

# LIGHT

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President - Rtn. Abinash K Singh ● Secretary - Rtn. Debasis Das ● TREASURER - Rtn. Chiranjib Sha ● Editor - PP Tanu Roy

## The Forgotten Train Driver Who Fought Through Fire to Save 400 Passengers

Rinchen Norbu Wangchuk (Source: 'Valour on Footplate' by Sudhendu J. Sinha, Adviser, NITI Aayog, Gol, courtesy Indian Railways)

An Anglo-Indian driver of the Indian Railways, Manasser Johannes was posthumously awarded the Kirti Chakra for sacrificing his own life to save 400 passengers aboard a burning train.

On the intervening night of 25 and 26 July 1956, Manasser Johannes witnessed a "sudden block-back of fire from the fire-box door into the cab [driver's compartment], where he was standing".

At the time, the Anglo-Indian engine driver was driving the 315 Up-Howrah-Adra-Chakradharpur passenger train with 400-odd passengers on board.

Trapped in the flames were Johannes and two firemen who, according to Sudhendu J Sinha, an advisor to the NITI Aayog on transport and electric mobility, were at serious risk of losing their lives to the raging flames.

"A sudden block-back of fire from the fire box door was growing up in flames. While it had rained the other day, it was all dry that day. Even the rain gods were not merciful," wrote Sinha in an article for an Indian Railways publication.

The firemen contemplated jumping out of the train. Meanwhile Johannes, also known as 'Mack' to his colleagues, was doing everything possible to close the fire box door and contain the fire.

These efforts went in vain, as the fire first engulfed one of the fireman's trousers. Now, the only option before Mack was to stop the train and prevent the fire from spreading into the other coaches. Making matters worse, however, the fire had damaged the train's braking system.

While one of the firemen was writhing in pain, the other was pleading with Mack to jump off the train. In response, the driver reportedly said, "You know it is not a goods' train. It is a bloody passenger train, the most popular one...with 400 pax on board. I will strive till my last breath to kill this fire witch. I wish I could stop the train. The levers seem to be choked to a block."

Instead, Mack asked the firemen to save themselves first, while he maintained his focus on braking the train. With the cab engulfed in fire, he guided his juniors on how to jump out of the moving train safely. Worried about their senior, they asked him whether he would join them.

He reportedly responded with "Maybe next life; that, too, as a Railwayman. It is a dream of every Anglo-Indian youngster to ride the footplate. We are the railway people. This is our train, you know! Guard Benny Calvert, another one of us, is manning the brake of this train. I am going to stop this train to safety, anyhow."

Both firemen jumped out of the train, and the fire had begun to totally engulf the cab, while Mack, writhing in pain, remained resolute in his determination to pull over this train to safety.

"The pain was rising and so was his resolve to pull over his train to safety — a predicament that comes only with the highest degree of passion. He took his last sincere effort to apply the brakes. It was all up in flames – orange and yellow with occasional blue streak," wrote Sinha.

As he was approaching the outer signal of the Kharagpur station, he pulled the brake lever with all his might even though the heat and burn had grown unbearable. Miraculously the train began coming to a gradual halt. It stopped just short of the outer signal of Kharagpur station with all 400 passengers, most of whom were sound asleep.

They did not have an inkling of what had just transpired.

Once the train stopped, the "engine was immediately detached, coaches were pinned down and the station informed," according to Sinha.

Meanwhile Benny, the guard, rushed to help Mack, who had suffered life-threatening burns all over. He was rushed to the hospital for emergency treatment.

Sadly, he passed away at the hospital.

"What was left with Benny Calvert was his immaculate uniform with impressions and contours of the charred hands of Manasser Johannes as souvenir, and the memorabilia of the ultimate sacrifice of his brave colleagues," he added.

For his outstanding heroics on that night, the Anglo-Indian engine driver of the Kharagpur crew base was posthumously awarded the Kirti Chakra in 1957. President Dr. Rajendra Prasad handed over the medal to his widow Marjorie and his young son Michael.

As his Kirti Chakra citation reads, "Realising that a disaster must result if he too jumped out, Driver Johannes remained at his post in the flame-filled cab and though severely burnt, he eventually brought the train to a stop near the outer signal of the Kharagpur station."

Needless to say, this is what true valour looks like.



**Today is our 2191st**

**Members attended last RWM : 11**

***Birthday Greetings :***

**Sept 6th** PP Capt. Naresh K Jain

**Sept 12th** Anika, Daughter of Rtn. Dr. Amitabh Ray



**Agenda – 2191st RWM**

1. Charter Day – Sept 11, 2022
2. Formation of Interact Club.
3. Cloth Distribution at RCC Badartala
4. Club Bijoya-Diwali Meet on Nov 1st, 2022
5. DG Official Visit – Dec 13th, 2022
6. Nov 8th, 2022 2nd Club Assembly.
7. Club Annual Meeting on Dec 20th, 2022

**Presidential Message - Jennifer Jones, President 2022-23**

Recently, Nick and I spent time in Guatemala, where we met wonderful fellow Rotary members and families who unofficially adopted me as “Tía Jennifer.” On the third day, after visiting Patzún in the mountainous western highlands, we set out for Lake Atitlán, which we needed to reach by nightfall. If we took a back road we could get there faster. Locals told us it had just been repaved and assured us, “You’ll have no problem.”

At first, it was a breeze. We wound through misty-green coffee and corn fields covering the hillside like a patchwork quilt. But at a river crossing, we found a bridge washed away. The only way to continue would be to ford the river in our small bus. There were a few tense moments, but we decided to give it a try and, thankfully, we made it across safely.

This adventure reminds me of two

important truths in Rotary. One, we rely on local, on-the-ground expertise to do what we do best. And two, sometimes you have to take uncomfortable chances to reach important goals.

Every day, I am honoured to learn from our Rotary family. Every lesson is an opportunity to grow, and each story adds a chapter to our collective Imagine Rotary year.



## New York polio case stirs fear, Vaccine push

**The last naturally occurring US cases of polio were reported in 1979**

When Brittany Strickland heard that the United States recorded its first polio case in almost a decade, she was "deathly scared" -- the 33-year-old wasn't vaccinated against the disabling disease.

"My mom was an anti-vaxxer, so I found out that I had never had any polio vaccines as a child," the designer explained to AFP, after finally receiving a shot this week.

Strickland was inoculated in Pomona, in New York's Rockland County where the first US polio case since 2013 was identified in July.



Since then, the disease has been detected in wastewater samples in the area, as well as in a neighbouring county and in New York City sewage, suggesting the virus is spreading.

The developments are leading experts to fear that polio, once one of the most feared diseases in America but now endemic to just a couple of developing countries, may wreak devastation stateside again.

"I had considered it a virus that was on its way to extinction," John Dennehy, a virologist at the City University of New York, told AFP.

Health officials are urging anyone not immunized to get vaccinated, with Rockland County offering free shots.

The area, 30 miles (48 kilometres) north of Manhattan, has a polio vaccination rate well below the national average.

Only 60 percent of two-year-olds have received a vaccine, compared to 79 percent statewide, New York's health department says.

Nationally, the figure is 92 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that recommends people receive the first of four doses at two months old.

Polio is a crippling and potentially fatal viral disease that mainly affects children under the age of five, but can be devastating to unvaccinated adults.

Periodic outbreaks killed thousands of children and left thousands more in wheelchairs and leg braces before a vaccine was developed in the late 1950s.

A massive global effort in recent decades has come close to wiping out the disease, with wild poliovirus now only existing in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The last naturally occurring US cases of polio were reported in 1979.

"It's horrifying," said Strickland. "You don't think it's gonna happen here, and then a bunch of people don't get vaccinated and now we're in this situation."

Polio is extremely contagious and can spread from person to person through stools, sneezes, coughs and contaminated water before infected people even show symptoms.

### 'Silver Lining'

Analysis of the Rockland case led officials to believe that the original source of the infection was someone who had received the oral polio vaccine, which was discontinued in the United States in 2000.

OPV replicates in the gut and can be passed to others through faecal-contaminated water. While weaker than wild poliovirus, the variant can cause serious illness and paralysis in the unvaccinated.

The case identified in July was in a young man who was not inoculated and the disease was causing him paralysis, officials said.

They said he had not travelled abroad, suggesting the disease had transmitted locally.

Local news reports say the infected man was a member of the Orthodox Jewish community, where vaccine hesitancy tends to run high.



Rockland is home to a large population of Orthodox Jews. Last week, more than a dozen rabbis published an open letter urging members to get vaccinated.

Shoshana Bernstein, an independent health communicator and Orthodox Jew who is educating members on the importance of getting immunized, says "any community that's more insular" is susceptible to anti-vax messaging.

"The silver lining with polio is that we do have elders in the community who can talk

from first-hand experience. In a community that very much values the family system and its elders, that does make an impact," she told AFP.

While it is too early to say whether the solitary case is part of a limited or more widespread outbreak, Dennehy fears it could just be "the tip of the iceberg."

"Only a proportion of the people who are infected will ever show any symptoms, and only a fraction of those people will ever get paralytic polio," he said.

"But if enough people are getting infected, eventually we start seeing more and more paralytic polio."

## **UNICEF and Rotary partner to help Sri Lanka**

### **Rasheeda Bhagat**

As the economy of Sri Lanka collapsed leaving 21 million people without food and medicines, UNICEF and Rotary have forged a partnership to deliver life-saving medicines, clean drinking water, education material, and other critical supplies to children and families in the country. The project titled Lifeline Sri Lanka banks on Rotary's global network and the alumni from Sri Lanka's leading schools living overseas.

Explaining the initiative, past RI President KR Ravindran said "as 80 per cent of our medical supplies are imported, with foreign currency reserves running out because of the economic

crisis, essential medicines are not available and our healthcare system is close to collapse. Lives are in peril, surgeries are being postponed and children and pregnant women are most at risk.”



So Rotarians of Sri Lanka will drive donations into this fund from their friends and families and Sri Lanka’s alumni. UNICEF will use the collected funds to procure essential medicines, medical equipment, water purifiers and school stationery to support vulnerable communities. The initiative was launched in Colombo where RI Director AS Venkatesh participated, along with UNICEF’s Regional Director for South Asia George –Laryea-

Adjei, Ravindran and RI District 3220 DG Pubudu de Zoysa.

“UNICEF is delighted to partner with RI and this timely partnership comes at a time when families can no longer afford meals, medicine stocks are depleting rapidly, and schools do not have basic stationery. Time is of essence, and we need to urgently meet the needs of the most vulnerable children and provide timely support,” said Laryea-Adjei.

Venkatesh added, “I was very happy to support the idea of this unique partnership when the RI Board met to discuss this proposal. Our Board is happy that Rotarians in Sri Lanka are playing a critical role in supporting their country in this time of distress.”

Ravindran said it was significant that two *“prestigious organisations” — Rotary and UNICEF* — with a longstanding history of collaboration since 1988, especially in the polio eradication drive, had come together to help a “nation in distress. Such unison mandates absolute credibility, transparency and accountability for success and both organisations possess these attributes in abundance, giving Sri Lankans living all over the world an opportunity to donate for life-saving causes, knowing their funds are being put to the best use.”

The donations will be given directly to UNICEF, which will buy medicines and supplies directly at the best prices, and ship them directly to Sri Lanka. “The government will clear the consignments for us on a priority basis and store it in their warehouses. A joint supervisory committee with a majority of members from Rotary and UNICEF will ensure proper distribution,” said DG Pubudu.

To ensure transparency, details of every contribution and expenditure, along with the total of funds raised, will be displayed on the dedicated website.

## **E-content learning materials for Class 1-10 launched**

Education Minister Taba Tedir launched e-content learning materials for the students of Class 1-10, developed by the Rotary India Literacy Mission (RILM), during an **‘Annual Work Plan and Budget (AWP&B) 2022-23’** Conference of the state’s Samagra Shiksha Mission here on Friday.

The conference was attended by Education Commissioner Padmini Singla, SCERT Director Pige Ligu, Elementary Education Director Otem Tayeng, Secondary Education Director Marken Kadu, Deputy SPD Neelam Tan, all 26 DDSEs and DPCs of the state, the SCERT Deputy Director and the RILM team led by its President Shekhar Mehta and Chairman Kamal

Sanghvi, who attended the conference through the virtual mode.

The conference was aimed at understanding the project approved in the AWP&B 2022-23, with its prospective plan up to 2025-26, by the union Project Approval Board, and to retrospect the performance of the ***Samagra Shiksha*** campaign during the last few years.



The minister dwelt on matters related to establishment of 300 ECCE centres, functioning of 540 pre-primary schools, introduction of mother tongue, account opening of students for DBT, shortage of subject teachers, teachers' training, timely conduct of DPC meetings, etc, besides formation of an alumni association under the aegis of the Vidyanjali programmes.

Stating that the government alone cannot bridge all the infrastructure gaps in the schools, Tedir said that "each SMC/SMDC should form an alumni association and adopt a 'give back to society' policy to ease out some of the immediate problems of the schools."

The district officers were made aware of the observations pertaining to the performance of students, learning outcome, poor transition rates in the secondary level, high dropout and imbalances in gross enrollment, and net enrollment ratio in some districts.

The officers were also made to understand various infrastructure gaps, such as toilets, potable drinking water, electricity connection, furniture, dilapidated classrooms in the schools, and the issue of shortage of teachers in the secondary level, single or no teachers in most of the remote schools, excess teachers in the elementary level, etc, and mushrooming of teachers in the capital region and district headquarters.

Singla said that the "education scenario of the state can be improved when the officers at the state and district level act as a leader for the cause of education." She also advised the officers to use funds judiciously and follow all procedures provided in the relevant financial rules.

Ligu highlighted the initiative taken to transform the education scenario of the state "with the help of the NITI Aayog and the 'reach to teach' through a project titled 'sustainable action for transforming human capital'."

The world celebrated the **8th Anniversary of International Day of Charity**, founded by UNGA in its resolution for 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development Goals basing on 17 charters to be celebrated on the passing away day of Nobel laureate Mother Teresa, born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu, who came to India in 1928 & founded Missionary of Charity in Calcutta in 1948 to minister destitute for 45 years. Charity is a notion in society which helps social bonding, contributes to creation of inclusive & more resilient societies. It also alleviates the worst effects of humanitarian crisis, supplements public services in healthcare, education, housing & child protection, to name a few. The other benefits are advancement of culture, science, sports & protection of cultural & natural heritage, promotion of the rights of the marginalised & underprivileged sections of society etc.

September 5th, 2022 is 60th Anniversary of the Teacher's Day



celebrated as per the wishing of the 1st Vice-president, 2nd President of India to replace his birthday as Teacher's Day. A distinguished scholar of comparative religion & philosophy, a teacher, the first Indian to hold a post of Professor in University of Oxford, a frontline author on Advaita Vedanta, Bharat Ratna & Templeton prize awardee, Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's Birth Anniversary symbolises the charity in shape of teaching & sharing knowledge, favourably amalgamated with the **International Day of Charity!!**

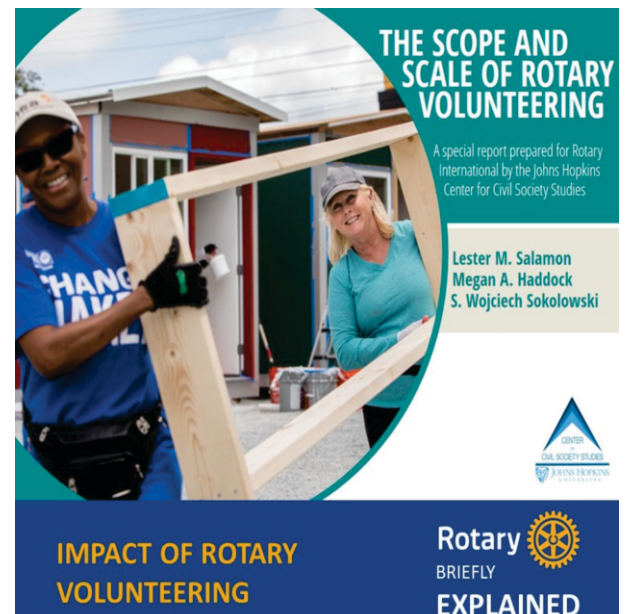
**Rotarians** intuitively know that the contribution and impact of the work by each of them is immense, but what they generally see is only what they and their fellow club members do, one hour at a time.

However, to see how the time contribution of each Rotarian adds to a world-wide total is utterly impressive.

None of the major service organizations has been able to gain a meaningful handle on the actual scale or economic value of the volunteer effort they mobilize until Rotary commissioned research by Johns Hopkins University into Rotary's volunteer impact.

**Here are some points:**

- ☀ Globally, Rotarians contribute 47 million volunteer hours per year. Even more impressive is that each of these hours represents a real benefit to communities locally and internationally.
- ☀ Rotary International is mobilizing a workforce for social progress each year that is equivalent to nearly 27,000 full-time equivalent workers—nearly 50 times larger than its own 563 paid staff. Remarkable!
- ☀ Conservatively this represents US\$850 million a year. Rotary thus saves communities nearly US\$850 million in service costs.
- ☀ 73.4% of Rotarians rate emphasis on service as one of the organization's major attractions to its members. [Therefore, service opportunities are how Rotary attracts members and retains them! Rotary does well on this regard]
- ☀ Women Rotarians contribute a slightly higher number of volunteer hours than men.
- ☀ In New Zealand and Australia Rotarians contribute an average of 6 volunteer hours per month ... much higher than some! (Asia 4.3, Europe 4.7, North America 3.7, but Latin America 6.4)
- ☀ Half of all Rotary organized volunteer time is devoted to health, education, and social assistance (e.g., child, elder, or disability care, soup kitchens, refugee support services), with culture and arts a close fourth.
- ☀ The largest proportion of hours (49%) was devoted to manager, organizer, or coordinator functions. [Indicates we use Rotarians use their organisational skills] However, 33.3% of hours are in manual service [eg. building gardens for schools, or installing sanitation to Pacific villages, and huge variety of other projects].



## **New India's five big, surprising Trends and what they mean**

Abhijit Majumder

**These trends go much beyond economic growth. They signal a civilisational revival, a great rise encompassing the social, cultural, financial and military.**

Just 10 years ago, if you had told anybody any of this, she would give you an incredulous smile.

And yet, much of what was unthinkable back then is becoming a reality in today's India. We are still very far away from the ideals of removing desperate poverty, raising per capita income to the point of dignified living, or ensuring justice or at least a legal level playing ground for the poor and underprivileged.

Let us examine five such trends which were inconceivable even a decade or two ago.

**Trend one:** India now has more women than men. According to the fifth National Family and Health Survey (NFHS) carried out by the government between 2019 and 2021, India has 1,020 women for every 1,000 men. In 2011, that figure was 943 females per 1,000 men and in 1991; it was 927 females per 1,000 men. Governments and non-government agencies worked in rare cohesion on this.

**Trend two:** There are more internet users in Indian villages than in the cities. Rural India has 20 percent more internet users than urban areas, according to a recent study by data and market measurement firm Nielsen. The study titled Bharat 2.0 internet study shows that out of India's 646 million active internet users aged two years and above as of December 2021.

**Trend three:** India has seen a sharp decline in fertility rate among women. The recent National Family Health Survey has shown that India's Total Fertility Rate (TFR or average number of children a woman would bear) is 2.0, down from 2.2 in the 2015-2016 survey.

**Trend four:** India has surpassed every nation, including China and the US, in digital financial transactions. For a country which was so cash-reliant till just six years ago, this is extraordinary.



India had the highest real-time payments among businesses around the world, with over 40 percent of such payments worldwide in 2021 being done here.

**Trend five:** Indian economy is just about one year away from overtaking that of Britain's, it erstwhile coloniser. The Indian economy is all set to become sixth largest in the world, says a recent report by British consultancy Cybr. It says that in 2022, the Indian economy will surpass France's and in 2023, Britain's.

*When we are in the centrifuge of change, it is hard to notice it. Which is why we must listen to what the figures are telling us! This generation is both the witness and executor of defining change.*

## **MINUTES OF THE 2190TH RWM JOINTLY WITH ROTARY BALLYGUNGE, ROTARY CALCUTTA MILLENNIUM & ROTARY CALCUTTA NABADIGANTA HELD ON SEPTEMBER 1ST, 2022 AT EASTERN METROPOLITAN CLUB**

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1. PP Ashif Shah welcomed all the clubs and requested President of Rotary Ballygunge to start the JRWM. Members were requested to rise for National Anthem led by him.
2. Rotary Garden Reach's President called the 2190th RWM to order.
3. President informed about the signature project 'Zero Thalassaemia' and requested the clubs present to join us in this initiative.
4. President Abinash handed over the proceedings to Rotary Calcutta Nabadiganta, followed by Rotary Calcutta Millennium.
5. Club Secretary, Rtn. Debasis conducted Club business.
6. Minutes of the last RWM were confirmed. President terminated the meeting.
7. After the JRWM, the meeting proceeded to the session on Ovarian Cancer, by Dr Rupashree Dasgupta.