rotary E-Club (RID 7210), while RC Central Calcutta and RC Hooghly are local partners. NGOs Young India and Kishlay Foundation are also supporting the initiative.

“We launched the project symbolically on World Environment Day, although September, with the onset of the monsoon, is the ideal time for plantation,” said Dr Aruna Tantia, project lead and past president of the club.



Women from a self-help group, along with Young India president Nupur Vaish (fourth from R) ready to plant mangrove propagules on a riverbank in Mokamberia village in the Sundarbans.

To mark the launch, 10 Rotarians, volunteers from Young India, and members of local self-help groups travelled to the village and planted 60 saplings along a barren riverbank in Mokamberia.

Home to nearly five million people, the Sundarbans is an archipelago of 104 islands in the Bay of Bengal, of which 52 are inhabited and 52 remain forested. Spread across more than 10,000 sq km, it is recognised as the world's largest mangrove forest.

However, this unique ecosystem has come under severe pressure in recent decades. "Over 110sqkm of mangroves have been lost in the last two decades due to recurring cyclones, accelerating erosion and saline intrusion," said Aruna, citing an *Economic Times* report.

Climate change has intensified tidal surges and cyclones, leading to frequent flooding, destruction of property and intrusion of saline water into agricultural lands. Nearly 90 per cent of local households depend on farming, but increasing soil salinity and flooding have made agriculture increasingly unviable.

As livelihoods shrink, many residents are forced to venture deep into the forests to catch crabs and fish or collect honey, often risking fatal encounters with tigers. The deaths leave behind the "tiger widows" and other family members who are compelled to seek work elsewhere. The lack of sustainable livelihood opportunities has trapped many communities in a cycle of poverty and hardship, she explains.

Home to nearly 5 million, the Sundarbans is an archipelago of 104 islands in the Bay of Bengal. But in recent times this unique ecosystem is under immense pressure.

A community assessment conducted by the club two years ago revealed that residents wanted stronger natural barriers against erosion and flooding, along with alternative livelihood opportunities. Responding to these needs, the club has designed a project that seeks to reduce climate risks, restore ecosystems and improve the lives of more than 10,000 people.

The groundwork began in 2023 when Neera Sen Sarkar, associate

professor and consultant botanist at the University of Kalyani, conducted a detailed study of the area's topography, water flow, salinity levels and tidal currents. Based on her findings, a pilot project was launched in 2024 at Ramakrishnapur village, where one lakh mangrove propagules were planted along the riverbank. "The pilot recorded an encouraging survival rate of nearly 70 per cent, providing the confidence needed to scale up the initiative," said Aruna.

She explained that the new plantation will use sandbanks reinforced with bio-geotextiles. Wooden pegs will be installed along the fortified shoreline, and saplings will be embedded within them to prevent them from being washed away by strong tides.

"This reinforcement will strengthen the banks through natural fencing and help break tidal waves, reducing frequent flooding. It will also improve aquatic biodiversity by



Propagules being planted along a river bank in Ramakrishnapur village.



Saplings of fruit-bearing trees being distributed to schoolchildren during the project launch.

creating habitats around the mangrove root systems,” she said. The total project outlay is \$57,650.

The project is designed not only to protect the environment but also to generate livelihoods. Before plantation begins in September, local self-help groups will be trained to raise mangrove saplings in nurseries and weave bio-geotextile netting. Men from the villages will receive training in soil work and shoreline fencing. Basket weaving from dried leaves of mangrove plants and organic rice cultivation will also be taught to the villagers.

The skills developed through the programme will create income opportunities and enable the community to continue supplying saplings and bio-geotextile materials for future expansion into neighbouring villages.

“Our long-term plan is to replicate this model in at least three more villages in the next phase,” said Aruna.

The club is seeking CSR support to establish a telemedicine centre at its health clinic, to connect rural patients with urban specialists.

The club members are conducting awareness programmes for schoolchildren and adults on climate change, environmental conservation and the importance of preserving mangroves as natural coastal shields.

The next step is to introduce rainwater harvesting systems through another global grant. The aim is to provide freshwater for both cultivation and household use.

“The soil here is naturally fertile, but salinity has robbed it of its productivity,” said Aruna. The need became apparent during the club’s regular health camps in the villages. “We found many women suffering from anaemia and suggested that they grow green leafy vegetables in their backyards. They told us that plants simply would not grow there. That prompted us to study the larger environmental challenges affecting the region,” she added.

The club is also seeking CSR support to establish a telemedicine centre at the health clinic it has already set up in Ramakrishnapur village. The facility will connect rural patients with urban specialists, ensuring access to consultation, treatment and follow-up care.

RC Salt Lake Metropolitan Kolkata has been a dependable partner for the island communities, and has played a key role in disaster relief during the devastating cyclones Amphaan and Yaas. ■

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7. Names of all members with their complete postal address including **PIN CODE, mobile number and email ID** must be sent along with the form and DD/cheque payable at par. Online transfers can be made through GPAY or netbanking. When you make an online payment share with us immediately by WhatsApp (9840078074) or email (rotarynews@rosaonline.org) the UTR number, your club name and amount paid. If this is not done your payment will not be updated in our records and your club will show dues outstanding.

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The subscription charges for the Print version will be applicable for copies already despatched, and



to

for the balance period of the year, pro-rata E-version rate will be applicable.

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19. There may be delivery issues in some areas. In such a situation clubs can opt and receive copies in bulk. Additional charges will be applicable.

Non-compliant clubs face termination by RI

Beginning July 1, 2022, the RI Board has included in its *Rotary Code of Policies* the termination of Rotary clubs that do not subscribe to a Rotary magazine. A quarterly report on non-compliant clubs is being sent to RI by our office, after notifying the

respective club leaders and the DGs. These clubs are given a **90-day grace period** after which the defaulting club is placed under suspension by RI.

For clubs that stay suspended and are non-compliant for 180 days, RNT, after notifying RI, sends a reminder letter stating

“the Board at its discretion can terminate this club.”

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

Helping parents understand autism

Kiran Zehra



Parents along with their children at the autism awareness workshop.

Does my child hate me?’ was one of the most heartbreaking questions asked by a mother at our autism awareness workshop,” says Pradeep Khamkar, secretary of RC Dharashiv, RID 3132. The mother had spent years trying to understand why her child cried for hours, threw tantrums at family gatherings, and seemed impossible to comfort. “Nothing worked. Scolding didn’t help. Neither did punishment. The behaviour continued, leaving her and the rest of the family exhausted and convinced the child was acting out on purpose.”

But that wasn’t the reason. “The child wasn’t being stubborn or defiant. They were on the autism spectrum,” explains Khamkar.

For Dr Abhay Shah, a paediatrician and member of RC Dharashiv, such conversations had become

“painfully familiar. Parents often arrived at my clinic overwhelmed and confused, unable to understand why their children behaved differently from others their age. Some blamed themselves. Others believed their children were deliberately misbehaving. It wasn’t lack of love, it was lack of awareness.”

After dealing with multiple cases of parents complaining about their child’s behaviour, “asking for medicines to calm the child, I was tired and wanted to do something about it.” So he approached his Rotary club “to look beyond individual cases.”

Working with government hospitals and the district education department, the club found that nearly 6,000 children in Dharashiv district (formerly Osmanabad in southeast Maharashtra)

fall somewhere in the autism spectrum. Yet awareness of the condition remained strikingly low, particularly in the district’s rural communities.

The findings led to what Khamkar describes as Dharashiv’s first parenting workshop dedicated to autism spectrum disorder (ASD), bringing together 70 parents and autism specialists from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) to help families better understand the condition.

Rather than limiting the programme to lectures, the club invited parents to come along with their children. Some children rushed to the stage to grab the microphone. Others cried inconsolably or wandered around the hall, seemingly uninterested in what was happening.



Below: An autism expert from Tata Institute of Social Sciences addressing the parents.

“Instead of trying to stop such behaviour, the autism specialists calmly responded to each child, using those moments to demonstrate practical ways parents could comfort, redirect and communicate with them,” says Khamkar. For many parents, “this was the first time they had seen someone respond to their child’s behaviour without frustration or judgement.”

Through case studies, demonstrations and conversations, the experts explained that children with autism express themselves in different ways, and that no two children on the spectrum are alike. The TISS team came prepared with activity kits and used the children’s response and behaviour during play to demonstrate practical ways parents could support and communicate with them.

Khamkar says the most rewarding moment came when anxious parents watched their children gradually settle down, engage

with the experts, and enjoy the activities from the therapy kits. “Many parents realised for the first time that their child wasn’t being difficult, she simply needed to be understood differently. Every child with autism deserves to be treated with dignity and, above all, to be understood,” he says.

Beyond autism

For nearly two decades, the JF Ajmera Rotary Eye Hospital and Rotary Vision Care Centre have been bringing affordable, high-quality eye care to people across Dharashiv district.

Established in 2006 as Rotary’s centennial service project and managed by Rotary Seva Trust (run by RC Dharashiv), the hospital has grown into one of the region’s most trusted charitable eye care institutions. In 2023–24 alone, it conducted 1,010 village eye camps, examined more than 94,600 patients through outreach programmes, and treated over 1.18 lakh outpatients at the hospital. The team performed nearly 28,000 eye surgeries, including more than 12,000 free cataract procedures, while school screening programmes covered over 6,000 students across 28 schools.

The club, in partnership with the Gramin Women Trust, is helping women from self-help groups become financially independent through training in record-keeping, digital banking, government schemes and entrepreneurship. The initiative has connected nearly 1,000 rural women, with more than 700 completing online documentation required to access government benefits and financial services. The programme also encourages women to explore self-employment, agriculture-based livelihoods and micro-enterprises. ■



He is an eye surgeon who has led 31 eye surgery missions to nine countries in Africa, Latin America and South Asia, multiple times to some of these countries, in the last 25 years. Meet Dr K V Ravishankar, chairman, Usha Kiran Eye Hospital, Mysuru, and a member of the Rotary E-Club of Bangalore, RID 3191, who has been doing “international volunteering since 2001 to donate my surgical skills for treating needy people across the world.”

Till date, his medical missions have resulted in 1,609 surgeries, of which 50 per cent were on children. As many as 20 of these foreign medical visits were ‘solo missions,’ thanks to generous funding from corporates, private sponsors and his home club.

Now for the first time, he has obtained a global grant of \$55,000 for doing 200 paediatric eye surgeries in Ghana. “We are doing this in three phases. During our first visit in the first week of June, our three-member team performed 43 surgeries at the Tamale Eye Hospital, trained a local surgeon, and many nurses in handling complicated eye surgeries,” explains Dr Ravishankar. He is also a technical cadre advisor, Blindness Prevention, for TRF.

During the week-long surgery camp, “children with complex sight disorders were given life-changing surgical care, bringing new hope, improved vision, and a bright future to 43 families across North Ghana and beyond,” he said.

Apart from major surgeries, the mission team did rectification procedures for cataract, squint eyes, plastic-cum-reconstructive surgeries, and on-site training and skill transfer to host



200 paediatric eye surgeries in Ghana

V Muthukumaran

ophthalmologists. Dr Ravishankar was assisted by his wife Dr Uma both Rotarians, and Dr Milind Bhide, a non-Rotarian from Hyderabad.

Sub-Saharan nightmare

Explaining the situation in the Sub-Sahara region, he said, among the patients, around 40 per cent children had congenital or traumatic cataracts, 40 per cent suffered from squint eye maladies, and 20 per cent had to undergo oculoplastic procedures (a reconstructive process around the eye for medical, cosmetic enhancements).

Every successful surgery means
a child going back
to school with confidence,
parents regaining hope, and a
family getting a second chance
at a better quality of life.

Dr K V Ravishankar

chairman
Usha Kiran Eye Hospital
Mysuru



Dr K V Ravishankar (fourth from right), his wife Dr Uma (behind, fourth from L) and Dr Milind Bhide (L) with children and their parents at an eye surgery camp in Ghana.

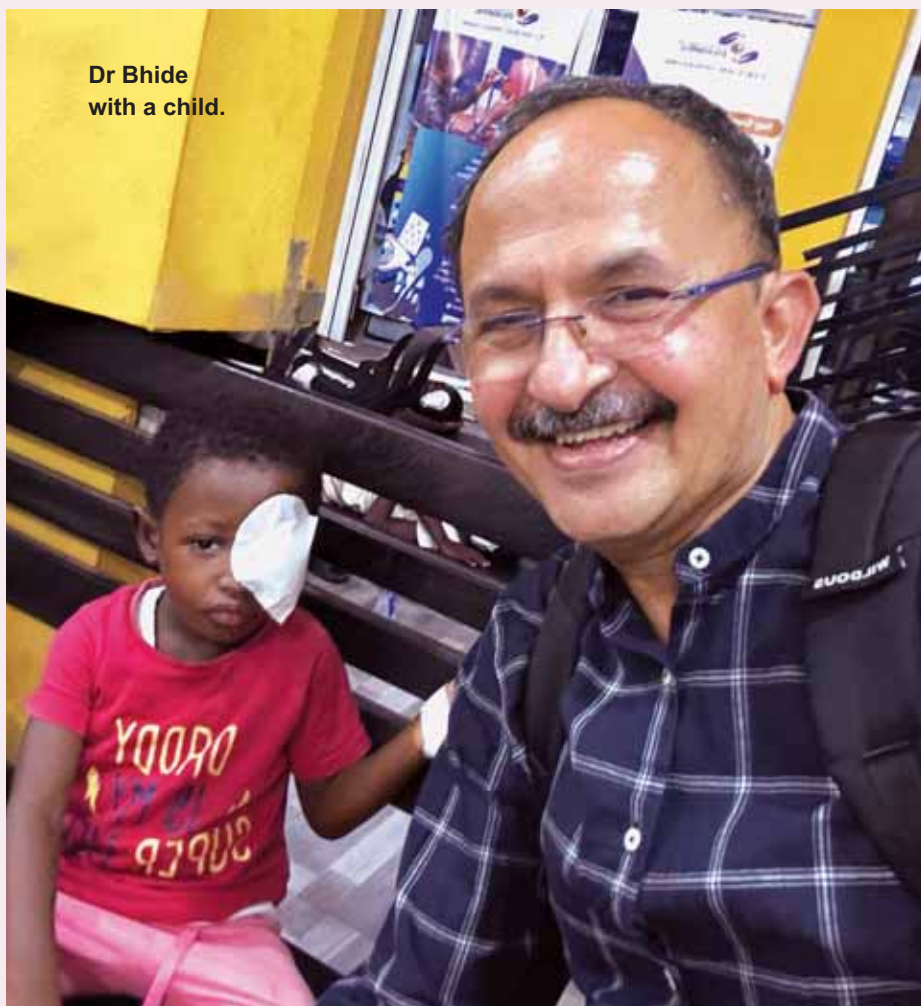
“What we found is just a small glimpse of the actual need. For, the Sub-Saharan Africa alone faces an estimated 80,000 cataract cases a year among children in

need of surgery,” said the doctor, citing the findings of study reports of global agencies such as IAPB and WHO. “We were happy to see the results of our surgeries being reflected in the beautiful smiles of the children during post-operative care, which brought a big relief to their parents,” said the ophthalmic surgeon. On the whole, it was a challenging, but rewarding camp. “Every successful surgery means a child going back to school with confidence, parents regaining hope, and a family getting a second chance at a better quality of life.”

Looking back, Dr Ravishankar said the Ghana eye surgery mission was made possible with support from TRF, partner clubs — RCs Accra-Industrial, Accra-Premier International, both from Ghana; his home club, RCs Bangalore Abilities, Ivory City Mysuru; the Evans Family Foundation, Charlotte, US; the Avoidable Blindness Foundation, Bengaluru; two Rotary clubs in UK; and one club each in the US and Canada.

The Indian medical mission was given “all the necessary support and facilities for the surgeries by Dr Judith Simon, MD, Tamale Hospital.” PDG Dave Amankwa, RID 9104, and past AG Emmanuel Quarshie, project contact, were present to extend their cooperation to the Indian doctors.

Having started his career at Sankara Nethralaya, Chennai, Dr Ravishankar found his ‘true calling’ when he became a Rotarian in 1997–98, “to provide voluntary medical service to local people.” Only with the support of Rotary clubs in India and abroad, individual donors and Foundations, “we were able to complete over 30 eye surgery missions till now,” he smiles. ■



Dr Bhide with a child.

in Mysuru

Jaishree

The welcome at Rotary Maanasa Kuteera in Mysuru is warm and spontaneous. As I enter, the children greet me with enthusiastic applause. Moments later, 17-year-old Rajan, a student with ADHD, sings a soulful Kannada song. He astonishes me further by telling me, in a matter of seconds, the day of the week I was born after I mentioned my date of birth. It was a remarkable display that challenged many assumptions about children with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Established and managed by the Rotary Club of Mysore Mid-town, RID 3181, Rotary Maanasa Kuteera is a special school where nearly 100 children with intellectual and developmental disabilities receive education, therapy, vocational training and, above all, confidence.

For the 45-year-old club, which has around 83 members, the school represents its commitment to creating projects with lasting social impact. “Each president strives to leave behind a landmark project that serves the community. Maanasa Kuteera is not just another project for us; it is something very close to our hearts,” says club president Rakesh Babu K.L.

The idea took shape in 2012–13 after club members repeatedly visited special schools across Mysuru while organising *Bandaviya*, an annual sports meet for 600–800 children with special needs. What they saw disturbed them. Many schools functioned from cramped rented buildings or temporary structures because landlords were reluctant to lease premises to institutions serving children with disabilities. Those that did find space struggled to pay the rent.

Determined to change this, the club secured a one-acre site from the Mysuru Urban Development Authority after nearly eight years of persistence. The land alone cost ₹45 lakh, while the school building required another ₹1.6 crore. "Every rupee came from our Rotarians and philanthropists who believed in the cause. It is truly a project built by our members," recalls founder-chairman S Raghavendra, a past president of the club.

The spacious campus, operational for the past three years, houses 12 classrooms, a kitchen and therapy spaces. Two school buses pick up children from homes within a 10–15km radius; they are served nutritious meals at school and are dropped back home in the evening, allowing many parents to work during the day.

“Our objective was not only to educate the children but also to support

Students of the Rotary Maanasa Kuteera display their creations.



their families. Many parents, particularly from economically weaker sections, cannot leave a child with special needs alone. By caring for them from morning till evening, we give the parents an opportunity to earn a livelihood,” says Raghavendra.

The school admits children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including those with Down’s syndrome, cerebral palsy and autism, charging only a nominal fee from families that can afford it. Those who cannot pay are not turned away.

Learning here is tailored to each child’s abilities. After admission, teachers observe every child for about 10 days before preparing an individual learning plan. Progress is reviewed every three months and goals are revised according to each student’s development.

“We don’t rely only on what parents tell us. We assess every child, understand their strengths and challenges, and then decide the most suitable learning goals,” explains special educator Bhavani.

Besides English, Kannada, mathematics and general knowledge, the curriculum emphasises practical life skills. Students learn to recognise



(From R) RC Mysore Midtown president Rakesh Babu K L, the institute’s founder-chairman S Raghavendra, district executive secretary Padmaja Muralidhaar, Veeresh H S and Bhaskar Sainik watch children learn.

money, calculate change, understand time, identify vegetables and groceries, and build communication skills needed for independent living.

Vocational training forms another important pillar of the programme. Depending on their aptitude, students make greeting cards, jewellery, paper bags, candles, soaps, cloth paintings, crochet products and embroidered items. Their colourful creations reflect both patience and creativity. I found the painted cloth bags particularly attractive and could not resist buying a few.

Around 15 trained teachers, supported by caregivers, ensure every child receives individual attention. Yoga, games, music and dance are part of the daily routine, helping improve physical fitness, coordination and confidence. The children have consistently excelled in cultural competitions, held at the prestigious Dasara celebrations in Mysuru, and in inter-school events.

Club members sponsor meals on birthdays and wedding anniversaries, provide uniforms, maintain the infrastructure and regularly monitor the school’s functioning. Parent orientation and counselling sessions have also been introduced to help families better understand and support their children.

The club now plans to construct an additional vocational training block where older students can learn income-generating skills such as paper plate making and other small-scale enterprises. The long-term vision also includes a teacher training institute for special educators, addressing the shortage of trained professionals in this field.

The school’s work has already attracted attention beyond Mysuru. During this year’s *Bandaviya* sports event, RID 3192 DG Ravishankar Dakoju was deeply moved by the participation and enthusiasm of the children. Inspired by what he witnessed, he announced plans to replicate the event in Bengaluru as a state-level programme, with Rotary Mysore Midtown serving as knowledge partner.

While Maanasa Kuteera remains its signature initiative, the club’s service extends further. It runs an affordable school for nearly 700 children, supports government school students with digital learning devices, and has recently built a visitors’ shelter for families accompanying patients at the Princess Krishnammanni Super Speciality Hospital in the city.

Parents cannot leave a child
with special needs alone.
By caring for them from
morning till evening, we give
the parents an opportunity to
earn a livelihood.

S Raghavendra
founder-chairman
Rotary Maanasa Kuteera

Pictures by Jaishree

Engaging the Sundarbans' tribals

Walking down memory lane, Tapas Bhattacharya says, "I joined Rotary in 1994 to serve communities better with more resources, more hands, instead of working alone. While doing this, I enjoy the fellowship of Rotarians."

He will charter 10 new clubs, and aims at a net membership growth of 800 in his district which has around 150 clubs with over 4,000 Rotarians. In a mega initiative, the tribals at a Sundarbans island will be educated "on preserving their fragile ecology through awareness camps; healthcare camps will be held regularly for them; and artificial limbs will be distributed to the tribal amputees," he says. The island project (GG: \$40,000) will also include 150 child heart surgeries. Around 100 Rotary water booths will be set up (GG: \$60,000) across Kolkata and other areas of his district.

On the medical front, thalassaemia screening camps will reach out to 5,000 beneficiaries. Project *Life Beyond Cancer* will set up Rotary Help Desks at three government hospitals which will "act as a bridge between the parents of cancer-afflicted children and the doctors. Free medicines will be provided in these bridge counters." Rotary Help Desks (₹1.5 crore) are funded by contributions from members, private donors and CSR grants.

A Rotary Blood Centre and thalassaemia daycare centre will be set up at the Tapan Sinha Memorial Hospital, Tollygunge, through a GG of ₹2 crore for which the application has been made. For TRF-giving, his target is \$500,000.



Tapas Bhattacharya
Underground transport
RC Dum Dum
RID 3291

Meet your Governors

V Muthukumaran



Anil Singhal
Fertiliser manufacture
RC Amritsar Midtown
RID 3070

Virtual sessions for Rotarians

His focus will be on improving the "quality of Rotarians in our district, instead of simply adding more members. However, my aim is to achieve at least 10 per cent net membership growth," says Anil Singhal.

Rotary clubs with 10 members will be merged with stronger ones as part of shoring up the service quality. At present, there are 115 clubs having 3,200 Rotarians in the district. In the last four years, they could not do GG projects as "we are under RI's suspension for non-compliance of stewardship norms. It will be revoked, and around 5–6 GG projects (₹2–3 crore) will be done this year." Around 100 Rotaract and 200 Interact clubs will be formed. At present, they have a 'marginal presence' in Rotaract. Singhal will be holding 2–3 zonal virtual sessions a month to "enhance fellowship, networking and bonding among Rotarians. I want to educate them so that they understand the value of social service." At least 200 medical camps, each attracting over 150 patients, will be organised by the clubs.

Club leaders will be advised to take up online courses at rotary.org for doing service projects efficiently through team work and engagement. His TRF-giving target is \$100,000. While he is inspired by PRIP Rajendra Saboo with his accessible nature, "I am motivated by PDGs Avinash Mohindru, Arun Kapur, and RIDE Gurjeet Sekhon as they are my role models." Singhal joined Rotary in 1988.

Life-saving devices for hospitals

Having five revenue districts of Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Kottayam and Alleppey in southern Kerala, “my focus is on increasing the number of members in each club, and starting new clubs in underrepresented areas of my region,” says KG Nair. With 166 clubs and 5,450 Rotarians and 500 Rotaractors, he will be striving to achieve a net membership growth of 25 per cent by June 30 next year.

Nair has lined up a number of GG projects such as installation of life-saving, critical equipment — ventilators, defibrillators, dialysis machines, diagnostic devices etc — at healthcare institutions; providing electric and CNG autos to at least 100 individuals for a sustainable livelihood; and distribution of artificial limbs at prosthetic fitment camps which will be held at all the revenue districts, he says. “We are working on other projects to be done either through GG or other funding modes, to ensure self-employment and livelihood of the disadvantaged.”

Nair wants to promote Rotary and its welfare projects through social media, “so that our action-oriented initiatives for community well-being are brought into public focus.”

A former Rotaractor, he became a Rotarian in 1991, and says: “Rotary means a lot to me in terms of giving back to society, and reaching out to the communities to make the world a better place. Right from being a Rotaractor (1983), it has been a remarkable journey for me as a Rotarian.” Nair has set a TRF-giving target of \$1 million.



K G Nair
Cashew industry
RC Quilon
RID 3211

An acre of land will be acquired
near Ghaziabad to build a
Rotary School which will be
funded by CSR and global grants
and members' contributions, all
totalling ₹3 crore.

DG Amit Gupta
RID 3012



Amit Gupta
Academician
RC Ghaziabad Central
RID 3012

A Rotary School in making

New Rotary clubs will be set up in the unrepresentative areas of the national capital region (NCR) around Delhi as “there are many places like Simbhaoli and Wave City where Rotary is yet to make its presence felt,” says Amit Gupta. His district has 145 clubs and 4,100 members at present; he wants to charter 8–10 new clubs with “focus on a net membership growth of 500.”

A clutch of GG projects has been lined up: Computer labs will be set up in 50 government higher secondary schools (GG: ₹2.5 crore); a thalassaemia testing machine for the Rotary Blood Bank, Sonipat (GG: ₹50 lakh); and two dialysis centres with two machines each (GG: ₹50 lakh) will be inaugurated at a charity and government hospitals in the NCR.

Talks are on with the UP government to acquire one-acre land near Ghaziabad to build a Rotary School (Class 6–12), which will be funded by a mix of CSR grant, GG and member contributions (₹3 crore). For TRF, the target is \$1.5 million. He joined Rotary in 2008 which has enabled him to think about and do much bigger

charity than he was doing earlier.

During Covid times, he procured Remdesivir doses for treating his mother. “I got a call from a Mumbai Rotarian asking for help to vaccinate his Covid-hit relatives in Ghaziabad. I immediately gave the doses to them.” As a Rotarian, “I am giving back more to society as my life perception has changed,” he smiles. ■

Kamadhenu creates lasting livelihoods

Jaishree

Sixty-three widows and single women from villages around Bengaluru received milch cows under *Project Kamadhenu*, a global grant initiative that aims

to provide them with a sustainable source of income. The project was implemented in May by the Rotary Club of Bangalore Ullal, RID 3191, in partnership with RC Edinburgh,

RID 1320, RC Dallas, Texas, RID 5810, and working partner RC Magadi Central, RID 3191.

In Indian tradition, *godaan* (the gifting of a cow) is considered one of the most sacred and auspicious acts of charity. Revered as *Kamadhenu* in Hindu mythology, the cow symbolises abundance, nourishment and prosperity. By gifting milch cows to economically disadvantaged women, the project has combined this age-old cultural value with a practical livelihood intervention, explains club president Madhavi Shreekanth.

A ten-member committee, including three veterinary doctors, identified deserving beneficiaries with the help of village heads and community leaders. Preference was given to economically vulnerable women who had adequate space to rear cattle and access to land where fodder could be cultivated. Among the beneficiaries was a young widow raising a small child on her own, and a speech- and hearing-impaired woman who was struggling to find a stable source of income.

The committee shortlisted healthy, milk-yielding cows that were in the final stages of pregnancy and expected to calve within 15 to 20 days. The cows were sourced from the weekly village shandy held every Friday between 5 and 8 am.

“As the purchase window was limited, we could procure only 12–15 cows at a time,” she says. As a result, the project was implemented in six phases over three months.



Immediate past president of RC Bangalore Ullal Madhavi Shreekanth cuddles a calf.



A woman takes home a milch cow gifted to her by the club.

In the last phase four Rotarians from Maine, RID 7780, USA, joined the programme and were delighted to witness nine women receiving the cows.

Each animal cost between ₹55,000–70,000. “Since prices at the weekly shandy fluctuate, the cost varied. However, we were determined not to make any compromises on the health and quality of the cows,” she explains.

To ensure that the women would immediately begin earning an income, the club established linkages with local government-run milk federations. Beneficiaries signed agreements to supply milk directly to these federations, which in turn deposit payments into their bank accounts. The milk federations also provide nutritional supplements for the cattle, to help improve their health and productivity.

Each cow is expected to yield an average of 10 litres of milk a day, ensuring a steady stream of income for the beneficiaries, notes Madhavi. By linking the women directly with the milk federations, the project has



IPDG B R Sridhar (R) and project chair Sreekanth at a cattle distribution site.

created a reliable market for their produce while eliminating uncertainties in payment.

Rotarian veterinary doctors have trained the women in cattle care, animal health and nutrition, while a Rotarian Chartered Accountant has already conducted sessions on financial management, enabling the beneficiaries to manage and grow their earnings effectively.

The project was initially designed to support 54 women. However, prudent financial management resulted in surplus funds. After obtaining approval from TRF’s Grants Committee, the club expanded the programme to include nine additional beneficiaries, taking the total to 63 women.

For Madhavi and her team, the most rewarding moments came during the handover ceremonies. Each cow was treated with reverence before being entrusted to its new owner. Traditional poojas were performed, bananas and jaggery were offered to the animals, and *aarti* was conducted. Every cow was given a name and identification number before being handed over. “The entire process was deeply satisfying,” she says.

One memorable incident occurred during the final phase of the project when a cow went into labour and delivered a healthy calf at the very venue of the handover ceremony.

“We were overjoyed. Everyone saw it as a wonderful blessing and a sign of good fortune for the beneficiary,” recalls Madhavi.

Chartered only in 2023 with 21 members, the club has expanded rapidly to 108 members within its first year and today remains a vibrant 101-member club. It has also chartered a satellite club. ■

Empowering rural families with GG, CSR projects

V Muthukumaran

The storage level of Anjanawale pond has more than doubled after the July monsoon fury.

In order to provide major relief to tribal women from the hassles of daily cooking filled with smoke, grime, heat and sweat, that badly affects their health, RC Pune Sports City, RID 3131, had distributed smokeless stoves to 1,775 homes across 20 small hamlets in Ambegaon taluk in partnership with RCs Fort Collins Breakfast and Culver City, RID 5440, US, through a global grant valued at ₹42 lakh. The funds were used to procure modern stoves made by Earth Fit Solutions, Pune.

Tracing the genesis of the project, its primary contact Sandesh Savant was all praise for their GG partner, RC Fort Collins Breakfast, “with which we have been doing many service projects and community initiatives for the last 15 years, and they wanted to do this smokeless stove project as the varsity that designed it — Colorado State University — is in their city. Plus, we have many tribal hamlets where families depend solely on firewood for cooking,” he said. Also, the Indian company has earned a reputation for distributing this eco-friendly stove in remote villages through NGOs and CSR-funding from corporates over the last few years. Listing three important benefits of a smokeless stove, he said, “women need not trudge 2–3km to collect firewood as the metal frame system consumes less than 50 per cent wood than the traditional method. This will definitely save our trees.”

Secondly, as most of the tribal families are living in single or two-room huts, they had to inhale fumes while using the traditional stoves, leading to respiratory problems and eye irritation; now their health is much better as these stoves are ‘almost smokeless.’ Tribal women can use the 3–4 hours of the time saved on collecting wood, followed by laborious cooking

to pursue alternative sources of earning that will fetch additional income to their families, said Savant.

Livelihood pursuit

In partnership with their RCC Shashwat Trust led by its president Budhaji Damse, the club has trained 187 women beneficiaries in Malin and Mahalunge villages in dairy farming. Thanks to their sustained efforts, “our milk collection has touched 1,800 litres a day, generating an income of ₹80,000 in these two villages.”

Likewise, 50 tribal families in three villages — Panchale, Asane and Shendewadi, all in Ambegaon taluk — have taken up cultivation of marigold and kafri flowers after they were trained in floriculture, and got market linkage support with “low investment, but higher returns, creating a good livelihood model for them.” The seasonal harvesting of flowers fetches an income of ₹30,000–₹40,000 per family within a few months.

Past president Sadhana Joshi (2024–25) during whose tenure the stoves were distributed in June, shared her interaction with three village women.

Given the visible and measurable impact of the smokeless stove, we will distribute another 2,000 cooking units to tribal families in Junnar taluk through a GG project valued at ₹45 lakh.

Sandesh Savant
primary contact
RC Pune Sports City



A woman enjoys cooking on the smokeless stove.

“Swati Kedari (35) from Maybawadi village is now using the extra time to do vocational jobs earning her family the much-needed additional income.” Vanita Mavale (45) from Patan village pointed out that elders in her family are now healthy due to smokeless cooking, and are involved in making sun-dried edibles like *papads* and other snacks for the retail market.

Pushpa Shelke (42) from Kondhare village said, “With the advent of this modern eco-friendly stove, I don’t trek long distances, as we did earlier, to collect firewood, and our family members are now healthy and cheerful.” Given the visible and measurable impact of the smokeless stove, “we will be distributing another 2,000 cooking units to tribal families in Junnar taluk through a GG project (₹45 lakh) for which we are scouting for a global partner,” added Savant. He is hopeful of completing the new project within this Rotary year.

Pond rejuvenation

Following a request from the Anjanawale Group Gram Panchayat in Junnar taluk, a Rotary team visited a derelict, remote pond that was in disuse. The study team prepared a report on the state of the pond, and MacDermid Enthone, an industrial solutions corporate, came forward to rejuvenate the waterbody at a cost of ₹11.5 lakh.

Though the project was started in December 2025, “water could not be pumped out into the nearby fields as they had standing crops which would get flooded. Also, rainwater is flowing into the pond, hence we could not excavate it then,” recalled Savant. After draining the water in January, “we deployed porcelain and other earth moving machines to excavate the lakebed in February.” Villagers helped the masons in building a four-foot stone wall around the pond and its water pulley system by March-end.

Floriculture brings seasonal income to farmers.



Dairy farming is a lucrative source of livelihood for Ambegaon women.

“We also erected a three-foot barbed wire-mesh guard on top of the wall to prevent cattle scaling up and entering the pond.”

With the positioning of a 200 litre-giant drum (for watering livestock) a few yards away from the pond, and installation of a granite signage, the rejuvenated pond was handed over to the group gram panchayat sarpanch Aruna Ghatkar on May 31. Around 750 tribal families and 3,000 livestock across four villages in Junnar taluk will have access to 15 lakh litres of water from the reclaimed pond.

An overjoyed Aruna said, “the rejuvenated pond will save us walking 2–3km daily to fetch water for our domestic use.” For Dilip Kokane (48) from Pasarwadi village, “there are no words to express our happiness. We now get clean water for drinking and rearing cattle all through the year.”

With heavy rains during the recent monsoon, the Anjanawale pond’s size has increased to 33 lakh litres “in just two days of massive downpour. Our decades-old water scarcity is finally over. Many thanks to Rotary and its CSR partner,” said Punaji Kokane, a 26-year-old resident of Talyachewadi village. ■

An organ donation walkathon in Indore

V Muthukumaran

A first-of-its-kind Grand Walkathon was held in December to create awareness on organ donation by RC Indore United, RID 3040, in partnership with the Mitasha Foundation, a local NGO into public campaigns, with the participation of 12,000 volunteers including 140 Rotarians from 11 Rotary clubs, students, youth, and professionals from all walks of life.

Indore and Sidhi Lok Sabha MPs Shankar Lalwani and Rajesh Mishra flagged off the 5km march in the presence of subdivisional magistrate Sudam Khade, IPDG Sushil Malhotra, Mitasha Foundation chairman Aalok Singhi, a club member, and senior Rotarians of RID 3040. “It was a grand show of unity that brought together government officials, healthcare staff, frontline workers, educational institutions, civil society, and thousands of citizens to turn the spotlight on a single cause: Saving lives through

organ donation, and the prevention of anaemia,” said Rajeev Tuteja, immediate past president of the club.

Around 30–35 NGOs, corporates, schools and societies joined hands with Rotary to spread the message. More than 10,000 organ donation pledge forms were distributed in the course of the awareness rally, “and we have already got back 4,500 filled forms... we are expecting many more in the coming months.”

Added Singhi, “the response from the public was beyond expectation... we thought that it would be enough with 500 volunteers, but societies and people from across Indore came forward and joined us.”

One of the emotional and nostalgic moments at the event was when 20 athletes who had represented India at the World Transplant Games — a multisport event held in Olympic style every two years for those who have undergone an organ transplant

and living donors — walked alongside thousands of participants and interacted with them. “Each athlete represented a miracle made possible by organ donation. Their stories reminded the audience that behind every successful transplant is a family that chose generosity during its most difficult moment,” said Singhi. The campaign also highlighted the urgent need to tackle anaemia.

The walkathon has entered the Word Book of Records for “being the largest organ donation awareness lesson for one hour involving 6,128 participants at the Nehru Stadium, Madhya Pradesh, India.”

Incoming club president Kiran Modi has assured Tuteja and Singhi that the walkathon would become an annual feature of the club. The project cost of ₹5 lakh was sponsored by different societies and members of RC Indore United, a six-year-old club with 52 members. ■



From L: Sidhi MP Rajesh Mishra, Mitasha Foundation chairman Aalok Singhi, Indore MP Shankar Lalwani, divisional commissioner Sudam Khade, and PDG Sushil Malhotra flag off the walkathon.

RI Board of Directors 2026–27

The RI Board of Directors manages Rotary International affairs and funds in accordance with the RI Constitution and bylaws. Directors are nominated by their zones and elected to two-year terms. Nine new directors and the president-elect join the Board on July 1.



Olayinka H Babalola

President

RC Trans Amadi, Nigeria

Born in Ibadan, Nigeria, Olayinka Babalola is the founder of two companies: an oil and gas infrastructure delivery company and an executive coaching and organisational performance advisory group.

Babalola was the charter president of his university Rotaract club.

He joined RC Trans Amadi in 1994 and served on committees including the End Polio Now: Countdown to History Campaign Committee and the Nigeria PolioPlus Committee, before joining the RI Board as a director and later as its vice-president.

He provided local Rotary leadership for polio eradication in Nigeria's conflict-affected northeast. As RI President, he wants to help restore members' emotional connection to the organisation and their sense of belonging. "We do things for others, but Rotary is also our own," he says. "When something is your own, you want to fight for it: 'It is my duty to help it thrive.' When you see how Rotary has made a lasting impact on your life, then you can tell that story."

He has received the Africa Centennial Heroes Award, the Regional Service Award for a Polio-Free World, the RI Service Above Self Award, and The Rotary Foundation Citation for Meritorious Service. Babalola and his wife, Precy, a Rotary member, live in Port Harcourt. They support TRF through a named endowment and as AKS members.



Larry A Lunsford

President-elect

RC Kansas City-Plaza, Missouri

Larry Lunsford, a certified public accountant, serves as executive vice-president and chief financial officer of Bernstein-Rein Advertising Inc in Kansas City, Missouri.

His passion for Rotary service began during his college years. In 1981–82, he travelled to Australia as a Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Scholar, which he called a "nine-month daily immersion in Rotary." He joined Rotary in 1991 and has held numerous global leadership roles, including RI director, aide to RI President Mark Daniel Maloney, and TRF trustee

and vice-chair. He has served on RI and Rotary Foundation committees, and chaired the RI Membership Growth Committee and Rotary Peace Centers Committee.

During a morning walk in Evanston in August 2023, while he was serving as a Rotary Foundation trustee, Lunsford developed the idea to mirror the Foundation's successful \$2.025 billion by 2025 Endowment fundraising campaign with a membership goal: 1,250,000 Rotarians by Rotary's 125th anniversary in 2030. The RI Board adopted the goal in October 2023.

His honours include TRF's Citation for Meritorious Service and Distinguished Service Award, and the RI Service Above Self Award.

He and his wife, Jill, have two children and one grandchild. Larry and Jill support TRF as Major Donors, Benefactors and members of the Paul Harris Society, PolioPlus Society and Bequest Society.



M Muruganandam

Vice President

RC Bhel City Tiruchirapalli, India

M Muruganandam, widely known as 'MMM' or 'Triple M,' is an entrepreneur and philanthropist with more than 30 years of expertise in supply chain management.

As the founder and chair of Excel Maritime, he has expanded operations across 18 cities in India and in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.

He began his Rotary journey at age 16 with Rotaract.

MMM became a Major Donor to TRF while still a Rotaractor. In 2016–17, as one of the youngest governors of District 3000, he led several initiatives to commemorate the Foundation's centennial. These efforts raised awareness about literacy, road safety, blood and organ donation, and self-defence training for girls. He also played a pivotal role in establishing 99 Rotaract clubs, 250 Interact clubs, and 100 RCCs in his district.

Outside of Rotary, MMM leads the Excel Foundation, which champions education, healthcare, sports programmes, and skill development for marginalised communities. Its cornerstone project is opening a 75-bed comprehensive cancer hospital to make basic treatment accessible to rural communities.

He has served in numerous Rotary positions, including as RPIC for Zone 5 and RIPR. He has received the Service Above Self Award and the RI Vocational Service Leadership Award, as well as TRF's Citation for Meritorious Service. MMM was an early contributor to the Paul and Jean Harris Home Foundation, marking a historic commitment to preserving the legacy and home of Rotary founder Paul Harris.

He and his wife, Sumathi, a member of the same Rotary club, are AKS members.



César Luis Scherer

Treasurer, RC Marechal Cândido Rondon-Beira Lago, Brazil

César Luis Scherer is an entrepreneur and accountant with experience in financial management, strategic planning and administration.

He is a Rotarian since 2003. Scherer has received the RI Service Above Self Award and the Citation for Meritorious Service from TRF. His wife, Sônia, is a member of the same Rotary club. They support TRF as Major Donors.



Massimo Ballotta

Director 2026–28, RC Feltre, Italy

Massimo Ballotta earned a degree in medicine and surgery with specialisations in sports medicine and rehabilitative medicine from the University of Padua, which was founded in 1222. Although he retired, he continues to work as a consulting physician and volunteers with associations for disabled and disadvantaged people.

Ballotta joined Rotary in 2009 when he moved to Feltre, a city in the foothills of the Dolomites mountain range.

An expert sommelier, Ballotta teaches food and wine pairing in national courses. He and his wife, Rossella, are Major Donors and Benefactors of TRF.



Christine Buering

Director 2025–27

RC Altenburg, Germany

Born in southern Germany, Buering joined Rotary in 1995 when she co-founded her club with her husband and others. Passionate about gender equality, Buering became part of the group that started the Sylvia Whitlock Leadership Award in 2017. The award, adopted by RI in 2021, honours one Rotary member each year who has actively worked to advance women in Rotary. During Covid, she helped found the Rotary Action Group for Menstrual Health and Hygiene.

Buering has served as a learning facilitator, CoL representative and RIPR, among other roles. She is a Major Donor.



Marshall Butler

Director 2026–28

RC West Jacksonville, Florida

Marshall Butler is the marketing director for Pragmatic Works, which offers software training. He joined RC West Jacksonville in 2002 and served as governor of District 6970 in 2016–17. Butler has received TRF's Citation for Meritorious Service. He and his wife, Karen, support the Foundation as Major Donors and are members of the Bequest Society, Paul Harris Society and PolioPlus Society. They have two grown daughters, Emily and Maggie. Emily recently joined her father's club, continuing the family's legacy of service.



Soffia Gísladóttir

Director 2026–28

RC Húsavík Nordurthing, Iceland

Soffia Gísladóttir, whose name means Soffia, daughter of Gísla, is a labour market specialist at Iceland's Directorate of Labour, where she connects entrepreneurs and start-ups with potential employees across Iceland and Europe. She previously served as a deputy member of Parliament.

Gísladóttir is from Húsavík, a northeastern coastal town and the site of an early Viking settlement. She joined Rotary in 2012 and has served in numerous leadership roles, including DG, ARC, RIPR and learning facilitator.

A runner, Gísladóttir has completed a 160-km (99-mile) ultramarathon across Iceland's rugged terrain of glaciers and volcanoes. She and her husband, Guðmundur Baldvin Guðmundsson, are Major Donors to TRF.



Thomas Anthony Gump

Director 2026–28

RC Edina/Morningside, Minnesota

Tom Gump says the best part of Rotary is the friends you make. He has travelled the Rotary world, becoming an honorary member in numerous clubs. He has brought in many members and has helped form numerous new clubs, including clubs to serve veterans and seek an end to human trafficking. He united five clubs to form an RCC to serve hundreds of refugees, led one of the clubs in his district to achieve 100 per cent Paul Harris Fellow Club status.

Gump previously served as aide to the RI President, an International Assembly learning facilitator, and an RIPR. He has chaired RI's Membership Growth Committee and the MDP Alliance, a consortium of multidistrict presidents-elect learning events.

Gump and his wife have provided for an endowment gift through their estate that will establish the Thomas and Catherine Gump Family Peace Fund. They support TRF as

Major Donors, Bequest Society members, multiple Paul Harris Fellows, Benefactors, Sustaining Members and PolioPlus Society members.

Gump received RI's Service Above Self Award and is a Gold Member of its Membership Society for New Member Sponsors. TRF has awarded him its Citation for Meritorious Service and Regional Service Award for a Polio-Free World.



Brian Hall

Director 2025-27

RC Covington, Louisiana

Brian Hall is director of development at Attivo ERP, where he specialises in integrating business systems. He has been an active leader in the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Rotary Action Group for nearly a decade. He has served on the Joint Technology Committee of RI and TRF, with a focus on strengthening Rotary's information technology infrastructure and digital strategy.

Hall is a recipient of Rotary's Service Above Self Award. He has also received TRF's Citation for Meritorious Service, and he and his wife, Lynn, are Major Donors.



Martha Peak Helman

Director 2026-28

RC Boothbay Harbor, Maine

Marty Helman served as president of the Otto and Fran Walter Foundation, a non-profit that has helped build schools in developing nations, provided scholarships for young people, and supplied humanitarian aid to Holocaust survivors, among other initiatives. The Walter Foundation partnered with TRF to fund the Rotary Peace Center that opened in 2025 at Bahçeşehir University in Istanbul.

Marty and her late spouse, Frank, joined RC Boothbay Harbor in 2003. She has served Rotary as TRF trustee and as chair of the Fund Development and Peace Major Gifts Initiative Committees. She was a member of the teams that selected the sites for the Rotary Peace Centers at Bahçeşehir University and at Symbiosis International University in Pune, India.

Marty initiated an effort to support the Sakuji Tanaka Rotary Peace Fellowship, which raised \$1 million for the Rotary Peace Centers. She is a member of the AKS, Paul Harris and the PolioPlus Societies. She received TRF's Distinguished Service Award. She and Frank were charter members of the Legacy Society of the Foundation.



Jung-Hyun Lee

Director 2025-27

RC Hwasung Taeon, Korea

Jung-Hyun Lee has been a Rotary member since 2003. He is also a champion of digital literacy. As chair of Rotary Korea's

committee on information technology, he spearheaded digitalisation efforts that significantly increased member registrations on My Rotary, growing participation from 15 to 70 per cent.

His wife, Young-Ran Won, is a survivor of ovarian cancer, and they lead a support group for cancer patients and their families to provide guidance and hope to others navigating similar challenges. Lee is an AKS member.



Emmanuel Katongole

Director 2026-28, RC Muyenga, Uganda

Emmanuel Katongole, an entrepreneur, joined Rotary in 1996 but had his first contact with it at age 14 as a direct beneficiary. Born to illiterate parents, he was four when his father disappeared under Idi Amin's rule. Later, he lost two siblings to HIV/AIDS and another sister, who died from blood loss while giving birth at age 15.

While selling corn on the street to help support his mother, a housekeeper, Katongole started a conversation with a Rotarian, who asked why he wasn't in school. After hearing his story, the man adopted him, and he spent his adolescence under the family's care.

In remembrance of his sister who died in childbirth, he spearheaded a Rotary project to establish a blood bank at Mengo Hospital in Kampala. The \$1.3 million project is reducing a shortage of blood for transfusions, helping decrease deaths. Katongole serves on the advisory board of the Rotary Peace Center at Makerere University. He chaired the Peace-Major Gifts Initiative Committee. He also served as an endowment/major gifts adviser and as ARFC after his tenure as governor of District 9211 in 2013-14.

He is a recipient of the African Centennial Rotary Heroes Award. He and his spouse, Resty, support TRF as Benefactors and as members of the AKS and Bequest Society.



K P Nagesh

Director 2025-27

RC Bangalore Highgrounds, India

Nagesh is an entrepreneur and founder of UNIQ Security Solutions, a company that employs more than 10,000 workers and serves over 500 clients across southern India. He has also established Uniq Skill Development Academy in Ramanagara district, which provides vocational training to rural youths, helping them secure employment in the uniformed services and the corporate sector.

After earning a degree in mechanical engineering at PES College of Engineering in Mandya, Nagesh served as a short service commissioned officer in the Indian Air Force.

He joined Rotary in 1995. While serving as governor of District 3190 in 2015-16, he led initiatives that resulted in the addition of about 2,000 members and 52 new clubs while increasing the representation of women. Under his leadership

as governor, the district also achieved the highest total contribution to TRF worldwide that year.

He has served Rotary in various leadership roles, including ARRFC, endowment/major gifts adviser, and member of the executive committee of India Water Mission.

Nagesh is passionate about fundraising for TRF. His goal is for India to become a \$100 million-giving country, with every district giving at least \$1 million. He is a recipient of RI's Service Above Self Award. He and his wife, Uma, a computer science engineer, are AKS Chair's Circle members.



Kenichi Nakaya

Director 2026–28, RC Ashikaga East, Japan

Kenichi Nakaya is a physician focused on internal and cardiovascular health in Ashikaga, Japan

A second-generation Rotarian, Nakaya joined RC Ashikaga East in 1988. He was encouraged by his father, a past club president, and his mentor, PRID Toshio Itabashi. He has served as an ARRFC, endowment/major gifts adviser, and learning facilitator at the International Assembly in 2023 and 2024. He was governor of District 2550 in 2015–16.

Nakaya is a recipient of the RI Service Above Self Award and TRF's Citation for Meritorious Service. He and his wife, Masako, are AKS members and they have established named endowments to support the Foundation's work.



Jennifer A Scott

Director 2025–27

RC Greater Blue Mountains, Australia

Jennifer Scott is a lawyer, mediator, and conflict resolution specialist with experience in environmental law. She became a Rotarian in 1996, and served as DG of RID

9690 in 2007–08.

Jennifer and Ian, who is also a Rotarian and past district governor (2014–15), are Major Donors to TRF and members of the Bequest Society. She has been recognised with TRF's Citation for Meritorious Service.



Takao Shinomiya

Director 2026–28

RC Osaka-Southwest, Japan

Takao Shinomiya is the CEO of Tatsumi Industry Co Ltd, an Osaka-based real estate company that his grandfather founded in 1921. A third-generation Rotarian,

Shinomiya joined his club in 1993 at age 38, following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather.

During his term as club president in 2011–12, Shinomiya mobilised 13 Osaka clubs to support communities after the devastating 2011 tsunami in Japan's Tōhoku region.

He supports TRF as a Major Donor, AKS member, Benefactor and Paul Harris Society member. He and his wife, Yoko, have established named endowments for SHARE and the Rotary Peace Centers.



Wyn Spiller

Director 2025–27, RC Grass Valley, California

A Louisiana native and daughter of a Rotarian, Wyn Spiller earned a psychology degree from Louisiana State University before beginning her career

as a teacher.

A Rotarian since 1994, she has served as endowment/major gifts adviser, RRFC, RIPR, IA facilitator, and 2022 RI CoL learning leader. Spiller is a recipient of TRF's Citation for Meritorious Service. She and Steve are Major Donors and members of the Bequest Society, Paul Harris Society and PolioPlus Society.



Harriette Florence Verwey

Director 2025–27, RC Leiden-AM, Netherlands

Harriette Florence Verwey, born in Suriname as a Dutch citizen, immigrated to the Netherlands at age 18 to pursue her dream of becoming a doctor.

She joined Rotary in 2002. She was the first Black DG in the Netherlands and is the first female director from her zone. She also served as RRFC from 2019 to 2022, and has volunteered to support the Rotary-IHE Delft Institute for Water Education international student scholarship programme.

She supports TRF as a member of the PolioPlus Society, a Major Donor, and a Bequest Society member.



John Hewko

General Secretary, RC Kyiv, Ukraine

John Hewko is the general secretary and chief executive officer of RI and TRF.

He was a charter member of the first Rotary club in Kyiv. Hewko has been a public policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, an adjunct professor of law at Georgetown University, and a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

As general secretary, Hewko leads a diverse staff of 800 at RI's World Headquarters in Evanston, Illinois, and six international offices. He and his partner, Marga, are Major Donors to TRF. They live in Evanston.

TRF Trustees in the next issue

©Rotary



RID 2982

RC Salem Metropolis

A Rotary Foundation Stamp of ₹1 was designed for public contributions to TRF. The stamps are given to retailers who hand them to customers instead of candies as a substitute for small change. Awareness posters are being distributed to shops and retailers.



Club matters



RID 3030

RC Nagpur Horizon

Arm chairs were donated to the Blind Relief Association at the Mundle High School, Nagpur. This would enable the institution to strengthen the seating arrangements at its Nav Drishti Hall.

RID 3053

RC Jodhpur Aarya

A family planning ward was inaugurated at the Mathura Das Hospital. Jodhpur North mayor Kunti Deora, PDG Sanjay Malviya, medical college principal B S Jodha and superintendent Vikas Rajpurohit were present.





RID **3060**

RC Umbergaon

A new Rotary Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation Centre was inaugurated at Solsumba village in Umbergaon taluk of Gujarat. The centre is equipped with modern facilities to provide affordable service to rural people.

RID **3011**

RC Delhi Safdarjung

An awareness seminar was held to mark World No Tobacco Day (May 31), followed by an oral screening camp at the Delhi Public School. MP Bansuri Swaraj addressed the youth. IPDG Ravinder Gugnani and PDG Mahesh Trikha were present.



RID **3090**

RC Suratgarh

Project *Chirping birds, fragrant nature* has donated 150 sparrow nests to the public, and some bird nests were perched on tree branches at parks and public places. IPP JK Arora and director PDG Rajendra Taneja are working to make this campaign a success.



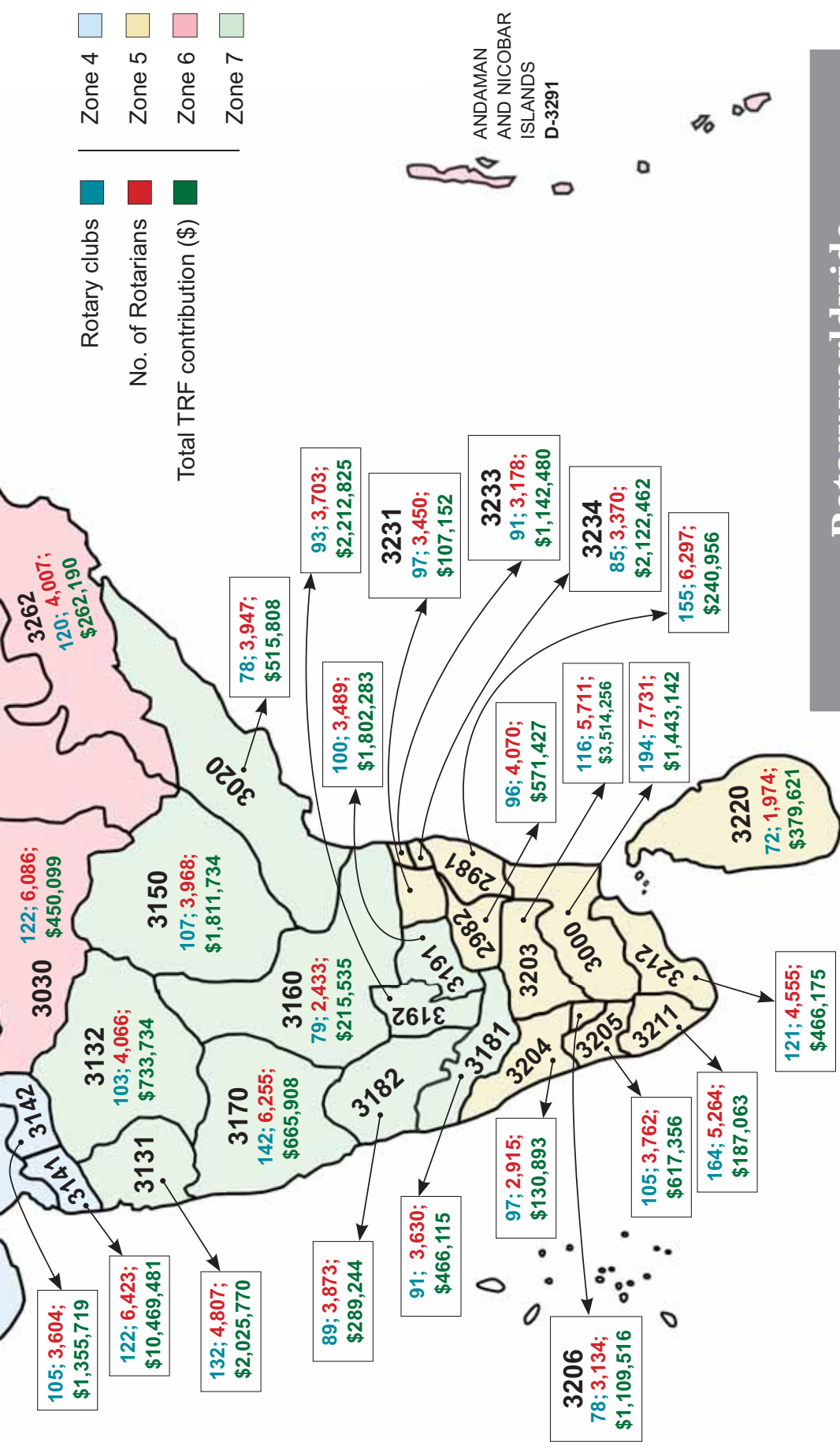
RID **3100**

RC Moradabad Navyam

A cyclothon was flagged off by additional district magistrate Ankur Srivastava in the presence of IPDG Nitin Agarwal, Manoj Rastogi and DGE Kavya Gemini to promote fitness.

Membership & TRF contribution summary





Making a difference

Team Rotary News

Rotary expands a school in Trichy

RI Vice President and RID M Muruganandam inaugurated a building (1,200 sqft) at the Government Aided Middle School in Trichy, constructed by RC Tiruchirapalli Fort, RID 3000, at a cost of ₹20 lakh. The new building has additional classrooms and gender-segregated toilet blocks. The then DG J Karthik and DGE R Subramani were also present. ■



RI Vice President and Director M Muruganandam, along with IPDG J Karthik (to his right) and DG R Subramani (2nd from R) at the school.



RC Pune Royal's immediate past president Medha Kulkarni (L) and RMD Sinhgad Spring Dale School principal Asha Dhore (R) launching the planting drive.

Butterfly Garden at a Pune school

More than 40 saplings were planted on the premises of the RMD Sinhgad Spring Dale School, Warje, by RC Pune Royal, RID 3131, to create a Butterfly Garden. In a joint initiative with the Vanadevrai Foundation, Kothrud, the then club president Medha Kulkarni and school principal Asha Dhore inaugurated the planting drive.

Project *Butterfly Garden* will create a natural habitat for butterflies with carefully chosen plant varieties so that they can lay eggs on these plants and begin their lifecycle. "Along with butterfly-friendly plants, medicinal and Ayurvedic herbs were also planted," said Medha.

While a drip irrigation system will be used, info boards will display Marathi and botanical names of the plants for educating the students. A small pond is also being created. ■



High-tech device, ICU at Bengaluru hospital

A Cryostat machine for accurate testing during surgery has been donated to the Sri Shankara Cancer Hospital by RC Bangalore Junction, RID 3192, with a CSR grant from Radhyshyam Rander, a club member.

IPDG Elizabeth Cherian and donor Urmila Rander inaugurated the diagnostic machine in the presence of Rotarians. A Step-Down ICU facility was also set up at the hospital with a CSR grant of ₹41 lakh from Fujitsu Research India. Project chair Ajay Bhauwala coordinated for the new facility. ■



IPDG Elizabeth Cherian (L) and CSR donor Urmila Rander at the inauguration of Cryostat machine.



RID 3142 IPDG Harsh Makol inaugurates the ICU. Also seen are RC Dombivli East members and donors.



An ICU facility at Mumbai hospital

IPDG Harsh Makol inaugurated a 10-bed intensive care unit (ICU) at the Ashray Charitable Trust Hospital set up by RC Dombivli East, RID 3142, through a CSR grant from Dr Acharya Laboratories. The ICU is equipped with state-of-art facilities including three ventilators.

The project cost ₹70 lakh. The club's CSR team led by its chairman Pramod Shenwai, project director Anand Acharya and his team were guided by the hospital leadership in executing the medical project. It was partly funded by Lata Shastri. IPP Sandeep Gharat, then club secretary Vinayak Agte, Usha Acharya and Sunanda Hegde were present. ■



The EV advantage

Preeti Mehra

With the government pushing for EV adoption, your next car is most likely to be a non-fossil fuel one.

It is now abundantly clear that electric vehicles (EV) will be the mode of transport in the immediate future. If you have any doubts, then the Delhi Electric Vehicle Policy 2026 that came into effect last month makes it amply clear. The whisper in the corridors of power is that other cities and states that suffer from significant air pollution will soon follow suit and alter their policy on these zero tailpipe emission vehicles.

So, why are we bothering to talk about this? Because as commuters and vehicles users each one of us will soon have to make a concerted choice of

how we will negotiate these new laws. In other words, how will we commute around our city or town.

Undoubtedly, electric buses, cars, two-wheelers, three-wheelers, called EVs in short, are much less polluting than the current fossil fuel-powered internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles that monopolise our roads. EVs are best for the environment and will help in ensuring better air quality in cities and towns. But to make a shift to these vehicles is no easy task, and policies like the one enacted in Delhi are trying to push the idea forward.

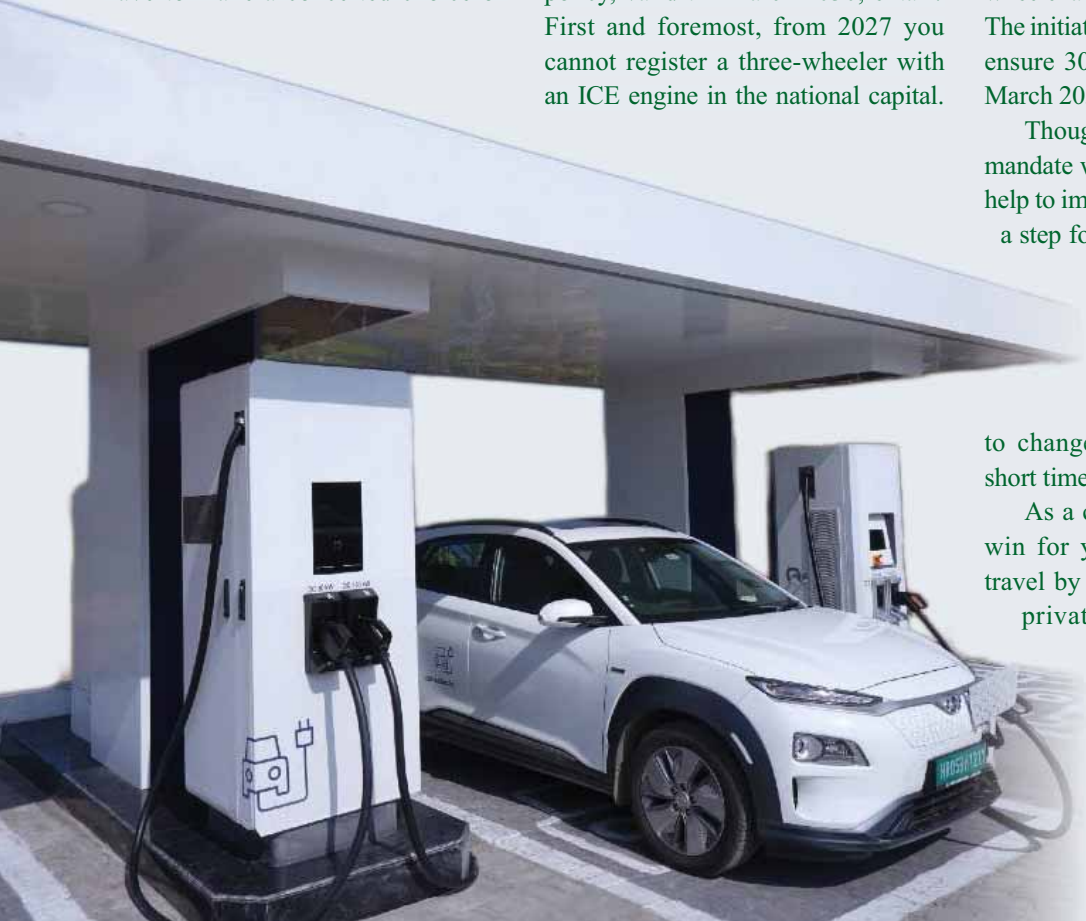
So, what does the updated Delhi policy, valid till March 2030, entail? First and foremost, from 2027 you cannot register a three-wheeler with an ICE engine in the national capital.

Most of these serve as last mile transport from the metro to residences. For two-wheelers the registration cut off for new vehicles has been relaxed till 2028. There are a host of upfront purchase subsidies for EV three-wheelers, two-wheelers and light duty commercial carriers or N-1 trucks.

Private and commercial electric passenger cars have also been given a big incentive. Those that cost up to ₹30 lakh will be given 100 per cent exemption from road tax and registration fee. Besides, getting rid of your old ICE vehicles will fetch you a scrappage bonus, which is up to ₹1 lakh for a four-wheeler and ₹10,000 for a two-wheeler. The initiative, in a nutshell, is to try and ensure 30 per cent electrification by March 2030.

Though we are not sure if such a mandate will work and how far it will help to improve overall air quality, it is a step forward. It is a move that will have a far-reaching impact on the number of EVs on the road and challenging times for the transport industry which will have to change its production lines in a short time.

As a commuter, it may be a win-win for you. In either case, if you travel by public transport or by your private vehicle, you will have the opportunity to lessen your carbon footprint and feel you are contributing towards a relatively more sustainable world.



But let me tell you the electric vehicle is not the new kid on the block. Most of us think of EVs as high-tech innovations that belong to the new millennium, but it will come as a surprise to many that a battery-operated vehicle (a locomotive to boot!) was put together some 180 years ago by Robert Davidson, a Scotsman. His EV ran too slowly and was seen as impractical to use. But, believe it or not, battery-operated cars became a hit in Europe and America briefly from the 1890s to the first few years of the 20th century before internal combustion engines completely ran them out of reckoning.

I came across these nuggets and many more historical facts in a book just released: *The EV Evolution: Then, Now and Next of Electric Vehicles*. Written by Anil Sasi, a former colleague, the book traces the history of the electric vehicle and where we are today in its journey.

Unlike in the West, India's fascination for EVs is of more recent vintage. In the early 1990s a small two-seater electric car was put together in Kerala by the Chalakudy-based Eddy Current Controls in collaboration with Japan's Yaskawa Electric Manufacturing Company. The car, christened the 'Lovebird,' was showcased as the first Indian EV in 1993 at the Auto Expo in Delhi.

The Lovebird, despite government support, remained a novelty and failed to sell more than 30 vehicles and the project unfortunately folded up.

Three years later, Vikram Sasa, a three-wheeled electric vehicle, was developed by the Lucknow-based state-owned Scooters India Pvt Ltd. It sold some 400 pieces. Later on, Mahindra & Mahindra developed the nine-seater M&M Bijlee which hit the road in 1999. There were other manufacturers, including Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) which tried their hand at developing EVs. But most of these attempts failed to attract sales and did not find

space in the growing automobile market because they were cumbersome and costly to operate.

India's first mass produced electric car was the Reva. It launched its urban electric microcar in 2001. Anil Sasi notes in his book that this was a full seven years before Tesla, generally considered a flagbearer of today's EV generation, rolled out its maiden car, the Roadster.

However, the manufacturers of Reva could not capitalise on its headstart. It was bogged down by various issues and the company finally sold its majority stake to Mahindra and the original owner, Sudarshan K Maini, ceded control of the company around 2010. But before that Reva's NXG model sold some 3,000 units and was made available in 24 countries.

The Reva initiative did pave the way for electric two-wheelers. Several brands have hit the market in the last few years. In urban centres they have gained popularity with charging stations being set up at vantage points.

Simultaneously, the four-wheeler segment has also picked up pace but much more slowly. However, it is now possible to spot EV cars in the metros silently weaving in and out of dense traffic without leaving a trail of fossil fuel smoke.

With government policy likely to push for phasing out ICEs in the coming years, there will be more efficient EV cars and buses in the market. So, before you buy your next vehicle, you may have to seriously consider opting for an EV. I am no car expert to advise you on which model will be best suited for your needs. But I can say this much: an EV vehicle will be the right choice because it will not add to the air and noise pollution in our cities. Having said that, I would like to hastily add that there is nothing more environment friendly than using public transport or cycling to your destination.

The writer is a senior journalist who writes on environmental issues





RID **3131**

RC Pradhikaran Pune

Over 800 children from 21 underserved areas in Pune and Raigad took part in a two-day RYLA held jointly with other clubs and Jnana Prabodhini. The programme expense of ₹5 lakh was sponsored by Electrica Engineers India.



Club matters



RID **3170**

RC Haveri

A police booth with digital clock and LED display on road safety was set up near the local bus stand. The project aims to create awareness on traffic discipline and civic responsibility through messages.

RID **3181**

RC Belthangady

A hip-knee-ankle-foot orthosis brace was donated to school girl Shama who could not walk without support. Club member Dr Gopalakrishna and Ann Bharathi sponsored the device costing ₹25,000.





RID 3203

RC Tirupur Pioneers – RID 3203

A children's play area was created at the Government Elementary School, Kavilipalayam Pudur, at a cost of ₹2 lakh. Trees were planted around the play area to shield the children from hot sun.

RID 3132

Rotary E-Club Empowering Youth

IPDG Sudhir Lature inaugurated gender-specific toilets, urinals, handwash stations, a water tank and hygiene boards at the Mount Sinai Convent School, Ahilyanagar. Forcas Impex funded the project for ₹15 lakh.



RID 3231

RC Tiruvannamalai Galaxy

A mobile suction unit was donated to the paediatric ward of the Government Medical College, Tiruvannamalai, to enhance the medical care of newborns. District admin secretary J Gajendhiran led the initiative.



RID 3261

RC Sambalpur

A bus stop was adopted for maintenance by the club as part of its efforts to keep the city clean and commuter-friendly. The project lifted the public image of Rotary.

Compiled by V Muthukumaran

Neck pain: causes and care

Gita Mathai

An adult human head weighs approximately 5kg. This considerable weight is balanced on the smallest and most mobile part of the spine, the eight cervical vertebrae that make up the neck. By the age of five, a child's head has already reached almost adult size and weight. From then onwards, the head resembles a heavy ball balanced on a slender, flexible pedestal.

Throughout life the head is rarely still. It constantly moves up and down, turns from side to side, and rotates in a circle. These remarkable movements are made possible because the cervical vertebrae glide smoothly over one another. Between each vertebra lies an intervertebral disc, which acts as a shock absorber or cushion. The joints are lubricated by synovial fluid, allowing movement with minimal friction. Strong muscles and ligaments support the neck bones and protect the delicate spinal cord and nerves that pass through it.

Unfortunately, modern life places tremendous strain on this delicate structure.

The abuse often begins in childhood. Schoolchildren frequently carry bags that are far heavier than recommended. Government guidelines specify maximum school bag weights, starting at about 1kg in Class I and gradually increasing to 5kg by Class X. These recommendations are often ignored. Even when backpacks are used, many children sling them casually over one shoulder instead of wearing both straps. This uneven distribution of weight forces the neck and

shoulder muscles on one side to work much harder, resulting in muscle strain and poor posture. The habit frequently continues into college and adulthood until the backpack is replaced by a heavy handbag, laptop bag or briefcase carried in one hand.

Poor posture is another major culprit. Whether studying, working from home, or sitting in an office, many people spend long hours bent over a desk. The computer monitor should be positioned at eye level, with the chair and desk adjusted to the correct height. When the head tilts forward, the load on the cervical spine increases



dramatically. A head weighing 5kg can exert the equivalent of 20–25kg of force on the neck when bent forward.

The widespread use of smart-phones, tablets and laptops has created an epidemic of what is popularly called “tech neck.” People spend hours looking down while messaging, reading, watching videos, attending virtual meetings or scrolling through social media. Because the mind is absorbed in the activity, the warning signs of discomfort are ignored until mild stiffness progresses to persistent pain.

Even travelling can contribute to neck problems. Most car seats are equipped with adjustable headrests, but few people take the trouble to position them correctly. During long journeys, an improperly adjusted headrest allows the head to fall forward or sway from side to side, increasing muscle fatigue and stiffness. A correctly positioned headrest should support the middle of the back of the head rather than the neck alone.

The nerves supplying the shoulders, arms and hands emerge from openings between the cervical vertebrae. As we age, wear and tear of the discs and joints may cause these openings to narrow. Bulging discs or bony overgrowths can compress the nerves, producing pain, numbness, tingling or weakness in the shoulders, arms or hands. Sometimes the pain is not felt in the neck at all. It may be referred to the shoulder blade, upper back, or even the chest, occasionally mimicking the pain of a heart attack. Persistent neck pain often interferes with sleep, reduces work efficiency, and affects quality of life.

Fortunately, most episodes of neck pain improve with simple measures.

The first step is to correct posture. Sit upright with your shoulders relaxed, your feet flat on the floor, and your computer screen at eye level. Avoid holding the phone between your

ear and shoulder. If you work at a desk, stand up, stretch, and walk around for a few minutes every 30 to 60 minutes.

Applying alternating hot and cold packs to the neck for about five minutes each, repeated three times a day, often provides relief. A short course of pain relievers such as paracetamol or, if appropriate, a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) like ibuprofen may reduce pain and inflammation. Sleeping on a low, supportive pillow helps maintain proper alignment of the neck. Some people also benefit from applying a capsaicin-containing ointment to the back of the neck before bedtime.

Gentle stretching and strengthening exercises are equally important. Physiotherapists can teach exercises that improve posture, strengthen the neck and shoulder muscles, and restore flexibility. They may also use treatment such as heat therapy, ice packs, ultrasound or Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS) to relieve pain. Yoga, when practised under expert supervision, can improve posture, flexibility, balance and muscle strength, reducing the risk of recurrent neck pain.

A soft cervical collar may provide temporary relief by limiting neck movement, especially during travel or acute pain. However, prolonged use weakens the supporting muscles. It should not be worn continuously for more than three hours at a time or for longer than one to two weeks unless specifically advised by a doctor.

If neck pain persists beyond two or three weeks despite these measures, or if it follows a fall, sports injury, or road accident, medical evaluation is essential.

Imaging tests are not routinely required for simple neck pain but become necessary when serious injury or nerve compression is suspected. X-rays can reveal fractures,

Sit upright with your shoulders relaxed, your feet flat on the floor and your computer screen at eye level. Avoid holding the phone between your ear and shoulder.

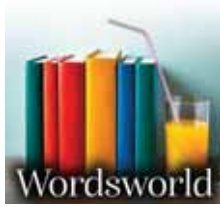
osteoporosis, abnormal alignment, arthritis or narrowing of the disc spaces. An MRI provides detailed information about discs, ligaments, nerves and the spinal cord, making it the investigation of choice when nerve root or spinal cord compression is suspected. A CT scan offers excellent three-dimensional views of the bones, while nerve conduction studies may be required in patients with progressive numbness or weakness.

Blood tests may be advised to detect conditions such as Vitamin D deficiency, low calcium levels, inflammatory arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis or infections. Treating these underlying disorders often reduces neck pain.

Surgery is rarely required. It is reserved for patients with severe compression of the spinal cord or nerve roots, persistent weakness, or pain that does not respond to adequate conservative treatment.

The neck is remarkably strong, yet surprisingly vulnerable. Paying attention to posture, avoiding unnecessary strain, exercising regularly and seeking timely medical advice when symptoms persist can keep this hardworking part of the body healthy and pain-free for many years.

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



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Imagine exploring room after room after room and browsing shelves stacked ceiling-high with books, books and more books, all minutely categorised, wooden ladders leaning against them, tables overflowing with titles, and chairs to sink into to salivate over your cache. This was the highlight of a recent visit to the English city of Bath famous for Roman hot springs and Georgian architecture. Topping and Company Booksellers is one of



Sandhya Rao

several bookstores there. It boasts some 80,000 titles — yes, 80,000 — and gets a steady stream of visitors from all over the world. It hosts authors and events at the store and elsewhere practically every day; Arundhati Roy and Elif Shafak, for instance, were there. Interestingly, just a short distance away, Waterstones had prominently displayed Roy's *Mother Mary Comes to Me*.

Across short forages over two days, we managed to fish out some wonderful titles from Topping. (Oh, if only there were no weight restrictions on air travel!) *A British Childhood: How Our Children Live Now* is a reflection on schooling in the UK by the 2024–2026 Children's Laureate Frank Cottrell-Boyce who, apart from being a novelist, is also a screenwriter and, along with Danny Boyle of

Slumdog Millionaire-fame (based on *Q&A* by Vikas Swarup), had co-created the 2012 London Olympics opening ceremony. As Laureate, he travelled around the UK meeting children in schools, libraries, institutions, prisons, and saw first-hand the precarious circumstances in which many children are forced to grow up. The book captures reflections on his own childhood and the childhood of young people today, and offers insights into the gaps and loopholes and failures of systems and communities in the care (or lack) of a nation's most vulnerable population.

Although Boyce's observations are about the situation in the UK, much of what he writes could quite easily apply to children and circumstances in other parts of the world. For instance, we often hear parents complain of having to tell or read the same story to their child *ad nauseum*. Boyce points out that in the early years of a child's life, "it's not about cultural capital or a rich vocabulary. It's about making a space for a profound emotional connection." As the blurb from the *Guardian* review says, "(Boyce's) clarion call about the loss of delight and safety in children's lives is also a reminder of the sheer magic of reading." Reading this book compelled me to buy (from Topping) and read *Millions*, his debut novel which went on to win many awards and was also made into a film. It centres around a bag of pounds (GBP) landing in the lap of two small boys and the fallout of this weird happenstance! *Millions* may be a book for children, but it guarantees a delicious and thought-provoking adult read.

Another book that we fished out from this labyrinthine bookstore was *The History Trees: Extraordinary Tales of Trees Through Time* by Colin Slater. The book features the stories of some 60 trees from all over the world that have withstood the seasons over hundreds, even thousands of years. Trees



**Topping and Company Booksellers,
Bath, England.**

are solid, except when their trunks are hollow, which is a rarity. So, then, what do you have to say about the Boab Prison Tree of Australia? In Wyndham, Western Australia, when “a sharp-eyed policeman in the 1890s spotted a hollow baobab on the road from the gold mines into town, he immediately thought of a good use for it. An officer cut a hatch into the trunk and for the next few decades, the tree served as a holding cell for prisoners on their way to the Wyndham courthouse”! Apparently this 1076 square foot space could hold some 30 people! This one is believed to be more than 1,500 years old.

In comparison, the Tree of Life in Bahrain is a toddler, at only some 442 years as determined by dendro-chronology (tree ring dating). What’s interesting, though, is that it is one of two curiosities in this arid archipelago of some 50 natural and 30 artificial islands that are 90 per cent desert. The other is Bahrain’s very first oil well, now in disuse, and indicative of the fact that Bahrain will sooner than later exhaust its oil resources. The tree, with long roots and the ability to survive in dry conditions, is believed to have been planted in 1482 when the Portuguese briefly ruled over the region.

Leif Kullman and Lisa Öberg were conducting a census of trees on Fullufjället mountain in Sweden when they came across a particular Norway spruce, a pretty unprepossessing-type tree. They found that its trunk was a few hundred years old but its root system, determined through a process called vegetative cloning, was much older. Radiocarbon dating revealed that its root system was born from a seed that had germinated 9,565 years ago! They named the tree Tjikko, after their beloved pet dog. And so, Old Tjikko it is.

In this context, we cannot miss mentioning Thimmamma Marrimanu, the world’s widest banyan tree, still standing near the Horsely Hills of Anantapur



Shelves stacked with books at the store.

district in Andhra Pradesh, India. Estimated to be 550–650 years old, it spans an area of over seven-and-a-half acres and is held up by over 4,000 aerial roots. This process of sending down aerial roots and re-rooting is called layering. Old Tjikko too layers itself, a little differently, though. When snow falls, its lower branches are pressed so far down that they root themselves. The stories of each and every tree in the book is a fascinating reminder to protect and nurture trees, not decimate them in the name of so-called security and development.

One other book from Topping is *The Correspondent* by Virginia Evans, winner of the 2026 Women’s Prize for Fiction. It is often believed that prize-winning fiction can be difficult to read. *The Correspondent* overturns that perception. I don’t think I’ve ever read an about-300 pages-long book this easily or finished it so quickly and felt thoroughly satiated. Its epistolary — told through letters — style is not unique; there have been many popular novels written in this style. The protagonist is a retired, crusty, clever, unyielding lawyer in her seventies; for many this could be a non-starter. She has been a letter-writer since childhood and through

her steady correspondence with family, friends, authors, doctor, suitors, the gardening club and many others, the concerns and cares of her world and her life in particular stand revealed in all their detail. Things she observes, comments on, advises about, reflects upon, keeps secret... everything. All this while she is slowly losing her vision even as she gains not one but two suitors.

As we read what she has to say, as also the responses she receives from those she corresponds with, including someone sending her hate mail consequent to a harsh sentencing, we gradually understand what the secret is that Sybil Van Antwerp has been hiding for decades. It is shocking, unforgivable even. I must confess to having been moved to tears by the end of the novel which, don’t fear, also has several moments of irony and amusement as well. Tender, clever, sharp, clear... the writing is all of this and more as it completely wraps up the reader in the emotional embrace of its warm storytelling. Don’t be misled by the bland title of the book, read it.

Pictures by Sandhya Rao

The columnist is a children’s writer and senior journalist



A culinary surprise in Switzerland

TCA Srinivasa Raghavan



Once a year my wife and I visit Switzerland where my son and his family live. It's a very expensive country where a very basic meal for four in a restaurant can cost around ₹25,000 and a train journey of 200km around ₹10,000 per person. Of course, a part of this is because the Indian rupee has taken a deep dive against the Swiss franc, which is around ₹125 for one franc. The Euro is much cheaper at about ₹105–106 but in Switzerland you have to deal with their currency. So taking our advancing age into account as well, we have gradually reduced rushing around Europe. Instead, we stay put with the grandchildren who provide more pleasure than any glacier, mountain peak, lake, or a meadow full of cows can.

Then one day someone asked if we had been to Lucerne or, because it is in the German part of the country, Luzern. It is of very special significance in Switzerland because it's in one of its meadows in the 13th century that the country's democratic foundations were laid. Or so they say. We said no, we hadn't been there and were told that we should go. So despite the searing heat we went. Switzerland, by the way, experiences major heatwaves because of its success in cleaning up the skies. There is hardly any pollution. But without any aerosol particles, the ultraviolet radiation is severe and therefore so is the heat. To top it off, air conditioners are unofficially banned in homes for environmental protection.

Anyway, we took a train to Lucerne or Luzern one very hot day. During the journey we were wondering what to do about lunch when my wife spotted an Indian name, Pranav Yogesh, who is a head chef to boot. The restaurant he was working

in, Nimaya, was offering Indian food. Nimaya means gentle stream or Lord Krishna, both. So we went there.

Indian food in Switzerland isn't in much demand. Especially South Indian food and within that Tamil food. So I told Yogesh to add *thayir sadam* (curd rice) to his menu but without that North Indian garnish of pomegranate. But I am told South Indian food can be found if you really look for it. There are a couple of ladies who cook it for you on order and I am sure, because there is no adulteration of the ingredients, the dishes taste far better than in India.

You normally expect head chefs to be in their late forties or fifties, if not sixties. Remember Amitabh Bachchan in *Cheeni Kum*? But Yogesh, who told us to call him Pranav, was half that age, just 30. How do I know? Much to my wife's annoyance I asked him how old he was and he told me. He said he used to be the head chef at another place before coming to Lucerne. He said his intention was to provide a more experimental fare than available in traditional Indian restaurants. "Basically," he said "we want to move away from the curry house image that Indian restaurants have."

We asked him why he had chosen this profession and he said his grandmother played the veena at the age of 92, his mother was a bharatanatyam dancer, and his brother was a drummer who runs a music school. "Creativity can be culinary also," he said. He was bald as an egg and again to my wife's deep irritation I asked him why chefs preferred bald heads. "To prevent hair falling into the food," he said. "I don't have to wear a cap in the kitchen." It turned out to be a splendid meal and we came away feeling very pleased, not least because the bill was so reasonable. ■



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