

# Rotary

## INDIA

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## NEWS



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Jewellery courtesy: Birendrichand Ghanshyamdas Jewellers



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This coastal town near Chennai is famous for its monoliths and monuments, and is the venue for the 2021 Rotary zone institute.



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Cover designed by  
Krishnapratheesh S

Fans of Rotary News... and the critics

It's heartening to see on the October cover a tiny tot entangled with tubes being treated for a congenital heart defect at the Sathya Sai Sanjeevani Hospital. RI President Mehta describes well the importance of serving humanity. The Editor's note depicts the problems being faced by women in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime and the need for empowering girls. RID Mahesh Kotbagi stresses the importance of peacebuilding and how Rotary can be a partner in this great process.

RID A S Venkatesh explains the need to engage members in club activities to grow more and do more. Trustee chair John Germ shows the path for eradicating polio from the world. It is a delight to read the cover story on the Sanjeevani Centres doing 16,000 paediatric heart surgeries so far. Glad to note Rotary gives such importance to African countries for their progress and prosperity.



It is good news that Rotary has helped two million Indians to get vaccinated against Covid. Articles like *Weaving Colourful Dreams*, *Rotary a grand symphony to do good*, and *From home to sweet home* are all worth reading. Pandit Jasraj, the music veteran, will be remembered forever. Also, Club Hop pictures are beautiful. We are happy to get a value-packed edition every month.

Philip Mulappone M T  
RC Trivandrum  
Suburban — D 3211

I am happy to note that Rtn Vivek Gaur and other two trustees at the Sanjeevani Hospitals are taking up critical congenital heart diseases in children. I feel like a part of this organisation as I am also a practising doctor. The article *Aging blues* by Srinivasa Raghavan is relevant at the present times offering a good piece of advice to the elderly. Kudos to RC Kodaikanal for vaccinating the entire population of this hill town against Covid.

Dr Basava Varahalu  
RC Razole — D 3020

*Rotary News* must be kept in a library and maintained by every Rotary club in India as it will serve as a part of knowledge extension for new as well as senior Rotarians. It will educate Rotaractors on the essentials of Rotary and the kind of service it does. Thanks to the Editor and her team.

Abhay Kishore Chandwar, RC  
Dhanbad Midtown — D 3250

Agents of change

The article *Africa's Agents of Change* (Sep issue) showcased the contributions of Rotary Peace Fellows in Africa towards peacebuilding. The new peace centre at the Makerere University is supported by the Otto and Fran Walter Foundation which has pledged \$15.5 million. Many peace fellows after completion of their studies engage themselves in peacebuilding around the world. It really makes one to ponder why we should not explore the feasibility of engaging them and utilise their services in our trouble-torn Kashmir.

Ramaswamy NP, RC Rasipuram — D 2982

RC Coimbatore Metropolis has done yeoman service by reaching out to over 600 burn victims in partnership with a hospital. Rotary flag atop Mt Annapurna summit is a proud moment for all Rotarians.

Dr Pon Muthaiyan, RC Aduthurai — D 2981

Mehta meets Modi

I was happy to see RI Prez Mehta greeting PM Narendra Modi on the cover of the September issue. Editor Rasheeda Bhagat in her editorial *Who will help Afghan women* made us feel the helplessness, fear and pain of Afghan women. RID Mahesh Kotbagi's message on organ donation is important as even relatives often don't donate blood. The words of RID A S Venkatesh, "every child should get quality education," are noteworthy. Along with the implementation of all the programmes of the government, Rotary will also have to be engaged in providing quality education for every child.

Atmaram Gupta, RC Maharajanjanj — D 3120

I am an ardent reader of *Rotary News* as you are giving us quality stuff on so many important issues. Please accept my compliments on the brilliant issues your team brings out month after month. While reading about the Afghan women,

Ever since you had taken over the responsibility of Editor of *Rotary News* you have been doing a marvellous job with your experience and professional expertise in the field of journalism for a long period. Till then the editorship was handled by a few Rotarians, and once you came in, we readers felt a fresh fragrance. However, in the recent past, there is an over indulgence in your editorials, coverage of events and inclusion of non-Rotary articles and generous publication of photos of Rotary leaders, making us feel that the magazine has become a commercial journal, instead of an exclusive magazine for Rotarians to know about Rotary projects.

In the September issue, the pictures of Indian Rotary leaders occupied most of the pages. It appears that you and your teammates are only singing praise of senior leaders, who are supposed to be serving Rotary without any

personal projection, or a trumpeting band. *Rotary News* needs to become more professional.

*Sampathkumar  
RC Coimbatore  
Elite — D 3201*

*Rotary News* is primarily meant only for Rotary matters, but I am pained to find that in the recent past it is slowly being changed to any other magazine. The most glaring example was the coverage of Dilip Kumar in the July issue. What was the need to give him coverage of so many pages?

As a result of this lopsided attitude, genuine events of Rotarians are not being published in the magazine in the manner they deserve.

*B Devdas Rai  
RC Mangalore  
Central — D 3181*

my hands were trembling, as the future looks so bleak for Afghan women.

RI President Mehta has laid right emphasis on girls' education. It is a bane in our society that right from birth, a girl is told that she is unwanted and a burden and she is seldom treated on par with boys. Cumulative efforts of the government, society and parents are required to empower girls through education.

RC Delhi South has taken a lead with its *Beti Ki Shiksha* Project in empowering women. All the club members deserve praise for the project. Both the RI directors' messages are meaningful. Hats off to

RC Coimbatore for its *Hope after fire* Project under which 600 burn victims have benefited. Thanks to Dr S Raja Sabapathy for performing more than 1,000 surgeries under the project.

*Raj Kumar Kapoor,  
RC Roopnagar — D 3080*

RI President Mehta's message rightly focuses on improving the livelihoods of underprivileged people. Rotarians can improve the living conditions of these deprived communities. They have almost eradicated polio. But we have to work tirelessly and follow the guidance of Mehta to achieve our goals.

The Editor's note on girls' empowerment dwells on the fate of Afghan women. The article on Mehta's whirlwind tour of African countries rightly talks about challenges in providing sanitation, scholarship for girls and bridging other critical gaps for the internally displaced people in that continent. On the grim situation in Afghanistan, we can only pray for a good administration by the Taliban.

*S Muniandi, RC Dindigul  
Fort — D 3000*

### Praise for Rotary News Plus

A nice cover page showing big tricolours with Rotary Wheel, a great selection for the cover page. Thanks for the good selection of service projects by Rotary clubs across India.

*Naveen Garg, RC Sunam — D 3090*

This e-magazine is a good initiative to keep our planet eco-friendly by avoiding newsprint and also it connects Rotarians by sharing their club projects and programmes.

*Vikalp Jain, RC Wainganga  
Balaghat — D 3261*

We welcome your feedback.

Write to the Editor:

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**rushbhagat@gmail.com.**

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along with hi-res photos, to  
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**www.rotarynewsonline.org** to read about more Rotary projects.

# TRF: A monument of love for humanity



SERVE TO CHANGE LIVES

**G**reetings, dear changemakers of Rotary. I first discovered the value of service when I saw how a few simple acts can immeasurably change lives. It began when I joined others in my club for a project to bring toilets and clean drinking water to rural villages near Kolkata. It moved forward when we promoted sanitation and provided opportunities for education across the country, thanks to generous gifts from supporters who believed in our projects as much as those of us on the ground did.

There is no better time of the year to be reminded of that generosity than November, which is Rotary Foundation month. As the charitable arm of Rotary International, TRF is the engine that powers so many Rotary projects throughout the world. The Foundation transforms your gifts into projects that change lives. It is the Foundation that helps us to get closer to our goal of eradicating polio, to show more people how we promote peace through tangible actions, and to demonstrate the impact our projects have in our areas of focus.

Consider some recent projects that were made possible by the Foundation:

- The Rotary Clubs of Guatemala La Reforma, Guatemala, and Calgary, Alberta, received an \$80,000 global grant to organise

a comprehensive plan to train nurses and rural healthcare workers to prevent and treat cervical cancer and to implement a sustainable system of referrals in seven regions of Guatemala.

- More than two dozen hospitals in Honduras received personal protective equipment for their medical staff thanks to a \$169,347 global grant sponsored by the Rotary clubs of Villa Real de Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and Waldo Brookside-Kansas City, Missouri.
- The Rotary Clubs of Cotonou Le Nautile, Benin, and Tournai Haut-Escaut, Belgium, received a \$39,390 global grant to provide agricultural training at an ecologically responsible permaculture mini farm connected to a centre for children in Sowé, Benin. This will help a new generation of farmers become economically self-sufficient.

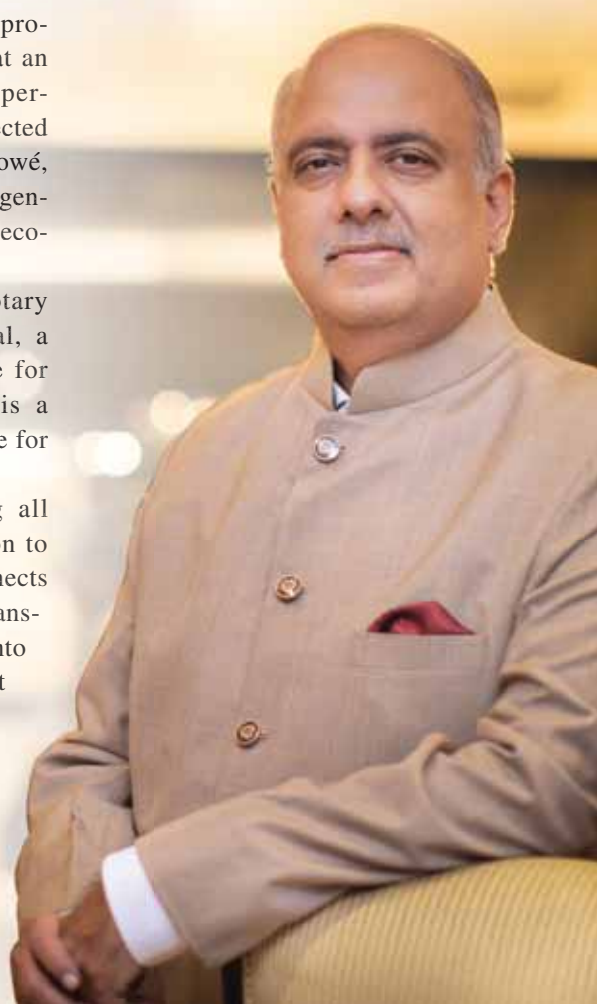
I like comparing The Rotary Foundation to the Taj Mahal, a monument of one man's love for a woman. The Foundation is a dynamic monument of our love for all of humanity.

This month I am asking all Rotary clubs to bring attention to the Foundation. It is what connects all Rotarians worldwide and transforms our collective passions into projects that change lives. Visit

[rotary.org/donate](https://rotary.org/donate); once there, you will have an opportunity to give directly to the programme you're most passionate about.

Thank you for giving your all to Rotary. You are the reason that Rotary is able to *do more* and *grow more*. Let's continue to represent that important legacy this month, this year, and beyond as we *Serve to Change Lives*.

**Shekhar Mehta**  
President, Rotary International





## Combating addiction the Rotary way

One of the major problems afflicting our youth and their families in India today is addiction of various kinds; to tobacco, liquor, drugs, and of late, the Internet. The last includes the dark net, which can only be accessed through specific software, configuration, or authorisation. All the unfathomable horrors that you can think of are available on the dark net, which is, unfortunately, attracting a certain group of disillusioned, unhappy, misled and misguided youngsters, many of them in schools. On this dark net, you can buy drugs through the black market, access pornography, get information about credit and debit card numbers, bank accounts details, leaving them vulnerable to hacking and even firearms. Even suicides have been committed here.

A Rotary Action Group on Addiction Prevention (RAG-AP) has been functioning under the chairmanship of past RI president Kalyan Banerjee for the last three years, with Johan Maertens from Belgium putting in a lot of hard work in fighting substance abuse across the world, particularly Europe. The core team working under Banerjee, as detailed in the cover story, is passionately working on spreading awareness, prevention, deaddiction and rehabilitation.

As PDG Ulhas Kolhatkar (RID 3142), a paediatrician himself, says the Internet has taken precedence over the other three forms of addiction — tobacco, alcohol and drugs — among the young. While earlier doctors like him used to see 14–15-year-old students of Classes 9 or 10 with Internet addiction, gradually the age has come down to 12–13 years. “We now find that Class 7 and 8 kids are getting addicted to first tobacco, and then beer.”

As for Internet addiction, young kids, barely 5, 6 or 7, whose prowess with mobile phone technology we used to marvel at, and even show off to friends and relatives on an odd occasion, are now sadly becoming addicted to the mobile phone and the Internet. The Covid pandemic forced parents to put these dangerous and addictive instruments in the hands of their children for online classes. Even homes, where a certain age bar had been strictly put in place for mobile phone use, were forced to capitulate for the sake of their children’s education.

While the core team of this RAG is fighting substance abuse, we know that for any Rotary programme to really make an impact, it is action at the grassroots or the club level that is required. Polio eradication in India happened because Rotary clubs across the country got involved, and continue to be active in immunising children during NIDs.

As both Banerjee and PDG Deepak Purohit, another warrior in this project, put it, addiction is a silent killer and is killing many more Indians than the corona pandemic did, and we need to tackle this problem. Rotaractors and other youngsters have been involved too and have done a sterling job in creating awareness material on this colossal problem through posters, videos, etc. PDG Himanshu Thackar is liaising with the government at various levels so that a partnership can be forged between the government and Rotary and training sessions conducted for doctors, teachers, students and parents to take the substance-abuse bull by its horns. The article gives vivid tips on what concrete measures each club can implement to lessen the pain which afflicts so many families across caste, class and religious identities in India.

Rasheeda Bhagat

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# Director

## On World Polio Day a flashback

In 1955, Dr Jonas Edward Salk developed a polio vaccine that was certified as 'safe and effective' and five years later, the US government licensed the Oral Polio vaccine developed by Dr Albert Sabin. In 1979, Rotary began its fight against polio with a project to immunise 6 million children in the Philippines.

In 1985, Rotary International launched PolioPlus, the first and largest internationally coordinated private sector support for a public health initiative, with an initial fundraising target of \$120 million. In a response that was an eye-opener for the world, Rotarians raised \$240 million for polio eradication. This made the world sit up and recognise the power of Rotary. In 1988, RI and World Health Organisation launched the Global Polio Eradication Initiative. At that time there were over 350,000 polio cases in more than 125 countries. In 2009, Rotary's total contribution to polio eradication touched \$800 million. Bill and Melinda Gates pledged \$355 million and challenged Rotarians to raise \$200 million. This would eventually result in a combined fundraise of \$555 million in support of the polio eradication initiative.

In 2012, India was removed from the

list of polio-endemic countries after going for a year without any new polio cases. In 2014, India completed three years without any new cases, and the WHO certified the entire Southeast Asia region polio-free. In 2019, Nigeria completed three years without new polio cases. Today, only Afghanistan and Pakistan remain to be freed of polio.

Yet, Rotary cannot sit back and rest. If we do not completely eradicate polio in the next 10 years, there is the horrendous possibility of 200,000 new cases across the world every year; 99 per cent success can become 100 per cent failure!

What was expected to be a 10-year effort has taken more than 35 years. During the peak of the campaign, even the formidable LTTE agreed to a ceasefire in Sri Lanka to enable polio immunisation. Today, as Afghanistan stands at a turning point in its troubled history, the Taliban has extended its hand of cooperation so that every Afghan child is immunised.

On World Polio Day, I urge every Rotarian and Rotary club across the world to remember that polio eradication is what the world will thank Rotary for. We must accomplish the task. We must eradicate polio from the face of the earth, forever.



A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Mahesh'.

**Dr Mahesh Kotbagi**  
RI Director, 2021-23

# Speak

## Let us work for a bigger cause

Rotarians around the world celebrated World Polio Day recently. Eradication of polio has been our global priority for nearly 35 years now and we are almost there. Our perseverance and success are something all of us are proud of. However a majority of present day Rotarians haven't had the opportunity to play much of a role in our fight against polio. I fondly recall the NIDs of the past when the entire club would turn out either for advocacy, bringing children to the booth or to encourage the paramedics. NIDs brought all of us together with a sense of purpose.

With that experience, I feel we need a similar cause to bring us together, motivate us and to grow this organisation in the years to come. While RI is unlikely to announce our next thrust area globally till the world is declared polio-free, we can still find something to charge us all up without losing sight of the resource mobilisation efforts for ending polio.

Regionally either at a club or at a district level, let us identify an activity that is relevant, needed, impactful and scalable. It could be a hospital, a school, blood bank or restoration of a large water body or anything that is large and significant. Rotarians of the region should be able to identify with the cause. Let us not be satisfied with doing small deeds. While they do make a difference to the beneficiary, they don't do justice to the potential that we have as an organisation. The collective effort of Rotarians has to be much greater



than the sum of its parts. As most of these large initiatives cannot be completed in a year, the normal leadership tenure in Rotary, I urge every club to have a clearly defined strategic plan with the buy in from the future leaders that would give the clubs the power to think big and the ability to execute them.

Let us not underestimate our individual capabilities and thereby underperform. The key is in our ability to make a difference in our community through large, impactful signature projects. As is said, when your signature becomes an autograph, you have arrived. Similarly when our projects become signature projects Rotary gets noticed. Best wishes!

**AS Venkatesh**  
RI Director, 2021-23

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## Do you know your Foundation?



When people ask me what TRF is, I tell them it's the heart of Rotary. You may have heard before that Rotary has an intelligent heart. The Foundation combines our emotional response of compassion with pragmatic action. With both heart and brain, you can change the world.

So, what does the Foundation mean to you? November is Rotary Foundation month, but do you really know our Foundation? First, it truly is *our* Foundation. TRF doesn't belong to me or the other 14 trustees, nor to the RI Board of Directors, nor to the RI president. It belongs to each Rotarian around the world. And it's there

for all of us to change the world. We save mothers and children because we have compassion, and we know how to plan. We provide clean water and sanitation where they're needed to those who need them, because we build strategies based on a community's needs. We combine support for peace, education, and economic stability for at-risk communities with an ability to manage big projects.

Giving to the Foundation is smart, too, because in doing so, you multiply the value of that gift. How many other foundations can you think of that identify the projects, fund them, and run them on the ground themselves? Ours is the only one I know. And we get it all done at such a relatively low administrative cost. This is one reason Charity Navigator consistently gives the Foundation a four-star rating.

I sometimes get asked a question: How much should I be giving to the Foundation? Each year, make a gift of what you can afford to give. For some, that is \$100, and for others, more. What's most important is

that you give something, because each generous gift helps us meet the increased demand we're seeing from members for global grants and our other programmes.

This year, we want to raise \$50 million for PolioPlus, which will be matched 2-to-1 by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, for a total of \$150 million. If every Rotary club contributed just \$1,500, we would surpass this goal. We have other goals as well — for the Annual Fund, the Endowment Fund, and outright gifts — adding up to a grand total of \$410 million.

We will get there if we set our hearts — and minds — to it. But remember, it's not about the money; it's what the money can do. There's a saying that goes, "I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples." The Foundation is that stone, so let us turn ripples into great waves with it, using our hearts and our minds.

**John F Germ**  
Foundation Trustee Chair

### Doing good with TRF help

## On a life-saving mission

### Team Rotary News

Rotary Club of Shri Ganganagar City, RID 3090, recently provided a critical care ambulance worth ₹25 lakh to the Charitable Trust of Shri Ganganagar to be put to use free of cost for the underprivileged. The facility was provided with the help of a global grant supported by TRF and RC Capalaba, Australia. It is equipped with a ventilator, oxygen concentrator, defibrillator, BP monitor, nebuliser and infusion pump, and will be maintained by past president Shailesh Goyal and Rtn Ajay Jhunthra. Bhanu Prakash was the project chairman.

PDG Vijay Gupta handed over the vehicle to Rtn V B Gupta who heads the trust, in the presence of DG Parveen



PDG Vijay Arora (third from L) and DG Parveen Jindal at the launch of the ambulance.

Jindal, PDGs Vijay Arora, Ashwani Sachdeva, Sanjay Gupta, DGN Ghansham Kansal and DRFC Dharamvir Garg. ■

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Rotary 

## District Wise TRF Contributions as on September 2021

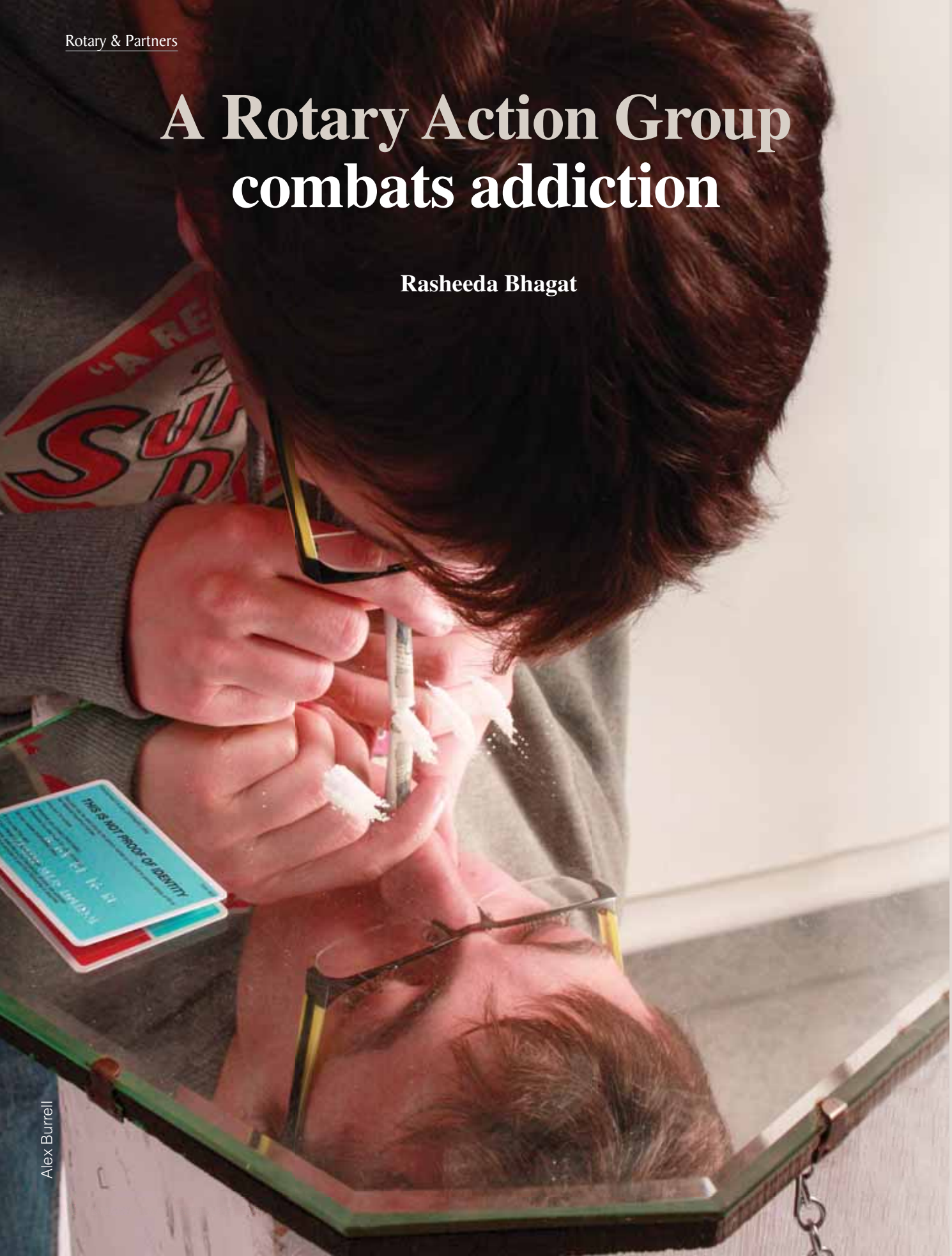
(in US Dollars)

District Number	Annual Fund	PolioPlus Fund	Endowment Fund	Other Funds	Total Contributions	
<b>India</b>						
2981	31,354	736	0	151,814	183,904	
2982	23,242	867	0	97	24,206	
3000	3,630	11	0	1,000	4,640	
3011	6,045	3,268	0	48,217	57,531	
3012	16,219	3,734	25,041	158,478	203,472	
3020	20,822	1,415	6,082	4,620	32,939	
3030	11,641	267	15,027	0	26,935	
3040	15,546	50	0	5,546	21,142	
3053	2,065	200	0	0	2,265	
3054	1,802	255	0	151,086	153,144	
3060	29,340	149	0	59,607	89,095	
3070	6,868	0	0	26,988	33,856	
3080	7,006	3,304	0	703	11,013	
3090	11,564	0	2,000	0	13,564	
3100	6,574	0	0	0	6,574	
3110	3,020	0	0	0	3,020	
3120	7,542	0	0	0	7,542	
3131	149,921	11,202	0	123,724	284,847	
3132	8,132	800	5,000	507	14,439	
3141	211,066	397	50,000	147,769	409,232	
3142	114,462	344	8,145	24	122,975	
3150	8,899	3,260	0	4,607	16,765	
3160	4,414	423	17,264	0	22,100	
3170	23,431	5,437	1,710	9,735	40,312	
3181	4,347	30	0	0	4,377	
3182	5,342	0	0	0	5,342	
3190	42,584	4,728	30,411	0	77,723	
3201	25,871	2,220	0	104,601	132,692	
3203	14,149	9,948	6,086	132,702	162,884	
3204	991	38	0	1,036	2,065	
3211	12,280	280	0	10,632	23,193	
3212	7,998	218	1,036	588	9,840	
3231	5,952	647	0	2,851	9,450	
3232	25,463	11,721	16,501	127,160	180,845	
3240	15,123	2,123	0	2,597	19,844	
3250	2,021	672	1,036	1,685	5,414	
3261	3,645	24	0	0	3,669	
3262	1,643	51	0	0	1,694	
3291	43,700	1,022	11,171	0	55,893	
<b>India Total</b>	<b>935,714</b>	<b>69,840</b>	<b>196,509</b>	<b>1,278,375</b>	<b>2,480,438</b>	
3220	Sri Lanka	32,132	5,483	1,510	1,000	40,125
3271	Pakistan	308	316	0	3,155	3,780
3272	Pakistan	12,495	10,293	0	0	22,788
3281	Bangladesh	11,371	2,145	12,000	16,399	41,916
3282	Bangladesh	4,595	120	1,000	500	6,215
3292	Nepal	19,715	3,907	0	60,856	84,477
<b>South Asia Total</b>	<b>1,016,330</b>	<b>92,105</b>	<b>211,019</b>	<b>1,360,285</b>	<b>2,679,739</b>	

Annual Fund (AF) includes SHARE, Areas of Focus, World Fund and Disaster Response. AF contributions count towards club annual giving goals and are included in per capita amounts. **Source:** RI South Asia Office.

# A Rotary Action Group combats addiction

Rasheeda Bhagat



**W**hen Johan Maertens, vice-president and chair, Scientific Committee, of the Rotary Action Group for addiction prevention (RAG-AP) invited me to chair this action group, as he felt that I will be able to draw in more Rotarians for this cause, I decided to focus on India as substance abuse has become a huge problem in our country,” says past RI president Kalyan Banerjee, adding that in several European countries Rotary has done a lot of work in this area.

This was three years ago; Banerjee pulled in two past RI presidents — Jonathan Majiyagbe and Gary Huang — on board, put together a core team in India and sent out letters to all the RI districts in India, underlining the need for Rotarians to get seriously involved as “we are a country where addiction is a huge issue with large numbers addicted to tobacco, alcohol, drugs, etc. It’s a growing menace which needs to be tackled.”

But even as the initiative of involving Rotary clubs in India to address substance abuse took off, the corona pandemic hit and as Rotarians

grappled with the challenges related to fighting Covid, this initiative took a back seat. But now, of the 40 RI districts, 20 have wrote back expressing their willingness to take this programme forward, says Banerjee.

“My main objective is to get each Rotary district from India to form a core group to work on addiction prevention and substance abuse. It is a fact that more people are dying from addiction of different kinds in India today than the number of people killed by Covid. This is a raging problem which not too many talk or are bothered about, except those affected and the families afflicted. I believe this is something that needs to be taken on a serious footing, particularly as children and youth are likely to get addicted,” he says.

**T**hree PDGs who are closely working closely with Banerjee to create awareness on the ill-effects of different forms of addiction in India and create avenues for treatment by forging partnerships with

other groups, corporates and the government, are Ulhas Kolhatkar (RID 3142), Deepak Purohit (RID 3131) and Himanshu Thacker (RID 3060). “Kolhatkar, himself a paediatrician, has done a great job by talking to students, particularly in RID 3142, and also roping in other groups already working on addiction prevention in India. Purohit and Thacker are also involved in the various initiatives we have taken to talk to students, teachers, educating and motivating them to talk to larger groups to spread awareness on the dangers of addiction,” adds Banerjee.

PDG Kolhatkar says he is “deeply concerned about all kinds of addictions afflicting younger and younger children; so we are trying to focus on school kids. Invariably, the first exposure to any kind of addiction, especially in children, is tobacco; the second stage is alcohol and then come drugs.”

Intervenes Banerjee, “Today, apart from opium and other drugs, tobacco and alcohol, one of the most threatening forms of addiction in young children is addiction to the Internet. On the dark net, some



PDG Ulhas Kolhatkar (third from L) in Thane at one of the Rotary Action Group Addiction Prevention programmes.

youngsters have even committed suicide because of this addiction. And this is something that needs to be addressed. Another concern is that children are all the time playing games, or watching pornography. Whatever the addiction, the Internet has emerged as highly addictive in some groups in our country.”

He says that Maharashtra is one of the worst affected states, along with Punjab, as “depicted in the film *Uda Punjab*. The good news is that Rtn Manmohan Singh from Punjab, who is working on addiction prevention, is the brother of the new Punjab CM Charanjit Singh Channi, and such connections between Rotary and the government are being established everywhere, which is very helpful.”

Banerjee adds that a core member of the Rotary executive committee in India working on prevention of substance abuse is PDG Himanshu Thacker from Surat, RID 3060. “He and his wife have been working on de-addiction in Gujarat for the last 20 years and he is specifically focusing on people who have become de-addicted and helping them to stay so. As we know, the de-addicted need continuous help to prevent relapse, and they are the best ones to take the message to those who are potential future addicts, by telling them about the

dangers of addiction from their personal experience.”

Kolhatkar adds that now the Internet has taken precedence over the other three forms of addiction — tobacco, alcohol and drugs — among the young. “Previously we used to see 14–15-year old students of Classes 9 or 10 with Internet addiction, but now the age has come down to 12–13 years and that is frightening. We now find that Class 7 and 8 kids are getting addicted to first tobacco, and then beer or other softer forms of alcohol... not hard liquor.”

As for Internet addiction, he now finds children between 5 and 8 years getting addicted, “particularly with classes going online during Covid, and children getting access to mobile phones even in homes where parents were earlier strict about giving them access to the cell phone.”

As mandated by the RAG on addiction prevention, many Rotary districts are holding workshops for psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, teachers and others on addiction prevention, and Kolhatkar says that at a recent training seminar “conducted as a part of our initiative **Health Connect**, participants shared many stories of 7, 8 and 9-year-old children getting addicted to the dark net. It was really disturbing.”

“What is alarming,” adds the child specialist, “is that everyday I am seeing



children who are getting addicted to the mobile phone. They may not be strictly labelled so, because this is too small a period to make this classification, but the symptoms are clear. They are jittery, unstable and are displaying symptoms of ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and some of them are getting labelled as ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) but I do not know whether they really come under these heads or are part of the Internet addiction syndrome.”

**P**RIP Banerjee adds that as RAG started



working on addiction prevention, “we’ve found that in Mumbai students, drug-taking is a significant addiction, particularly in the slum areas. The horrifying part is that slum children are getting addicted to drugs, and vendors and peddlers are well spread out in Mumbai



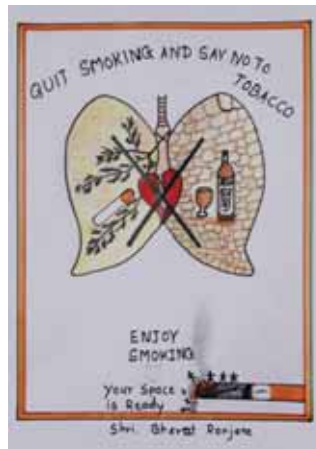
Juan Alvarado

trained people. This is the first step. These people will go to the schools and address PTA meetings and teachers; we have different modules to train the latter. Next Rotarians will be trained and after Rotary intervention, training of students will start.” This will involve both spotting children with addiction, and subsequently, with the help of clinical psychologists the de-addiction of these children will begin. All this has been worked out, he says.

**P** DG Purohit adds, “For three years now — and since 2019 — we have been working on addiction prevention. Looking back, we are surprised how we ourselves were ignorant and unaware of this big problem of addiction in our community. In Rotary we’ve been working on so many different focus areas but somehow addiction has not featured in our routine community service work of the district. Only when we started working on this, we realised the severity of this problem.”

Sharing numbers, he says, what causes great concern is that in India, almost a third in the 20–30-year age group, or 33 per cent of young adults, are addicted to tobacco. “Also, today India has the dubious distinction of having 12 per cent of the world’s

Posters generated at a competition organised by RC Borh-Rajgad, RID 3131.



slums. They are present at all the *nukkads* (corners). The result is that slum kids have taken to stealing and selling anything they can lay their hands on, just to buy drugs. The money earned by the father, or kept aside by the mother to buy food for the family is stolen by the kid, who is addicted. The parents are not in control at all.”

Kolhatkar underlines the need for a whole lot of training programmes. On the training methodology, he says, “We are developing a programme called **School Connect** and in the first phase this will train the physicians, psychiatrists and psychologists so that we will get a bank of at least 50



# Telltale symptoms of addiction

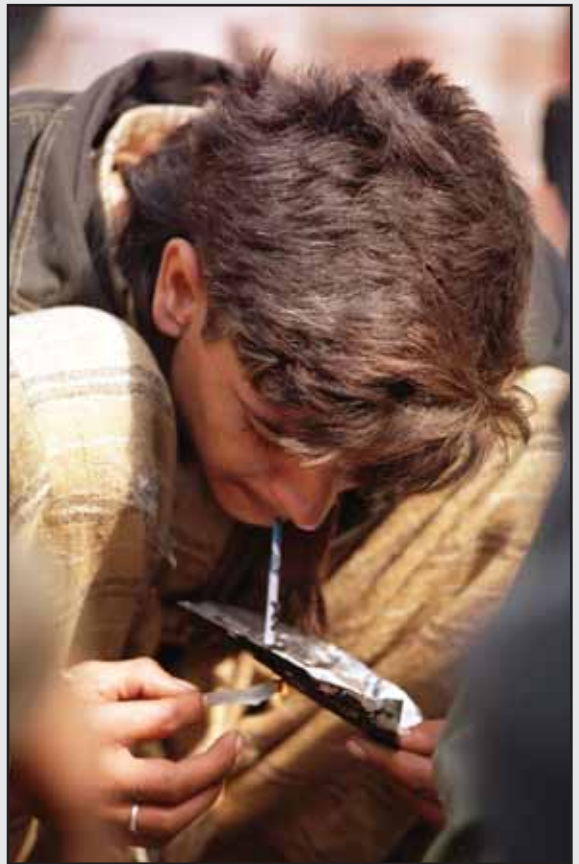
ask PDG Ulhas Kolhatkar about how a parent can tell that her child is addicted, because many parents have no clue, or are in denial. So what are the telltale symptoms for a parent to get warned that his child may have some form of addiction?

His response: "First, the children will be very reluctant to undergo routine studies. Other signs are sleeplessness or insomnia, because many of these children are on social media, Facebook, Instagram or the dark net, mostly during the night hours when the parents are sleeping."

The third symptom to look out for, he adds, is that as they are online quite a lot, "because of this overexposure or over indulgence on the Internet, they end up with a problem of anorexia

or decreased appetite. Also gradually, scholastic performance will decrease, their grades will fall and the child will slip from excellent to average to poor and will finally fail in exams. That is the usual journey of addiction among children.

He admits seeing the denial syndrome in many parents who first say that our child cannot be addicted to any evil. But invariably, first the teacher will notice some symptoms in the child and will quiz both the students and the parents. "At first, normally the parents will deny that their child could be addicted. Next, the cultural taboos kick in and the parent will say my child has been brought up so well, taught the right



smokers; about 27.5 crore of our population is addicted only to tobacco. So the problem is huge. And tobacco has been proved beyond doubt to be the leading cause of all forms of cancer."

Another alarming statistic given by Purohit is that "in the last three years alone, there has been a three-fold increase in alcohol consumption among young Indians. About 62.5 million Indians are addicted... not social drinking but addiction... to alcohol, which is directly linked to liver cirrhosis."

**T**he same startling statistics stare us in the face when it comes to addiction

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**Most people don't understand that addiction is a treatable disease and by treating an addict, we are not only saving a life, but also creating a happy family.**

**PDG Himanshu Thacker**

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to various types of drugs. In the last 10 years alone, India has seen a **30 per cent increase** in drug addiction. "One statistic says that over 60 per cent of Punjab's youth are taking drugs in some form or the other, 600,000 people are dying every year in the world due to drug-related problems, so addiction and substance abuse is a much bigger problem than corona."

In the background of these numbers, adds Purohit, "under past RI president Banerjee's leadership we approached Rotary districts in India to work on substance abuse by early 2020. About 20 showed interest in working for this cause. But then the pandemic hit and schools and colleges were closed." As work has to be done with and through

values, etc, and will not even touch drugs. So we ask them to see the counsellor, who gives parents tips on what to observe or watch out for in the child. Scolding the child is of no use, as is punishing them by keeping them hungry; it simply doesn't work."

Parents have to be taught by trained professionals the proper techniques of handling an addicted child... and why the child is doing it. With proper handling, love and affection the child can be weaned out of addiction, he adds.

That is why counselling is a must. While private schools have counsellors, municipal and government schools, thanks to lack of financial resources, don't have them. "But in private schools, particularly in the CBSE and ICSE schools, it has almost become compulsory to have counsellors," he says. Now in government and regional language schools, "through help from local Rotary clubs, we are trying to provide the services of counsellors."

schools and colleges, "we resorted to zoom and internet for training and awareness and created a Rotary website **rotaryaddictionprevention.in**. It is operational and suggests easy projects that clubs can do... our own product for our own people."

Districts have also done poster competitions to raise awareness and these have got enthusiastic response, "which shows people are interested. Then there are video competitions; a 2.5-minute video on drug prevention done by Rotaractors has created a good impact," he adds.

In RID 3131, an addiction prevention centre has been started by a Rotarian where 50 children are taking treatment.



Paul Noronha

**R**ight now, this RAG is focusing on awareness creation and prevention, and identifying areas where Rotary clubs and their members can work. "We have to give clubs projects that are simple to do, and involve Rotaractors too, as they can make a big impact. We have created some PowerPoint presentations that can be downloaded from our website and presented at club or district meets."

Banerjee adds that apart from approaching clinicians and experts who can guide Rotarians working on prevention of substance abuse, "we are also in touch with other non-Rotary addiction prevention groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous."

Kolhatkar says, "We've formed a national scientific advisory committee which includes big names such as Dr Pratima Murthy, director of Nimhans, Bengaluru, and other experts. These people have worked day and night for two months and created two beautiful programmes — **Health Connect** and **School Connect** — and the next on

the cards is **Rotarian Connect** for our national committee."

But, says Banerjee, "our final vehicle is the club, because ultimately all Rotary work and action takes place at the club level. We are concentrating on how to create a volunteer base and train them, so that they are useful in tackling this huge problem."

Kolhatkar adds that when Rotarians themselves, who were once addicted but have now won the battle, come forward to lead from the front, it makes a big difference. "For instance, one of our very senior addiction prevention leaders says very openly that he was himself addicted to alcohol 30 years earlier, but is now addiction-free, and he is such an asset for our district."

**C**orporate involvement and partnership is being forged through requesting corporates to provide infrastructure and their premises, for training. "Our partners have promised to sponsor all our de-addiction programmes."

# What clubs can do

Past RI president Kalyan Banerjee who heads Rotary International's action group on substance abuse gives these pointers to clubs in order to identify the root causes of addiction to tobacco, drugs, alcohol, the dark net, etc.

Clubs can participate in this programme thus:

- Hold orientation programmes for members by inviting outside experts to address them
- Form a small addiction prevention committee
- Organise awareness lectures with the help of AA (Alcohol Anonymous), NA (Narcotics Anonymous) or other experts in the field of tobacco and Internet de-addiction
- Hold competitions — posters, essay, poems, videos, etc
- Awareness rallies
- Organise cyber *suraksha* programme (RAG can help here)
- Organise health camps or exhibitions
- Hold marathon, cyclothon, walkathon, etc
- Issue certificates to small institutes, organisations once they become tobacco or alcohol-free
- Recognise services of individual Rotarians by giving 'Rotary Addiction Prevention Champion Awards'
- Start de-addiction clinics, rehabilitation centres, etc.

PRIP Banerjee adds that the “government is very proactive too in addiction prevention and almost every district has a de-addiction centre which is run by the Ministry of Social Welfare, and PDG Himanshu Thackar is trying to work with them.”

Underlining the importance of Rotarians and Rotaractors guiding and bringing people together to fight substance abuse, he says that this initiative was particularly important for women, “because when the husbands get addicted, the wives suffer the most. We know we have a big

problem also in the North East and I am happy to report that our Rotarians in the North East are very active and involved... in places such as Assam, Meghalaya, etc. We are hoping for better engagement with Rotary districts south of Hyderabad.”

Dr Judita Syiemlieh, past president of RC Orchid City Shillong, a core committee member of RAG-AP, says, “The problem was rampant in Manipur and Mizoram for long, and now we are seeing addiction in Shillong too. We have been trying very hard to sensitise Rotarians on

the need to work in this area, have been forming committees at the local level, and also trying to form a partnership with the government.”

PDG Thackar and his wife Aruna, a trained social worker, have been working relentlessly on addiction prevention right from 1989, when she set up an NGO in Surat called *Parivartan Deaddiction and Rehabilitation Centre*. “She has a great experience in working with addicts and must have handled around 25,000 people since 1989,” says Thackar.

After the NGO was started, and Aruna began working with the addicted, Thackar helped out through liaison with the GoI. “The result is that the government has recognised Parivartan as a grant programme, and I coordinate with the government on various issues, including developing systems, and learning from its vast experience in addiction prevention.”

He says that what “most people don't understand is that addiction of any kind is a treatable disease, and that is where we, as Rotarians, have to create awareness. Because by treating an addict, we are not only saving a life, but also creating a happy



An anti-drugs seminar conducted by RC Solan, RID 3080, for school students.



PRIP Kalyan Banerjee, chairman, RAG-AP, with the committee members. PDGs Pinky Patel, Himanshu Thacker, Ulhas Kolhatkar, Deepak Purohit and Ajay Gupta are also seen.

family. That is our goal for Parivartan, and this Rotary project too.”

The couple already has a rich and several decades’ experience in developing skits, glove puppet shows, street plays, workshops for school and college students, road rallies, apart from skill development of various types required in any de-addiction programme.

The PDG recalls that as governor in 1995–96, during his visit to the clubs, Aruna made it a point to get the help of Rotaractors and Inner Wheel members to conduct audio-visual presentations to create awareness on both addiction prevention and treatment.

The passionate crusader answers the question on the kind of dent Rotary can make on addiction prevention and treatment in India thus: “Rotary can do what we have done for polio, and for that we will have to work with and involve the top district leadership in this project.” He recommends that every district should appoint a chairperson, with a three-year term, “and all the clubs

should have committees dedicated to this cause. We can then train the designated people to do programmes in the community, concentrating on prevention, which is very necessary.” There are three phases in addiction — primary, secondary and tertiary — and in the tertiary phase comes treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration of the de-addiction person in mainstream society. “In the last, Rotary can really play a very important role.”

Thacker is already “negotiating with the GoI to become a partner in this RAG initiative, by supporting our awareness campaigns, give us addiction prevention content in regional languages and also training our volunteers. The government is very excited to partner with Rotary in this initiative, the ministers are very appreciative and enthusiastic, but the bureaucracy always takes some time!”

PDG Purohit adds that at the moment this RAG’s objective is to reach as many Rotary clubs as possible and impress on the members how crucial this fight against substance

abuse is. “Somehow, this has not yet become a focus activity of Rotarians; we need to motivate them to nip addiction of any form in the bud in places where it is just beginning and control it where it has already spread. Happily, our Rotaractors are already in touch with schools and colleges through our “connect” programmes, because these are the main places where addiction takes root.”

As Banerjee puts it, “Rotary has the means and the people, but we don’t have the method, and that’s what we are trying to overcome. One of the methods is to form clubs dedicated, at least partially, to fighting substance abuse. A beginning has already been made in Mumbai, with a cause-based hybrid club — Rotary Club of Addiction Prevention — with 30 members.”

While the Rotaract club of Himayathnagar conducted an alcohol awareness programme, a detailed workshop by the RAG-AP team and an Inner Wheel club was organised.

Designed by N Krishnamurthy

# Leading RAG's de-addiction initiative

Rasheeda Bhagat



**T**wo clubs that have really taken the bull of substance abuse by its horns are Rotary Club of Mumbai Ghatkopar (RCMG), RID 3141, and RC Hyderabad Midtown, RID 3150. In Mumbai, a cause-based hybrid club titled RC Addiction Prevention has been sponsored by RCMG,

with 30 members, and 20 more in the pipeline. It has also started a de-addiction centre at Spandan Hospital in the metropolis.

Yogesh Zaveri, a member of RCMG, who is passionately involved in fighting substance abuse for many years says this de-addiction centre was started by their club about a year ago and OPD

services are available here for all four types of addiction. Meetings are held here in partnership with the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), and “about 25 people, in the age group 35–40, attend these meetings.”

An electrical engineer by profession, Zaveri is a charter member and past president of RCMG. He says at these meetings in Spandan

**Rtn Yogesh Zaveri, with the VTT group, attending the *Unplugged* programme at the Ghent University, Belgium.**



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**People share stories of how they are not respected by their family members because of their alcohol addiction, and are counselled by people who have successfully quit.**

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Hospital, “people share stories of how they are not respected by their family members because of their alcohol addiction, and are counselled by people who have successfully quit.”

The counselling sessions are very effective and “two doctors from the hospital were so impressed by this programme that they have both been made Rotarians and are now members of the cause-based club RC Addiction Prevention.” The new club has already established three OPD clinics for treatment, counselling and awareness for all types of addictions, including Internet addiction.

Himself a college teacher, Zaveri says that initially, concerned about the manner in which youngsters were getting addicted to tobacco, gutka and alcohol, “our club initially started working against substance abuse through street plays done by youngsters on addiction. When Johan Maertens visited India in 2008, I was our district’s TRF chair, and he said if you are interested, we can organise a VTT (vocational training tour) to Belgium’s Ghent University. The VTT materialised in 2012, and I took two faculty members from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences and one from the Bombay University.”

The group of four underwent *Unplugged*, a beautiful, school-based intervention programme to tackle substance abuse among adolescents. It is a comprehensive social influence programme for addiction prevention, and is compulsory for all schools in Belgium. “Since then RCMG has trained over 200 teachers for this *Unplugged* programme,” says Zaveri.

His club has also conducted training programmes for family physicians in combatting substance abuse, and treating the addicted. “This project is being undertaken under a global grant, and so far, over 1,000 family physicians have been trained.” Other activities done by the club include holding AA meetings at a hospital in a Mumbai suburb, and at the Spandan Holistic Mother and Child Care Hospital in the metro.

The club has also developed a programme for training post graduate Psychology students to be school counsellors for addiction prevention conducted by the SNTD University, Mumbai.

**R**ID 3150 has been one of the active districts in combating substance abuse, and has already conducted a mental health awareness seminar for a joint Rotaract club meeting, where addiction awareness formed an important topic of discussion. RC Hyderabad Midtown has been in the forefront of the RAG work for tobacco cessation, and at a multi-district conference organised by the club, ‘Ican’ care programme for tobacco de-addiction was introduced.

A joint meeting was conducted by the Bareilly International University, Gujarat University and RC Hyderabad Midtown (host club) with eight co-host clubs. This club has also been conducting joint meetings with clubs across Rotary districts in the Punjab, Odisha, Himachal, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu. Eighteen meetings with 30 participating clubs have been held and distribution of tobacco cessation booklets has begun. ■

# Building a fairer, inclusive, sustainable society during pandemic

Rajendra Saboo

**C**ovid-19 is seemingly shrinking in India and perhaps around the world. In February-March 2020, India found itself in the grip of the deadly virus. Neither the central government nor the states were prepared for the challenge. Caught off guard, the public health facilities were overwhelmed.

It was in this scenario that non-government organisations (NGOs) came to the rescue, providing personal protective equipment kits and N95 masks, and even oxygen by importing equipment such as oxygen concentrators.

In Chandigarh, Rotary and other NGOs extended a helping hand to the PGI and government hospitals. In fact, in the second wave they even started mini Covid centres to relieve the crowded hospitals.

At the national and local level, Rotary developed Covid Task Force headed by senior leader and past Rotary International director Ashok Mahajan to help in vaccine promotion and distribution, with mobile vans. In the second phase it focused on helping the economically challenged families.

This pandemic has changed our world forever. Within 18 months, not shaking hands while meeting friends, unthinkable earlier, has become the new normal. But it is so much more than handshakes that is changing. A permanent line will divide our



lives and history — the period before Covid and after Covid.

Work from home will become a standard feature. Office protocol, office design, buildings, even urban planning will change. The way we travel will change with new protocol in public transport. Our outlook on health and wellness will change. Be it the way we deal with the environment, information or the leadership that governments provide, everything will change. The world after Covid will be a different world. It is up to us to make it better.

So, what are the big opportunities for social service organisations as we understand and accept the new norm. Here are some that I have identified:

## Health and well-being

Covid pandemic has exposed the gross inadequacies in public health across the world, especially in the developing countries. Building public health infrastructure in Asian, African and South American nations will be a huge opportunity for the NGOs, working

with governments, medical experts and corporations.

It is clear that pandemics such as Covid-19 are not the first or the last. Greater preparedness and quick reaction are crucial. We need infrastructure for early warning, more basic health-care and greater education about prevention through better hygiene and social practices.

Support for primary health education as an important part of school curriculum needs to be encouraged. There is a great opportunity to assist in efforts building more nursing colleges — not only for Covid but for extensive care of the steadily aging global population.

International NGOs must also support the availability of essential medicines and vaccination to the poor across the world. It is well known that the quick availability of Covid vaccines costing as little as \$4–8 can prevent billions of dollars of economic loss and ruin in the world in which the poor get hurt the most.

## Environment

While the origin of Covid virus continues to be debated, one thing is clear — it came from wild animals. As humans increasingly encroach the wild habitats for food and convenience, we run the risk of more such disasters.

We must respect nature and wild habitats, and change to more environment-friendly consumption habits. In our hunger for energy, we are irreparably destroying our land, air and oceans.

Organisations like Rotary International should focus on environmental services.

### Closer families and communities

Another realisation in recent times has been how rapidly the feeling of isolation has grown. Social media, the growth of international trade and globalisation has meant that (a) we are more connected to our phones than our families sitting around the table and (b) almost everything we buy, including water, paper and groceries, are produced by factories thousands of miles away, while local producers close their businesses.

Last 18 months have taught us the irreplaceable value of the family,

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**It is clear that pandemics such as Covid-19 are not the first or the last. Greater preparedness and quick reaction are crucial.**

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the community, of finding happiness within, of local sightseeing instead of travelling to distant lands each holiday. I do not mean to shun international trade or tourism, but local,

national and international must merge with happy balance.

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, said in the first months of the pandemic:

“Be safe from coronavirus infection; be smart to inform yourself about it; be kind and support one another.”

Let us hope we can see the end of this pandemic and the beginning of “not-so-normal” life in which we finally decide it is time to build a fairer, more inclusive and sustainable society.

*The writer is former president of Rotary International*

*(Courtesy: The Indian Express)*

## Gender Equity

# RC Chennai Bharathi aims to empower 1,000 girls

## Team Rotary News

Global Empowerment of Women Association, GEWA in short, was launched by RC Chennai Bharathi, RID 3232, with an aim to empower at least 1,000 girls through year-long vocational courses and start-up guidance being provided to the beneficiaries.

GEWA has signed MoUs with 10 institutions in the presence of DG J Sridhar, district first lady Punitha and Rtn Vinita Venkatesh, spouse of RID A S Venkatesh. Club president Santhi Rajkumar, Women’s Empowerment director Shruti Nair and Vocational Services director Rajeshwari are the



From R: DG J Sridhar, his wife Punitha, Rtn Vinita Venkatesh and club president Santhi Rajkumar at one of the vocational training centres.

core team behind the ‘1,000 Girl Children’ project which is being implemented under the GEWA banner.

Four venue partners were selected for training girls (16–25 years) who are from underprivileged families. Technical courses such as digital marketing, basic electronics and robotics, solar products assembling, tally and LED bulb manufacturing will be taught at the vocational centres. In the non-technical category, the girls will be trained on paper plate-making and soap manufacturing.

### Blood donation camp

Blood donation camps were organised at two venues by the club with the support of Rotary Central-TTK-VHS Blood Bank. Rotarians and members of Dawoodi Bohra community donated blood at both the venues — Royapuram Mufaddal Polyclinic and Primary Health Centre, Madhavaram. A team of VHS doctors, technicians and paramedics made both the camps successful. Rtn Renuka Ramakrishnan, community health director at the VHS, extended her support to the project. ■

# RC Haripad spreads cheer through hearing aids

Rasheeda Bhagat

**S**ooper” says a young woman, her eyes lighting up with happiness, before she folds her hands in a gesture of gratitude. Another little girl is overwhelmed, and can only say three words “Thank you Rotary”. Another toddler says it all with her dancing eyes and a wide grin on her lips, as her newly acquired hearing aid starts transmitting sound into her silent world.

The occasion is a three-day camp organised by the Rotary Club of Haripad,

RID 3211, Kerala, to fit hearing aids on hearing-impaired children and adults. The real beauty in this service done by the club members lies in the fact that not only 180 beneficiaries were fitted with 309 hearing aids during this project, but the club members also went out of their way to ensure that the beneficiaries identified got in time their certification of a physical deficiency from the required medical authorities.

President of the club Manu Mohan says that the club is

always on the lookout for “innovative projects. For some time now, we have been receiving an increasing number of applications for financial assistance to buy hearing aids.” This made the club’s leadership team search for organisations that were already working in the area of hearing handicap. Once identified, these organisations were invited to join the club in a project to bring sound into the lives of the hearing disabled.

Coincidentally enough, even as the club was searching for suitable partners with the requisite skill sets to do a complete job, its members heard that the Ali Yavar Jung National Institute for Speech and Hearing Disabilities, Mumbai, and IRLD of Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, working as a team, were searching for a reliable service partner to provide hearing aids to economically disadvantaged people with hearing disabilities. This was part of a GoI initiative undertaken to





Above: A little girl listens to music on her headphones after having a hearing aid fitted.

Hearing aids being fitted on some of the beneficiaries.



celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Indian Independence.

As good fortune had it, their search on the Internet revealed the work being done by RC Haripad in Kerala. “Their fact-finding team visited Haripad and was convinced of our reliability and approached me with a proposal for a joint partnership to help the hearing hand-icapped,” says the club president.

Once the partnership nitty-gritty had been worked out, the club launched the project costing ₹54 lakh. An announcement was made by the club in the media inviting applications, from economically



Haripad MLA Ramesh Chennithala fits a hearing aid on a beneficiary. On the left is club president Manu Mohan.

disadvantaged people with a hearing problem. This got good media coverage in print, electronic and also social media. Soon the applications started pouring in “from different parts of the state, far exceeding our expectations.”

The beneficiaries were scrutinised and selected but many of them encountered a hurdle, thanks mainly to the prevalent Covid conditions in Kerala, in getting a hearing disability certificate issued by a district/taluk medical board, a prerequisite to qualify.

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**At the end of the camp, the joyful expressions on the faces of the beneficiaries made all the hard work put in by the entire project team worth the effort.**

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This proved to be a major stumbling block in reaching the hearing aids to the selected beneficiaries and completing the project.

But the project organising committee quickly got into the act, persuaded local hospitals to get the beneficiaries examined by the competent authorities and issue the required certificate of eligibility to the deserving applicants. Club secretary Dr Nikhil Krishnan explains that thanks to “our club’s previous hospital-related projects such as the HOPE Project, and our PolioPlus programmes, and our collaborations with people’s representatives, the medical boards of the taluk/district hospitals agreed to meet, examine the applicants and issue the required certificates.”

The camp began on the club’s premises on Oct 7, all Covid protocols were observed and the beneficiaries were asked to come for the fitment of the hearing aids only in small batches, “and all social distancing norms were observed.”

The hearing aid camp was inaugurated by AM Arif, Member of Parliament from Alappuzha, and the local municipal chairman KM Raju distributed the first hearing aids. DG K Srinivasan, AG Resmi Prasad and Dr Tina Antony, chairman of AGTS, participated.

The second day of the camp was attended by DGN K Babumon, and the third day’s activities were inaugurated by Haripad MLA Ramesh Chennithala. “We are really grateful for the commitment and dedication of the team of doctors and health professionals from the partnering organisations, and members of the two Rotaract clubs who worked with us on this project. At the end of the camp, the joyful expressions on the faces of the beneficiaries made all the hard work put in by the entire project team worth the effort,” adds Prof K Sabarinath, a core team member of the club.

Designed by N Krishnamurthy

# Rotary's polio programme has helped avert a world war

**Jaishree**

**W**orld War I killed 20 million people; Rotary has helped to save 19 million people from being paralysed since its pioneering fight against polio in 1978. This is the best illustration of Rotary's work for peace. We have averted a world war by our polio eradication programme," said RI President Shekhar Mehta, addressing about 800 delegates from across 40 countries at a virtual International Peace Conference hosted by RC Chinchwad, RID 3131, in September.

He recalled his recent visit to Rotary's latest peace centre set up at the Makerere University in Uganda, Africa, where he met the first group of 15 students enrolled for Rotary's peace studies. "Their skill in conflict resolution is being honed by Rotary facilitating their further education. Now we have 1,500 peace scholars at some of the best universities in the world who are trained to stop conflicts," he said.

Referring to Rotary's youth exchange programme, President Mehta said that it helps the participants understand and respect the different cultures of countries and that is the basis of peace. "When a girl from India goes to Brazil, she takes with her so much of India and similarly when a student from Brazil visits India, he brings along his country's culture and tradition with him." Culture is a thought process. "If only people can understand that there can be two views for one idea, the world will be a far better place. The biggest differences between countries happen because of differences in culture," he said.

Peace is inbuilt in the programmes of Rotary. "When you bring water to a parched village in Africa through a Rotary global grant, and if you ask the children and women who have been carrying pails and pails of water from long distances to their homes, the borewells we sunk for them mean peace. For a mother who was not able to feed her child due to poverty the piece of bread you give her is peace. She is not interested in who is at war with whom. When we help the lame to walk, the blind to see we are bringing them peace. A country that is half educated cannot be at peace. Its people will not understand the value of democracy. So when we make those happy schools, train teachers and bring technology into the lives of people, we are bringing peace to communities," he said in his address from Prague (Czech Republic) where he was attending the Zone Institute.

RI Director Mahesh Kotbagi pointed out that all of Rotary's seven areas of focus aim at promoting peace among people, communities and the world as a whole. Peace is not a selective programme of one country or continent. We have to work at grassroots level to usher in peace among people. Discrimination should stop at all levels. "Gender equality is the number one predictor of peace. It means creating a world where people and planet can flourish — regardless of age, race, gender, class, ethnicity, ability, or sexual orientation," he said.

DG Pankaj Shah complimented RC Chinchwad president Shilpagauri Ganpule for organising the two-day summit and balancing it with resource



**RI President Shekhar Mehta**

persons drawn from various countries. "We got insights into the diverse facets of peacebuilding processes practised in these countries," he said. The district has planned a 3,000-km bicycle rally titled Sadhbhavna, put together by the district Rotarians to Bangladesh, as a goodwill promotion initiative.

Topics covered at the conference included achieving peace through creativity, yoga, music and dance. Peace studies specialist Dr Thomas Clough Daffern presented his theory of conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes. Arun Sathe shed light on RI's peace grant. Research papers presented by Rtr Abraham of RAC Lugbe and Rtr Chibuikem Anyanwu, RAC Port Harcourt Sea Port, Nigeria, were well-received.

Dr Nitin Karmalkar, vice chancellor, Savitribai Phule University, Pune, and Rtn Pietro Uzochukwu Macleo from RC Abujo Wuse, Nigeria, were honoured with the RI's Peace Awards.

PDGs and members of other Rotary clubs of RID 3131 also participated in the meet. "It was a befitting way for our club to celebrate its silver jubilee year," said Shilpa who anchored the conference. ■

RI President Shekhar Mehta participating in a car/ bike rally in Kolkata. To his left is DRR Arka Nag.



## Rotary India celebrates World Polio Day

Fifteen Rotary clubs celebrate at Visakhapatnam.



Thursday, 7th October, 2021

Let the victory of Polio continue with two drops



DG Nirmal Raghavan (sixth from L) and RC Tambaram Central president G Vetrivelrajan receive certificate from the adjudicator in the presence of PDGs CR Chandra Bob (R), Natarajan Nagoji (second from L) and Dr EK Sagadhevan (third from L) for creating a new record in the Asia / India Book of Records for the 'Largest Notebook Sentence' (End Polio Now created with 9,023 notebooks) in Chennai.



RI Director Mahesh Kotbagi felicitates TT paralympic silver medallist Bhavina Patel with a Vocational Excellence Award.



Above: RC Bhubaneswar Galaxy on a sapling plantation drive as part of the celebrations.

Below: PDG SR Yogananda (L) unveiled portraits of Dr Jonas Salk and Dr Albert Sabin at the Bangalore Referral Hospital in the presence of DG Fazal Mahmood (sixth from L).



# Transforming two tribal villages in Gujarat

Rasheeda Bhagat

It's time to revisit Leelaben, the woman from Katarvad, a tribal village in Gujarat whom you had met on the pages of *Rotary News* in December 2015. Especially as the flavour in Rotary these days is the empowerment of women. To recap... with RC Baroda Metro, RID 3060, implementing a GG project worth ₹65 lakh, her tribal village of Katarvad, about 130 km east of Vadodara in Gujarat, had been totally transformed. In the process, it had also thrown up a self-confident and smart woman leader.

A natural leader, she had come forward to describe the transformation

both the male and female farmers of her village had undergone, thanks to the Rotary project run in partnership with the Shroff Family Charitable Trust which runs a farm school in the region. After having undergone training herself at this farm school, she was then training other farmers. With great confidence she had explained to us the concept of SRI (systematic rice intensification), vermicomposting and biofertilisers. The main project undertaken by the Rotarians was augmentation of water resources in the village to help the farmers.

“Now, our club has undertaken another global grant, this time for ₹85

lakh and we are going to transform two tribal villages — Chilliyavant and Sanada, in Chhota Udepur district, about 120 km away from Vadodara,” says PDG Pinky Patel, a member of RC Baroda. Once again, it's a water conservation and augmentation project to harness the local water resources to help the water needs in these villages.

As in many parts of India, the farmers in these villages are also totally dependent on rainwater to irrigate their land. “So just as we did in Katarvad village, which you visited, in these two villages too, as it is a hilly region, we are going to level the land to prevent soil erosion by the gushing rainwater, build check dams, bori dams, community wells and implement other measures to ensure that the water table in the area comes up so that the villagers have water throughout the year,” says past RI director Manoj Desai, also a member of this club.

In September, after the corona lockdown was



Leelaben addressing a gathering of Rotarians including RI District 3060 PDG Pinky Patel and Rtn Sharmishtha Desai.



PRID Manoj Desai (second from right) along with Sharmishtha Desai and PDG Pinky Patel, members of RC Baroda Metro, visiting a tribal village for their water augmentation project.

lifted and the pandemic had eased, along with PDG Pinky Patel and other core members of this project, Desai visited the two villages. “As we work with the Shroff Foundation, their members took us to Katarvad, where we met Leelaben, who has now emerged as a top woman leader in the village; everybody respects her and she is guiding other women. It was so good to see her talk with so much confidence. This is true women’s empowerment,” he smiled.

This time the project envisages transformation of nine villages and in the first phase work in two villages has begun. “Basically, we are just replicating the Katarvad model as that village has really been transformed by our club’s project,” he added.

PDG Pinky said that these two villages have over 600 households and a population of about 3,500. Creating women’s self-help groups, is also a component of this project the club calls *Triple E* — empathise, energise and

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Leelaben was all praise for Rotary and said that thanks to Rotary’s intervention her villages are able to grow two crops in a year and migration to the city has stopped.

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empower. “This is a triple partnership between RC Baroda Metro, RC Tainan Phoenix, US, RID 3470, and the Shroff Foundation Trust.

She says that the topography of the terrain does not allow groundwater to recharge, hence normally only one rain-fed crop is possible. With limited income, in the past a lot of migration from the villages to towns was happening. “Our objective is to improve the water table and bring two assured crops under irrigation. We also want to create institutional arrangements for community managed land development, operation and maintenance of the entire system, and do skill development of both the youth and women.”

The crops grown in these villages are rice, maize, urad dal, and seasonal vegetables. “Some of the farmers told us that during the lockdown they were growing watermelons and selling them on the highways. We were very touched to learn that often, these farmers offered watermelons free of cost to the truck drivers,” she said.

Pinky adds that when they visited Katarvad, “Leelaben was all praise for Rotary and said that thanks to Rotary’s intervention her villages have been upgraded to a level where they now have two crops in a year and migration to the city has stopped. We were so happy to learn that thanks to Rotary’s work, these villages have become self-sufficient.”

And for this, let me recall the words of the club’s past president Sunil Vakil, who had worked on the first global grant for Katarvad. “We have not brought rocket science here; all we have done are simple interventions, such as building check dams, a couple of community wells, some water harvesting measures in 10 ‘model houses’ we created with cattle sheds, biogas plants etc.” ■

# A Rotary hospice in Hyderabad at ₹14 crore

**Jaishree**

**R**otary Club of Banjara Hills, RID 3150, Hyderabad, has upgraded its decade-old modest hospice into a bigger, modern one at a cost of ₹14 crore and the new facility was recently inaugurated by RI Director Mahesh Kotbagi. “We are working on this in a phased manner,” says club president Vikas Ranka, adding that 27 of 82 beds, 10 exclusively for children, have been put in place now, “and all the beds are occupied.”

The club set up the Sparsh Hospice with 12 beds in Banjara Hills on a rented premises initially in 2011 to provide palliative care for terminally ill patients. RC Banjara Hills Charitable Trust was established to look after the day-to-day operations. The uptake was very low then as the concept of hospice was still new and alien to both the public and the

doctors, says Ranka. Awareness was spread through the media. “From the initial struggle of filling the place, by 2017, aided by our full time CEO, we had a large waiting list of patients needing a bed in our small facility.” So the club launched the home-care services. “As demand grew, we decided six years ago to upgrade the hospice,” he says. From then on despite changes in leadership the club focused on identifying land and donors to make its dream a reality.

After persistent follow-up, the Telangana government allocated land for the facility, and the club built a 60,000-sq ft hospice at a cost of ₹14 crore. The state IT minister K T Rama Rao has been a supporter of Sparsh from 2016 and also became a significant donor, says the club’s charter president and trustee Dr M Subrahmanyam, a regular visitor to the hospice since its initial days.

Corporate partnerships followed. The largest donor was Phoenix Foundation (₹6 crore). “We had over 100 donors, including from the US, who contributed ₹5 lakh or more towards the building cost,” he adds. Large-scale fundraiser programmes not only helped bring in funds but also raised the visibility for Sparsh. The largest of them was the Skyfest in 2015 spread over five days at the Gachibowli stadium, which included music, hot air balloon rides and para jumping shows by the IAF team. It collected ₹5.5 crore of which a major portion was allotted for the hospice. In 2019 a concert by noted playback singer SP Balasubrahmanyam helped raise ₹75 lakh. A global grant worth \$188,000 is helping in the purchase of equipment needed for the new facility.

It has an auditorium, amphitheatre, library, dining hall, physiotherapy

**From R: RI Director Mahesh Kotbagi, Minister for IT, Industries, Government of Telangana K T Rama Rao, Shantha Biotech chairman Varaprasad Reddy and RC Banjara Hills president Vikas Ranka at the inauguration of the Sparsh Hospice.**



and prayer rooms for patients and their attendants. All facilities including stay, medicines and food are entirely free for them. “We are now taking care of 4,000 terminally ill patients, both young and old, and this includes our home-care service too,” says Dr Subrahmanyam. The running cost in the previous space was ₹12 lakh per month and it is now projected to be ₹50 lakh a month when it is ready with all the 82 beds, he adds.

Great care is taken in recruiting medical experts and care givers. “We stress on predominant qualities such as patience and compassion because patients need people who can empathise with their pain and mental health,” says Ranka. He recalls a recent incident



about a young girl from a nearby village admitted in Sparsh. “She had just finished college when she was diagnosed with cancer. She was so happy to participate online in her graduation

ceremony which we had arranged to be screened on the big screen. Such simple yet thoughtful acts are all that they need when medication and treatment are harsh on them,” he smiles. ■

Doing good with TRF help

## Rotary blood bank at Mahavir Vaatsalya, Patna

### Team Rotary News

As part of its many collaborative ventures with the Mahavir Vaatsalya Aspatal, a charitable hospital founded by former IPS officer Acharya Kishore Kunal, RC Pataliputra, RID 3250, has set up the Mahavir Rotary Pataliputra Blood Centre with a blood cell separator unit through a global grant.

The state-of-the-art blood bank with a component separator unit will immensely benefit patients as the services would be at an economical cost, said Shilpi Chachan, past president of the club. Both the club and the Mahavir Mandir Nyas (Trust) are together



From L: DG Pratim Banerjee, Mahavir Vaatsalya Aspatal founder Kishore Kunal, club president Jaiprakash Todi, RID 3141 PDG Sunnil Mehra and DRFC Sanjay Khemka at the inauguration of the blood bank.

implementing several community initiatives, some of which are the Mukti Rath (hearse vehicle) launched in 2014, a centre for heart surgery and a dialysis centre. In 2020, when the club led by Shilpi decided to set up the blood bank the then DG Gopal Khemka and DRFC Sanjay Khemka immediately accepted the proposal. A global grant project worth \$116,000, which also included ventilators for health centres, was approved by TRF in July 2020.

The facility was inaugurated by Kishore Kunal and DG Pratim Banerjee in the presence of IPDG Sunnil Mehra, RID 3141, DRFC Sanjay Khemka, PDGs Gopal Khemka, L B Singh, Vivek Kumar, C Khandelwal and Rakesh Prasad. The club has plans to set up an eye hospital on the premises of the Mahavir Vaatsalya Aspatal and donate a ventilator and a dialysis unit to the hospital, said Bipin Chachan, the club's GG chairman. ■



# Rtn Benjamin List receives Nobel Prize in Chemistry

Florian Quanz

**This year's Nobel Prize in Chemistry goes to the German Benjamin List, a member of the Rotary Club Mülheim a. d. Ruhr-Schloß Broich, and the Scottish-born US researcher David WC MacMillan. Both of them have developed methods for accelerating chemical reactions.**

**We conducted a brief interview with Benjamin List, who conducts research at the Max Planck Institute for Coal Research in Mülheim.**

## **How did you learn about winning the Nobel Prize in Chemistry?**

This is an incredible story. I was on a city trip in Amsterdam with my wife that day, and this shows that I really didn't expect the award. We had attended a concert there and picked out a nice café for our breakfast the next morning. Just before we could place our order, my cell phone rang. My wife immediately said: That's the call. But that was meant as a joke. We really hadn't expected it, although we knew that the Nobel Prize in Chemistry would be announced in three-quarters of an hour. You always hear jokes like that when you're being considered as a candidate. Not that I saw myself as a candidate, but it has been brought up to me from time to time from the outside in recent years. In any case, I then saw an unknown number on the cell phone display where it said Sweden underneath. I looked at my wife in shock, ran out of the café and

took the call. Then it was actually the call. It was unbelievable. I then had to pantomime explaining to my wife, who was still sitting in the café and looking over at me through a pane of glass, that I was really just being told that I was going to receive the Nobel Prize.

## **What was the expression on your wife's face at that moment?**

She was shocked, too, of course. I got down on my knees a bit to show that I was almost fainting from joy. That was a moment I will never forget.

## **Were you able to have breakfast in peace afterwards?**

No. First, the quality of the breakfast was unfortunately not as we had hoped for. Secondly, I could not eat anything, it just did not work. It's nice of them to inform you three-quarters of an hour before the announcement, so that you can

prepare yourself for what's about to hit you. But what are you supposed to do in that three-quarters of an hour? How can you prepare for it? Actually, not at all. We then quickly paid, wandered around Amsterdam a bit more and then back to the hotel.

**Did you tell the hotel staff right away that you are now a Nobel Prize winner in chemistry?**

Yes, I told them that right away. They were very pleased, of course, and thankfully made a separate room available to me. I sat there and gave interviews, first with the Nobel Prize Foundation itself.

**How many calls did you receive that day?**

I have not counted them. I haven't had time to answer all 600 e-mails yet. On top of that, there are SMS and WhatsApp messages.

**Is it now a curse that your mail address is also visible on the Max Planck Institute homepage?**

Probably so. My e-mail address is always included with publications in scientific journals. If you want, you can get my e-mail address quickly. My ambition is always to have processed all the mails from my inbox at some point in the year. But I'm afraid that won't happen this year.

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**Just before we placed our breakfast order in Amsterdam, the phone rang. My wife said, 'That's the call.' But it was meant as a joke.**

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**The feeling that the whole institute (where he works) was rejoicing and applauding, that was indescribable. I could really feel the joy.**

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**How was the reception at the Max Planck Institute for Coal Research?**

It was incredibly beautiful. It was one of the most beautiful moments in my life. Because I was not at the institute when the announcement was made, they had enough time to prepare for my arrival. We have a courtyard in the institute and on every second level there are fire balconies on which staff members were then standing. Everybody was clapping and of course the press was there and the TV cameras were pointed at me. But I didn't notice that at all. I only saw all the colleagues applauding for me. The feeling that the whole institute was standing there now, rejoicing and applauding, that was indescribable. I could really feel the joy. The craftsmen, the colleagues from the administration, the analysts, the chemists from the laboratories, everyone was there and clapped for five minutes. Then there was a short silence because I was answering a few questions for reporters, and then there was another five minutes of applause. Time seemed endless at that moment. It was overwhelmingly beautiful.

**Were you able to find a few words or was it a moment where you didn't know what to say at first?**

Strangely enough, this was easy for me. After all, I didn't have to give a complicated explanation, but it was a joyful occasion.

**Have you been invited to a celebration by your Rotary club?**

We are in contact. There will certainly be a small celebration, but when we can do this, I cannot say yet. But we will definitely do that. We'll see if I give a lecture then, too. I've already been allowed to give two talks, one about my life as a researcher and one about catalysis as a whole. Either way, we will celebrate in style.

(This interview is reproduced from *Rotary Magazin*, the regional magazine from Germany)



David Ausserhofer

# Women should form 30 per cent membership by 2023: RIPN

V Muthukumaran

The Covid pandemic has given unique opportunities for Rotary to adapt to the changing times, and “we need to embrace technology to create flexible clubs and reach out to more diverse professionals by following the newly-formulated DEI policies,” said RIPN Gordon McNally, addressing a virtual meeting of RC Madras, RID 3232. “Rotaract clubs are showing the way in gender equality as 51 per cent of Rotaractors are women and we can learn from them.”

RIPN Gordon  
McNally



Sharing his ‘Vision of Rotary’, he said efforts are on to increase women’s membership in Rotary to over 30 per cent by 2023 when he takes over as president. At present, 26 per cent of club presidents, 22 per cent of DGs and 37 per cent of the RI’s board of directors are women, he noted. “My vision for Rotary is closely aligned with the new RI Action Plan which advocates continuity and adapting to challenges through innovations.”

Instead of asking how Rotary should operate, he said, “we should ask why Rotary is needed. We bring hope of a better future by helping communities and doing good in the world.” Rotary fosters peace which is not absence of war, “but existence of freedom, healthy life, clean water, human rights, dignity and housing for all.” Recalling his interactions with deprived families and malnourished children in Africa who yearn for a better livelihood, McNally said, “I had a chance of meeting poor children in rural

Kenya where I had a dental clinic and Rotary brought hope to them. Hope of a caring, peaceful and kind world.”

As times change, and a new normal takes shape, Rotary has to re-evaluate its priorities, take stock, reflect on the times we live in and move forward. “Right from

the Spanish flu (1918) pandemic, Great Depression (1921) through World War II and Asian flu (1957), Rotary has seized the opportunity to grow its membership. Now we are in the midst of another pandemic, and we have to seize this opportunity to grow Rotary as membership is our lifeblood.” While he is all for *Each One Bring One* initiative of RI President Mehta, “we have to reduce our turnover as over 20,000 new members have left Rotary in the last 10 years. Our clubs need to devise ways to engage new members so that our retention improves.” Rotary will benefit immensely if it could induct and retain young members who will bring a ‘demographic dividend’ to the clubs.

Quoting late US senator Robert Kennedy’s famous words uttered in 1966, “we live in interesting and exciting times”, he said, “Rotary can transform the lives of our children if we are ready to embrace change while continuing our fundamental ideals for a better world.”

## Great work by Rotary India

Every month, clubs at all the four zones in India induct around 4,000–5,000 new members and “the target of 60,000 new Rotarians will be easily achieved by the end of this Rotary year itself,” said RID Mahesh Kotbagi. The clubs in India are doing ‘some phenomenal work’ and they have graduated to Level-2 in terms of TRF support, he said.

RC Madras president Mohan Raman said a number of GG projects will be inaugurated in the next few months. A technical training centre for disabled at the RCM Boys Town, the club's iconic project at Gummidipoondi taluk in Tiruvallur district, is getting ready in partnership with Worth Trust (₹4 crore); a toilet block (₹30 lakh) at a government girls school in Chitlapakkam; a 12-bed dialysis centre (₹1.4 crore) in partnership with Nadi Health Clinic; and the *Schools into Smiles* Projects in which 15 schools/classrooms are being renovated (₹55 lakh) along with the addition of new e-learning centres (₹16 lakh).

He recalled how way back in the early 1970s, the club had pioneered the

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**My vision for Rotary is closely aligned with the new RI Action Plan which advocates continuity and adapting to challenges through innovations.**

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red measles vaccination drive, a forerunner to Rotary's polio eradication programme. "We got the first 3-H grant of \$2.06 million for polio immunisation in May 1985, followed by two more such grants to set up a 200-bed

Child's Trust Hospital and polio rehab centre in the city," he said. The club had planted 118 fruit-bearing trees on its 30-acre Boys Town to celebrate McInally's nomination as the 118<sup>th</sup> RI president (2023–24); "and we will be happy to present to you the fruits they yield when you visit Chennai as Rotary president," said Raman.

DG J Sridhar and DGN Ravi Raman felicitated McInally and invited him to Chennai for a physical meet. Past president NK Gopinath anchored the virtual session that saw the presence of 780 delegates from Brazil, Columbia, US, Canada, UK, Turkey, Greece, Zambia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Australia. In addition, 100 Rotarians joined live on the YouTube. ■

## TRF sets up \$1 million Shekhar and Rashi Mehta Endowment Fund

### Team Rotary News

A valuable gift that RI President Shekhar Mehta got during the virtual celebration of his birthday in October was RIPE Jennifer Jones inviting the couple over to her place in the near future for an Indian dinner that she would herself cook. The two could guide her in preparing his favourite dishes, she smiled.

Announcing the setting up of the Shekhar Mehta and Rashi Mehta



Endowment Fund, TRF Trustee Gulam Vahanvaty said that "this year TRF has decided to raise \$1 million under this fund and we look for support from the Rotary clubs in India to meet this goal."

RI Directors AS Venkatesh and Mahesh Kotbagi anchored the virtual

meet and PDG Ravi Vadlamani said, his district, RID 3150, had added 62 new Rotaract clubs and completed 62 new Happy Schools to mark his 62<sup>nd</sup> birthday. Responding, Mehta said the best birthday gift any Rotarian could give him was bringing a new member. ■

# AI-powered spectacles for the visually-impaired

**Kiran Zehra**

**I**n a novel outreach to improve the lives of visually-impaired, RC Madras East, RID 3232, has launched *Project Drishti* which provides a pair of smart vision spectacles (SVS) to 300 beneficiaries in the first phase. The SVS uses a combination of AI-powered glasses and mobile connection to navigate, read and do more. With generous contributions from members and well-wishers, the club has raised ₹75 lakh for this project.

An elated club president M Srinivasa Rao said, “I am heartened to see contributions flowing into service projects. This has made us determined

in our journey to realise our dreams to serve to change lives.” Project Drishti will drastically change the lives of the visually-impaired with these smart glasses, noted DG J Sridhar, and said the club has already been approached by several other clubs from different parts of the country.

The idea of embedding a software into a pair of glasses isn’t new says, Ramu Muthangi, CEO of Smart Health Global, a Bengaluru-based IT company that designed the AI-powered spectacles. Accrediting the success of the SVS to the firm’s technical prowess and its collaboration with Rotary

and Boston-based NGO, Vision Aid, he said, “we want these special glasses to reach those in need as we are not looking for profit.”

Through the mobile App, the SVS will guide the visually-impaired with constant inputs. “The interaction occurs over Wi-Fi or mobile data with the spectacles conveying the series of information to the wearer through speech output fitted on the glasses,” said Muthangi. The device is fitted with two pen drive-like cases on the arms that rest on the ears. The left case has a camera with a flash that captures images within two metres, identifies



DG J Sridhar interacting with a beneficiary.



From R: Project coordinator Radhika Sathyanarayana; Ramu Muthangi, CEO of Smart Health Global; club secretary Magesh Pattabhiraman; club president M Srinivasa Rao and Dr Vijayalakshmi, head of Vision Rehabilitation Centre at the Aravind Eye Hospital, along with beneficiaries.

objects and warns of the obstacles in front and around, in order to make walking hassle-free. The device will also read documents in 73 regional languages, recognise friends through facial expressions, find their belongings, and help the wearer to use public transport.

One of the beneficiaries, 21-year-old Arivalagan, an MA English student from Chennai, said he is able to move around confidently and listen to

English texts, thanks to SVS. The hi-fi glasses will “help me with my lessons and read more of my favourite author Stephen King’s novels,” he smiles. For Thenmozhi, “being the only child, my parents worry about my future. With SVS I will pass the UPSC exams. This spectacle will secure my future which will make my parents happy.”

Aravind Eye Hospital (AEH) validated the utility of the smart glasses. “This wasn’t the first time

we are partnering with Rotary,” said Dr P Vijayalakshmi, chief paediatric ophthalmologist and head of Vision Rehabilitation Centre at AEH. A research team led by Dr Flora Jeyaseeli at AEH, Madurai, found that the mobility of people with low vision and visually-impaired had improved with the use of SVS. “The prototype was tried on 50 patients over the last 10 months and the feedback from them helped to tweak the model to optimum weight, size, shape and use,” added Dr Vijayalakshmi.

Dr Aravind Srinivasan, director, AEH, Chennai, said the SVS’ hardware is aesthetically designed so that the wearer feels comfortable using it all through the day. “The software is being constantly updated with database of objects and scenes to enable the AI engine to keep learning,” he said and hoped the device may be “justifiably viewed as a new way of seeing the world for the visually-impaired.”

Magesh Pattabhiraman, club secretary, said that every service project is planned a year-and-a-half in advance. “The reason all our projects are sustainable is our ability raise funds, to recognise responsible stakeholders who actively participate in all stages of the project,” he added. ■



Visually-impaired sisters with their SVS kits.

# Golden jubilee fest at Surat, Coimbatore clubs

## V Muthukumaran

**A** Charter Night with cultural shows, a medley of Bollywood musicals and traditional dance, and the honouring of 10 charter members by DG Santosh Pradhan excited members of RC Surat Roundtown, RID 3060. "All our 63 members were given a specially-designed Rotary pin to mark our golden jubilee," said club president Dr Bhavin C Jariwala.

A successful CPR training session for Rotarians and their families will be replicated at the other 15 Rotary clubs in Surat. A massive celebration is planned in Sep 2022 with delegates from RI headquarters, district and Rotary leaders.

### Down memory lane

Formed on Sep 8, 1972 with 40 charter members and Raojibhai Patel

as charter president, the club has given two DGs and done impactful projects.

A double decker vehicle with an OT for eye operations and family planning procedures was received from UK Rotarians, RID 1020, in 1984, to help rural families. Under a matching grant with RC Stone Mountain, RID 6900, US, the club implemented a year-long medicare project (1996–97) that distributed nutritious food to 540 children and 59 lactating women at a slum colony in Adajan.

Through Project *Mamta*, the 40 students of Mamta School for special children get their monthly rations, uniforms, books, footwear, etc.

From 1996, notebooks, stationery, uniforms, footwear and oral hygiene products worth ₹2.5

lakh are being donated every year to government schools in Dang and Vyara districts of South Gujarat. Through various GGs, equipment worth ₹1.4 crore was donated to the Tejas Eye Hospital, Mandvi. This July, under a GG, devices worth ₹40 lakh were donated to vision centres in rural areas and the club sponsored over 100 cataract procedures.

Adoption of a slum near Surat; distribution of food and books; upkeep of anganwadi; sewing classes for women; donation of sewing machines; and setting up a computer centre are other club projects.

### Renovated hall

The 50-year-old iconic Dilip-Paresh Rotary Hall has been renovated at a cost of ₹7 lakh donated by members.

Charter members and PDGs Bharat Solanki and Kulbandhu Sharma cut a cake to celebrate RC Surat Roundtown's golden jubilee in the presence of DG Santosh Pradhan (on PDG Solanki's left), club president Dr Bhavin Jariwala (behind PDG Sharma, on his right) and past president Prashant Desai (between PDGs Sharma and Solanki).



DG Pradhan inaugurated the renovated premises. A kitchen garden is being created for the Savita Sharda Girls Hostel for working women and college girls. Organic farming will be done here that will benefit 35 hostellers, said the club president.

Under the district's *Red Revolution* Project, the club is holding MHM awareness sessions at government schools and for rural women. "We clear myths and wrong notions about using sanitary pads. We will be distributing 600 sanitary napkin packs at these hygiene workshops."

### Projects on drawing board

A computer training centre for students of government schools without one; a *Kala Mahotsav* art festival; and adding more members are all on the cards, said Prashant Desai, head of Golden Jubilee Committee.

Recalling one of his memorable projects, PDG Bharat Solanki (72) said he was instrumental in setting up a polio rehab centre at the DKM Hospital in Surat as club president in 1974. "Taking charge as DG in 1984–85 as the youngest governor at 25 is an unforgettable experience for me and so is, getting the Service Above Self Award from the then RI President Richard King in 2000."

For PDG Kulbandhu Sharma "hosting a three-day district conference by the club in Dec 2003 when I was DG was a great occasion and I still recollect that event now and then."

### 'Go Green' is the mantra

Down south in Tamil Nadu, the Anns at RC Coimbatore Midtown, RID 3201, led by Vani Krishna Kumar, spouse of club president R Krishna Kumar, visited the Bethada Amman Tribal Colony and donated grocery bags to 14 families to mark the club's golden jubilee year.



**From L-R:** RC Coimbatore Midtown IPP S Palaniappan, district community service (medical) chair V Varadharajan, club secretary CV Sriram, district focus (earth) chair VS Sathyamoorthi, DG Rajasekhar Srinivasan and club president R Krishnakumar at saplings distribution drive.

The club, in partnership with ESRAG South Asia, gifted over 50,000 saplings to Rotary clubs and other NGOs in Coimbatore for distribution under its *Go Green* Project. "We are planning to create a biodiversity park, a one-acre Miyawaki forest at Chinniyampalayam village, with contributions from our members," said CV Sriram, club secretary. Reaching out to farmers, a one-day workshop on organic farming saw over 100 participants from Dharapuram, Tirupur, Pollachi, Udumalpet and Madurai who were given a crash course on preparing soil-friendly manure and traditional farming.

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A 10-member Golden Jubilee Programmes Committee, led by PP Prashant Desai, is in the process of chalking out year-long events that will culminate in a gala in September 2022.

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### GG projects

Plans are afoot to set up a dialysis centre at a private hospital and distribute 50,000 PPE kits to ambulance drivers through global grants. "Right now, we have a strength of 71 Rotarians. We plan to induct 15 new members, though we would love to take the membership close to 100 during our golden jubilee," said Sriram. A traffic circle on Race Course Road was adopted by the club to boost PR. "We have planned a slew of programmes and events to mark the golden jubilee year," said CT Thiagarajan, chair, International Service. A golden jubilee building (₹40 lakh) will soon come up, to house two tailoring centres and a limb fitment centre of the club.

### Artificial limbs camp

Even during the pandemic, the club hosted the artificial limb fitment camp which is a major feature of this 50-year-old club. Around 20,000 amputees have benefited from the Project *Walk Again* which is conducted at the club's Limb Fitment Centre on a regular basis since 1990. DG Rajasekhar Srinivasan inaugurated one such camp. ■



the pre-Covid times, all these houses did thriving business during the two months before Navarathri, for people would rather travel here and load their cars with uniquely ideated dolls at nominal rates than buy them locally in their hometown for a price that is nearly double.

### Covid effect

“Our business took a big hit two years ago when the first wave of Covid was at its peak and the government had announced a long lockdown. We couldn’t manufacture much this year due to shortage of funds. Most of these dolls are carried forward from the last two years,” says Padmanabhan’s wife

Savitha, adding, “if this continues for one more year we may have to sell our ancestral home where we are currently residing and move into a rented house.”

This year too, the state government’s decision to keep the temples closed Friday to Sunday has affected the sales, as pilgrims and tourists visit this town only on those days and “we would have done-good business otherwise.”

Padmanabhan’s ancestors, like many others in the locality, started out by making clay pots, and diversified gradually into making huge clay dolls to adorn the temples in the town. “In 1955 my grandfather made a miniature model of the



famous *Garuda Seva* event where the gods are taken in a procession in all their finery. This set of dolls became popular among the people during that year’s Navrathri and since then there is no looking back.

Today we are exporting dolls made of clay and papier-mâché, in addition to meeting wholesale and retail orders from across the country. Every year people request for unique and creative sets and we





oblige,” he says. Huge Ganesha idols are also made in these homes for the Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations in not only Tamil Nadu but also neighbouring states such as Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

At least 2,500 families are solely dependent on this doll-making vocation in Kanchipuram. “All our dreams depend on the sales we do in these two months,” says Padmanabhan. Many who have taken micro loans are unable to pay the instalments and this has been accumulating since the last three years. “It will take at least 4–5 years for us to recover from these losses.”

Covid worsened the situation for the craftsmen, for, they had suffered a similar hit in 2019 when the entire town was chaotic with the worship

of Athivaradar. The idol is brought out from under the temple tank for worship for 48 days once in every 40 years.

In 2019 when the idol was brought out and installed in the Varadarajaswamy temple premises the town swarmed with pilgrims from across the country and overseas. Business for the hospitality sector and small businesses such as local transport and flower vendors thrived but with heavy restrictions put in place to manage the surging crowd, the doll-makers were badly affected. “We were not allowed to sell our wares, and since lorries and trucks were not allowed to ply within the city, we could not ship out our dolls. As a result many wholesalers in other cities looked elsewhere for their needs.”

### The process

Shantha gives an elaborate sketch of the processing. Clay is the backbone of the doll and it must be kneaded into a fine soft dough. The dye that is the mould is carved by expert craftsmen. The clay dough is then stuffed into the front and back moulds and then pressed. The doll is then detached from the moulds, scraped and is left to dry in the shade for the next 4–5 days and then baked. It’s further coated with chalk powder and adhesive mixture and once dry, is coated with several layers of paints. Spray guns are used to give variations in the shades.

Her neighbour Ashokan enthusiastically shows his collection which included a large idol of Krishna with his *gopikas* in papier-mâché and I am totally hooked. He is a

diploma holder in mechanical engineering. Having had the taste of the corporate world, he still chose his ancestral profession of doll-making. “This vocation is the only essence of our lives; four generations have passed, yet we still cherish this craft. We have always had a boom in our business except these two years,” he says.

At the end of this magical world, I come across labourers deftly packing cartons of dolls with hay strewn all over their homes, and a little girl gleefully helping them, and wonder if we have ever paid attention to the many woes and wonders of our cottage industries. They deserve our help.

Pictures by Jaishree

Designed by  
N Krishnamurthy



# Supporting girls and women

Kiran Zehra

In a bid to empower adolescent girls with shielding and attacking techniques, RC Bombay Seaside, RID 3142, conducted a self-defence workshop at a school in the slums of Rabale, Mumbai. Over 120 girls in the age group 9–16 were taught easy and retainable techniques to defend themselves during an emergency. “Although more attention must be paid to changing the attitude of men and boys to stop perpetrating violence against women and girls, we still need to teach our girls how to defend themselves,” says club president Kamaljit

Singh Dhillon. A club study conducted in the slum revealed that these girls get “bullied and teased almost every single day by local men and boys once they begin to show signs of puberty. Some of the girls are scared to leave their homes and have abandoned their education.” The purpose of this training “was to build confidence in them so they can stand up to the bullies and hopefully enrol back in school.”

Varsha, a participant says, “My mother asks me to hold a key between my fingers or carry *lal mirchi* in my bag. She has asked me to walk in well-lit



Girls learn self-defence techniques at the workshop.

areas if I get late from class and wouldn't let me out after dark. But her tips never make me feel safe. This training will give me confidence,” she adds.

The trainers have taught the girls to use objects such as pencils, water bottles and bags to protect themselves when needed.

“The programme trains them to become more aware of their surroundings and sense danger

early. That coupled with the techniques will make them physically strong to protect themselves in times of distress,” says Nandhini Pundlik Birade, a trainer with a Black Belt in karate.

Dhillon adds that the club has chalked out plans for a bi-weekly training workshop for the next six months.

## Supporting livelihoods

Chiplun in the Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra was recently ravaged by severe floods resulting in loss of property and business for many. “We collected data of 50 women who tailored from home to earn a living and reached out to them to help them restart their business,” says Dhillon.

The club sponsored 25 sewing machines worth ₹2 lakh and the other 25 machines were sponsored by the Nerul Gymkhana Club. ■



Members of RC Bombay Seaside with a flood victim after giving her a sewing machine.

# Champions of Girls' Empowerment

Ryan Hyland

Rotary International honoured six members as People of Action: Champions of Girls' Empowerment on October 11, the International Day of the Girl Child. This distinction recognises the Rotarians' commitment to improving girls' access to education, health and sanitation, and hygiene resources, as well as their work to create

environments where girls can flourish. Empowering girls is one of RI President Shekhar Mehta's key initiatives, and he is encouraging clubs and districts to consider how they can accomplish this through all of their service projects this year.

The honourees will also be recognised at Rotary Day at UNICEF in March.



**Momtaz Chowdhury**  
RC Dhaka Mavericks  
Bangladesh

Momtaz Chowdhury is vice-president of the Institution for Shelter, Training and Development of Underprivileged Girls in Dhaka, Bangladesh, which provides housing, food and education for girls through secondary school. The organisation offers vocational training and, when the girls graduate, job placement assistance. She has also helped girls through the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee and her family's own educational

philanthropy projects. Momtaz believes that instilling leadership and entrepreneurial skills in girls benefits them as well as their communities, which is why she works with banks to provide flexible loans for female entrepreneurs. She also collaborates with banks to provide small business aids to women who have lost their jobs because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

survivors of abuse so that the writers can better tell these stories. And her club used a Rotary Foundation global grant to renovate a community shelter for abused girls in 2018.

Elaine Ruiz is the director of *Sewing the Future*, a project that offers professional training to young women in the criminal justice system. It trains girls to become seamstresses, artisans and service workers, which helps them find work after they're released and reduces their chances of being convicted of crimes again. Elaine serves as a liaison between the girls and the justice system and plays an integral part in establishing financial partnerships in the community.



**Elaine Ruiz**  
RC Senador  
Guimard Acre  
Brazil



**Mildred Fragante**  
RC Cubao Metro  
Aurora, Quezon City  
Philippines

Mildred Fragante has worked tirelessly in her career to raise awareness of abuse of women and children. She was a producer for *Women's Desk*, a national TV programme that collaborated with the Women and Children Protection Center on stories about domestic abuse. She also founded *Aurora*, a resource and education programme that works to empower girls, and *Reconnect*, a programme that pairs journalists and authors with

Lydia Njoroge is a programme manager at HEART (Health Education Africa Resource Team), where she has directly affected the lives of almost 300 girls in Kenya and other parts of East Africa by providing hygiene products to keep them healthy and in school. Lydia has conducted extensive research on how menstrual concerns affect girls' access to education. She has worked with Rotary clubs in the US and with Procter & Gamble's *Always Keeping Girls in School* initiative to create programmes that provide girls with resources and



**Lydia Njoroge**  
RC Kiambu, Kenya

help them get an education. These programmes have reached girls in more than 500 schools and trained more than 10,000 teachers in mentoring female students.

**S**rinidhi SU has devoted his Rotaract work to the health needs of women and girls in his community. He served as the project chair for a menstrual hygiene management session in 2018 and later founded a local group of Project Sthree to address women's health concerns, including menstrual hygiene, thyroid, breast cancer and HPV. The initiative also provides leadership and safety training. He has spoken and collaborated with Red Dot Talks, which encourages men to discuss menstrual issues. His work has given more than 5,000 girls a greater awareness of menstrual hygiene.



**Srinidhi SU**  
Rotaract Club  
of Bangalore  
Seshadripuram  
Karnataka

**M**otalib Weijters, who was adopted by Dutch parents, knew very little about his biological family or about life in his home country of Bangladesh. In 1994, he reconnected with his birth family, and saw the needs of people in their area. He worked on water and sanitation projects in Bangladesh and later founded a clinic for mothers and children. He also established a cervical and breast cancer treatment centre that offers services to women and girls in need. These initiatives have helped more than 21,000 people. The clinics are financially sustained by support from NGOs and Rotary grant projects carried out by clubs in the Netherlands and Bangladesh.



**Motalib Weijters**  
RC Uden  
The Netherlands

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## From RI South Asia Office desk

### Rotary Foundation month

November is Rotary Foundation month. Here are some ideas to ensure your November events are a success:

- Educate Rotarians about the Foundation's history and its impact on families and communities, share Rotary's work on your social media, publicise grants projects that can inspire other clubs.
- Promote Foundation programmes such as Paul Harris Society and Every Rotarian Every Year and encourage every Rotarian to support TRF's Annual Fund every Rotary year.
- Recognise and thank new Major Donors and Paul Harris Society members.
- Thank Rotarians who have contributed to the Foundation for the first time.
- Encourage the non-contributing clubs and members to give to TRF.
- Promote online giving among Rotarians in your region.

### Our newest Area of Focus

Supporting the environment becomes Rotary's newest area of focus, which are categories of service activities supported by global grants. It joins peacebuilding and conflict prevention; disease prevention and treatment; water, sanitation and hygiene; maternal and child health; basic education and literacy; and community economic development.

More than \$18 million in Foundation global grant funding has been allocated to environment-related projects over the past five years. Creating a distinct area of focus to support the environment will give Rotary members even more ways to bring about positive change in the world and increase our impact.

Grant applications for projects are open since July 1, 2021. Gifts and commitments from Rotarians and others will be sought to provide global grant support for the new area of focus. The TRF Committee on Environment Area of Focus-Major Gift Initiative from our region includes PDGs Ashok Panjwani and Gowri Rajan. ■

# Meet your



**V Thirupathi Naidu**  
Builder, RC Hospet, RID 3160

## Sanitary napkins & Happy Schools, his priority

**E**mpowerment of girls is the top focus of his district's clubs. "RC Gulbarga Midtown will be setting up a sanitary napkin plant in Gulbarga with a production capacity of 2,500 units per month, costing ₹10-12 lakh. We will distribute sanitary pads at our MHM awareness sessions in schools and special camps," says Thirupathi Naidu. Next in his priority list is Happy Schools; at least 25-30 government schools will be refurbished and given a range of amenities such as handwash units, toilet blocks, and classroom furniture. "Here also we will concentrate more on girls' schools in rural areas and taluks."

Two pathology labs will be set up at Hospet and Sandur taluks (GG: ₹25-30 lakh each). The technicians manning these labs will forward the reports to doctors at the referral hospitals and get consultations for patients, says Naidu. With growing demand in Hospet, a blood bank will be constructed through a Term Gift. "We will be flagging off an ambulance worth ₹25 lakh consisting of ICU and modern life-support systems that will provide emergency medicare in this region."

Comprising 12 zones, the district has 76 clubs with 2,400-plus members. Naidu is confident of inducting 500 new Rotarians and chartering at least 12 new clubs.

Each club will hold 4-5 medical camps for underprivileged families in rural and urban areas. On the Rotaract front, "according to official records, there are only 117 Rotaractors in 17 clubs. I will be chartering at least 34 new Rotaract clubs and hope to induct 500 Rotaractors through the year," he adds. Already a number of clubs — RCs Gulbarga South, Raichur Krishna Tunge, Koppal, Kavali and Rajanpet — have exceeded the EOBO target for the year, he says, adding, "RI President Mehta's Do more, grow more is critical to increase our global number from 1.2 million. Rotary districts in India can easily double their membership to 100,000 by the end of this year." His TRF target for the year is \$500,000. Influenced by Rtn N Seshagiri, his builder-friend, he joined his home club in 1991.



**Santanu Kumar Pani**  
Educationist, RC Balasore, RID 3262

## He aspires to be a 'membership champion'

**T**o add 2,000 new members is a challenge, says Santanu Pani, who has already formed 10 new clubs against the target of 60. "I'd like to be known as membership champion. We will induct 500 women members and form seven all-women's clubs," he says. Set up at the district camp office, the Rotary Training Academy imparts basic knowledge about Rotary and its hierarchy to new Rotarians and updates old members and PDGs about the latest developments at RI. District trainer PDG Sibabrata Dash heads this centre.

Soon, 10 satellite vision care centres (GG: ₹80 lakh) will be attached to the four Rotary Eye Hospitals (REH). The satellite centres will function as OPDs to Rotary and government hospitals. Pani has identified 98 unrepresented rural areas across Odisha to set up clubs and find members. He chartered RC Sunrise Arunachal, RID 3240, in October. Two dental-screening vans (Rs 1 crore) and a mobile cancer detection unit (Rs 1.5 crore) will be launched shortly through a GG and CSR funds. A dental clinic was attached to the Balasore REH recently."

He plans to start 50 new Rotaract clubs, 500 Interact clubs and 100 RCCs, and add 500 new Rotaractors. For TRF, he is striving to collect \$100,000, "but it is really hard to convince our members to contribute more to the Foundation," he says. About 20,000 government school teachers will be trained, and 12 Swabhimaan centres will reach out to 10,000 adult illiterates this year. A former Rotaractor, he joined RC Jeypore in 1998, moved to Delhi in 1994 and returned and joined RC Balasore in 2003," he adds.

# Governors

V Muthukumaran



**Dr Mohan Shyam Konwar**

Paediatrician, RC Tinsukia, RID 3240

## ‘Bifurcate the district for better administration’

Due to the vastness of the Northeast region and its diversity, Rotary clubs are “far and few here, giving poor visibility. My focus is to have at least one club in each town of Assam for, at present, more than 50 per cent of district headquarters don’t have a representation from Rotary,” says Dr Mohan Konwar. He wants the RI district to be bifurcated for effective administration. With 101 clubs and 3,500-plus Rotarians, he wants to net a 15 per cent growth in membership and charter 15 new clubs. “A new eye clinic (GG: \$200,000) will be opened soon at the Kuntal Goswami Memorial Trust Hospital in Guwahati which already has a Rotary blood bank and physiotherapy unit.” The district has applied for a global grant to set up a mega blood bank at Sibsagar. At his home town Tinsukia, the Rotary Community Centre will house a physiotherapy unit. Konwar has instructed clubs to implement at least one Happy School project. His target for TRF giving is \$400,000.

During official club visits, he says, “I have to travel 3–4 days to reach the destinations as connectivity is an issue in the NE region. It took me three days to reach Durgapur, West Bengal, from my place, Tinsukia.” The chartering of RC Sunrise Arunachal has opened new opportunities for Rotary, he says. “The first attempt to start a club in Arunachal 7–8 years ago was not successful, as it was shut down within a few months.” PDG Kirti Ranjan Dey inspired him to join Rotary in 2001.



**W M Nirmal Raghavan**

School admin, RC Ranipet, RID 3231

## From Annett to district governor

As a 15-year-old Annett, Nirmal Raghavan was exposed to Rotary values when his father Mahendra Varman joined Rotary in 1996. Now at 40, as district governor “I’m inspired by RI President Mehta to take up ambitious projects such as creating 100 urban forests based on Miyawaki technique; setting up one lakh RWH pits at schools, hospitals and public buildings; and *Project Vidiyal* (change) in which 500 vendors will get push carts.” Fifteen lakh saplings and one crore bamboo seeds are being used for creating social forestry. Both urban forests and RWH units are being funded through member contributions, DDF and sponsorships. Push carts have been bought through a mix of GG (\$60,000), DDF and member contributions. All the 97 clubs with 3,650-plus members have resumed in-person meetings and field projects, he says. Raghavan will induct 1,500 new Rotarians and charter 30 new clubs. “We are having only 28 active Rotaract clubs with around 400 Rotaractors; I will double the number of Rotaractors and form 50 new Rotaract clubs.”

A two-day badminton tournament saw the participation of 80 teams from seven RI districts at the Ranipet Sipcot complex. His target for TRF giving is \$500,000. His father, a charter member and current president of RC Walajapet, and mother Mallika, past president of Inner Wheel Club of Ranipet, have “deeply etched the spirit of social service in me since childhood,” he says. His spouse Nandhini is a charter member of Rotary E-club of Ranipet. Raghavan is also a board member of RILM and “I am very much attracted to this noble initiative of Mehta to usher in 100 per cent literacy in India.” He was influenced by PDG C R Chandrabob to join Rotary in 2009.

Designed by N Krishnamurthy

# The sky's the limit

Miles Howard

**Against the backdrop of Houston's global tapestry, Rotary will chart its future at the 2022 convention.**

I am squinting into a glass case lit by red and blue LED lights, looking for something alive. It's a sunny Friday afternoon in the Houston metro area, and I've ducked inside a vast building with a group of fellow travellers at Space Center Houston — the museum at NASA's Johnson Space Center. This is where the Apollo programme astronauts trained for spaceflight in the G-force simulator, a machine

known as the "centrifuge," that Apollo 11 astronaut Michael Collins called 'diabolical'. Today, you can walk into the Apollo Mission Control Center, where NASA officials sat saucer-eyed as Neil Armstrong took his first steps on the moon. The glowing box I'm studying is a vegetable grower. One day, it could be deployed in a colony on Mars. I spot wispy leaves sprouting inside. Lettuce, or possibly arugula.

You're not allowed to pop open the incubator and sample the goods, but a handful of adventurous recruits might get to experience this in fall 2022, when NASA will transform one of the Space Center's hangars into a simulated Mars colony. A volunteer crew will spend a year there, living inside a 1,700-square foot module, so that NASA can plan for the physical and psychological stressors that cosmic exploration will present: confinement to tight quarters,



delayed messages from Earth, and lots of freeze-dried food. It's one of several spaceflight experiments being conducted at the Space Center: a blueprint of our future taking shape right here in the shadow of Houston.

Or is it the other way around? Houston is the fourth largest city in America, with 7 million residents in the metro area. And though Houston has all the familiar iconography associated with Texas — space shuttles, brisket — as a native Bostonian, I had, even long before my visit, begun to pick up transmissions from the city that went beyond everything I'd believed to be

true. Photos of crawfish, harvested by Vietnamese-American fishermen off the Gulf Coast and served Viet-Cajun style, glistening with garlic butter. Video of Anthony Bourdain at a city park, talking with young men about their candy-coloured, elbow-wheeled slab cars, an innovation of Houston's hip-hop scene.

Since 1982, Rice University's annual Kinder Houston Area Survey has tracked the evolution of Houston as one of America's most racially and ethnically diverse cities, with Black, Hispanic, and Asian residents constituting more than half of the city. A 2019 US Census Bureau survey found that nearly 30 per cent of Houstonians were born outside the United States. Not only does this make Houston a bonafide majority-minority town, it also reflects broader demographic changes in cities worldwide as globalisation and other factors spur migration. It's no wonder that the 2022 Rotary International Convention will be held here. Houston isn't only a hub of technological innovation; it's a window to the world beyond our immediate present.

But what does Houston look and sound like today? In this mosaic of a city with international roots, what awaits us? That's what I've come here to get a taste of.

While the Space Center conjures a cosmic future, the second stop on my itinerary — a late lunch before I can check into my hotel — offers a more earthbound glimpse into tomorrow. The joint is called Blood Bros BBQ, and it's hidden in a strip mall in Bellaire, a few miles southwest of Downtown. The menu is Texas barbecue, but not in the way that you might think. Co-owners Robin and Terry Wong and Quy Hoang grew up in a nearby neighbourhood, close to Houston's Chinatown, and with Blood Bros, they have established

a laboratory in which Texas barbecue can evolve. The orange walls are adorned with Astros jerseys. Buckets of iced Shiner Bock flank the counter. Brisket sits atop the menu — but what emerges from the kitchen on a steel tray is a gamechanger. This nuong pork belly burnt ends, with a sweet-and-tart glaze that permeates the meat. Brisket fried rice, fiery, tossed with smoked beef. An electric green cucumber salad with hints of rice wine and sesame.

Like a neutron star in the maw of a black hole, it's all gone in a matter of minutes.

### Neighbourhood watch

Let me say this again: At 637 square miles, Houston is big — and its population has grown by 10 per cent over the last decade. When you drive the labyrinthine freeways that snake through the city, the high-rises of Downtown can sometimes appear to be a hundred miles away. For new residents, the scale of Houston has meant more housing supply and more spaces for building businesses, which gives Houston a competitive edge against cities like New York or Los Angeles. But for a traveller, the size of Houston means that you can't possibly experience it all in one weekend. Instead, you choose a couple of Houston's neighbourhoods, and you dig in.

One effective way to orient yourself with the sprawl of Houston is to focus your inaugural trip on the communities inside the 'Loop'. That's how Houstonians refer to the core of the city, which is encircled by Interstate 610. I've chosen Downtown as my base camp, and with the help of Jeff Balke, a Houston-raised website developer and freelance writer whose coverage of food and nightlife have appeared in *Houstonia* magazine, I've assembled a list of leads that will take me through several neighbourhoods in the Loop. "Eating is the best thing to



do in Houston, bar none,” Balke tells me during our phone conversation. “Basically, a new taqueria opens every third day, and almost all of them are great. I feel like they’re gonna open one in my bathroom next week.”

In a way, the story of Downtown Houston as it exists today begins not with the skyscrapers that house Fortune 500 companies such as Chevron and Kinder Morgan, but with the George R Brown Convention Center — a glass behemoth topped with bright red decorative smokestacks that look like Godzilla-scale Lego pieces. It’s also home base for the 2022 Rotary Convention.

Not too long ago, the area was in a chronic state of retreat. The early 20<sup>th</sup>-century oil boom brought commerce and life to Downtown, but when the highways seeded new suburban neighbourhoods, Downtown experienced an exodus. Even when the

1973 oil embargo spiked crude prices, showering Houston with more oil money, many of the dividends landed beyond Downtown. A decade later, oil prices plummeted, and the resultant oil recession yielded a new consensus among city leaders: Downtown needed to be more than a business hub. Specifically, it needed more spaces where Houstonians could play and have fun.

The convention centre was one of the first recreational venues to emerge from the oil recession in 1987. It was followed by Minute Maid Park — Houston’s first retractable roof stadium and home of baseball’s Astros — and a new lineage of restaurants, nightclubs and apartments. Because Houston doesn’t have zoning laws, the residential and the recreational run into each other here.

You can see this convergence while walking around Downtown, which is my first order of business

after dropping my duffel at The Lancaster Hotel. The boutique hotel has been in business since the Roaring Twenties, and some of that opulence has survived (think white marble, gold doorknobs, and a Champagne check-in.) The hotel is just steps away from the concert halls of the Theater District, innumerable patio bars and restaurants, and better yet, Discovery Green, where I find myself near dusk. Created by the city with a nonprofit partner in 2008, this \$125 million-park sits right outside the convention centre doors, and it’s easy to envision a mass of convivial Rotarians and Rotaractors spilling into the park on June 4 for the opening night welcome bash planned by the Host Organisation Committee. The offerings here include a glassy pond, along which I bumble through waterside gardens; lush picnic greens, where I witness young people practising yoga; splash

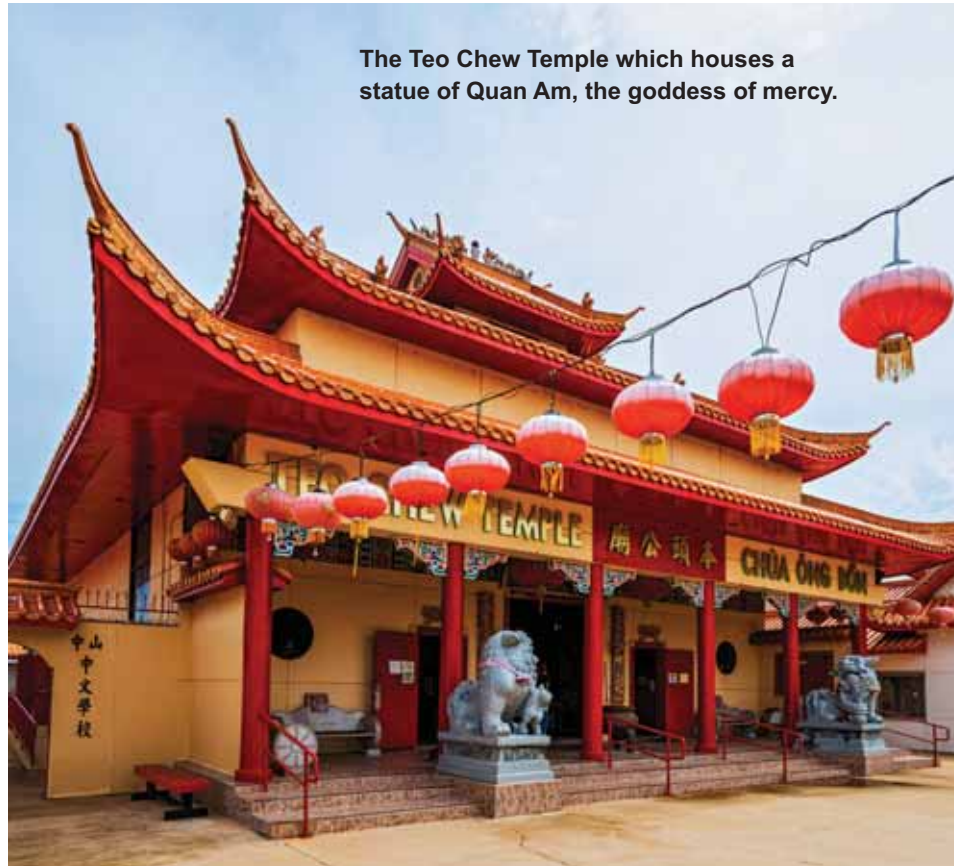


Saturn V, the type of rocket that sent man to the moon, on display at Space Center Houston.

fountains; sculptures; and even a fine dining restaurant called The Grove, which grows its herbs and produce in a rooftop garden.

It speaks to the rebirth of Downtown as a place for people to come together and raise a glass, or a selfie stick. Even for those who live outside the Loop, rambling around it is alluring. Just ask Rhonda Kennedy, a lifelong Houston metro resident and the host committee chair. A resident of Sweeny — one hour southwest of Downtown — Kennedy makes regular pilgrimages here with her family, and also with her motorcycle club. “We’ll stay in a boutique hotel and I’ll take the guys to a restaurant in the Theater District,” Kennedy says. “And remember, we’re talking about bikers.”

After draining a Cougar Paw red ale in the backyard of 8th Wonder Brewery — where I encounter four towering stone statues depicting each of the Beatles, created by local sculptor



The Teo Chew Temple which houses a statue of Quan Am, the goddess of mercy.



David Adickes — I trek a few blocks northwest to Xochi, where chef Hugo Ortega, who came to Houston from Mexico in 1984 with no connections or job leads, has assembled a menu with an exceptional selection of Oaxacan mole dishes. Anticipating a meaty 48 hours (after all, I am in Texas), I order the wild mushrooms with zucchini flowers and masa dumplings in a mole amarillo. But the highlight of my first night in Houston involves hopping aboard the light rail train that runs through Downtown and taking it to Hermann Park, a 445-acre oasis of woody gardens and duck ponds just south of the city centre.

Here, beneath the pyramid-shaped canopy of the Miller Outdoor Theatre, a sizeable crowd and I are treated to a performance of classical Indian dance by Silambam Houston, whose founder, Lavanya Rajagopalan, taught the art form to children in her native Chennai before immigrating to the United States. As one dancer in vivid green fabric spins to harmonic percussion and strings, I decide to move from the reserved seats near the stage to the upper lawn, where most of the crowd has unfurled picnic blankets on the grass, under the stars. You get the sense that just as much as the people came



## L I F T O F F

Houston offers a near-endless array of stellar restaurants, museums, parks, and cultural attractions. Here are 31 destinations to help launch your visit.

- |   |   |  |   |
|---|---|--|---|
| 1) Sunny Flea Market<br>8705 Airline Drive          | 9) Xochi<br>1777 Walker St.   | 16) Common Bond Bistro & Bakery (Montrose)<br>1706 Westheimer Road | 24) The Orange Show<br>2401 Munger St.                |
| 2) Crawfish & Noodles<br>11360 Bellaire Blvd.       | 10) Discovery Green<br>1500 McKinney St.                              | 17) The Menil Collection<br>1533 Sul Ross St.                      | 25) Japanese Garden<br>6000 Fannin St.                |
| 3) Teo Chew Temple<br>10599 Turtlewood Court        | 11) George R. Brown Convention Center<br>1001 Avenida De Las Americas | 18) Rothko Chapel<br>3900 Yupon St.                                | 26) Holocaust Museum Houston<br>5401 Caroline St.     |
| 4) Blood Bros. BBQ<br>5425 Bellaire Blvd., Bellaire | 12) 8th Wonder Brewery<br>2202 Dallas St.                             | 19) Buffalo Soldiers National Museum<br>3816 Caroline St.          | 27) Hermann Park<br>6001 Fannin St.                   |
| 5) Art Car Museum<br>140 Heights Blvd.              | 13) Kâu Ba<br>2502 Dunlavy St.  | 20) Emancipation Park<br>3018 Emancipation Ave.                    | 28) Miller Outdoor Theatre<br>6000 Hermann Park Drive |
| 6) Lei Low<br>6412 N Main St.                       | 14) Waugh Bridge Bat Colony<br>Waugh Drive                            | 21) Doshi House<br>3419 Emancipation Ave.                          | 29) Turkey Leg Hut<br>4830 Almeda Road                |
| 7) Mastrantos<br>927 Studewood St.                  | 15) Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern<br>105 Sabine St.                      | 22) Project Row Houses<br>2521 Holman St.                          | 30) Space Center Houston<br>1601 E NASA Parkway       |
| 8) The Lancaster Hotel<br>701 Texas Ave.            |   | 23) Smither Park<br>2441 Munger St.                                | 31) Kemah Boardwalk<br>215 Kipp Ave., Kemah           |

to see the dancers, they also came for this — the unspoken ecstasy of gathering together for something beautiful.

### Flight path

The next morning, I fuel up with a flat white from Minuti Coffee and hop back on the light rail. But this time, I take the train to Houston's Museum District. In this leafy and walkable residential neighbourhood, 19 museums offer a smorgasbord of cultural immersions, from contemporary art to medical sciences, Czech culture, and even the psychic explorations of the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung. It's a dense maze of museums, apartments, and parks: another nod to Houston's non-existent zoning laws.

But the district also benefited from a grassroots community vision that began in the 1970s. Residents of the nearby neighbourhood of Montrose (I'll amble over there later) formed their own development organisation, which, combined with the efforts of others, led to more housing construction as well as pedestrian safety improvement projects on the streets and sidewalks that link Houston's enviable collection of museums. The district was officially minted by the city in 1989.

I begin at Holocaust Museum Houston. Siegi Izakson, a Houstonian and Holocaust survivor, inspired a volunteer movement to secure funds and resources to build a museum where the stories of his fellow survivors could be preserved and shared for generations. As I wander through the museum, sizing up an authentic Danish boat that may have transported Jewish people to safe havens in Sweden, I unexpectedly make a new friend. Her name is Gloria. She's a volunteer greeter who welcomes visitors to the museum and offers insight into the exhibits. Within moments of her approaching me and introducing herself, we're talking about how her family immigrated to



**The opulent Lancaster Hotel has been welcoming guests since the Roaring Twenties.**

the United States from Czechoslovakia in the late 1920s.

I wander several blocks north of the museum until I arrive at an older brown brick building that resembles a high school. This is the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum, which is dedicated to telling the story of the Black soldiers who served in the military after the Civil War — and of how this yielded new generations of Black naval officers, pilots, and astronauts.

The museum sits at the nexus of the Museum District and one of Houston's historically Black neighbourhoods: the Third Ward. If you're visiting midday, you can easily saunter from the museum to the Turkey Leg Hut, where co-owners Lynn and Nakia Price crank out smoked turkey legs that are stuffed with seasoned rice and smothered in decadent sauces and toppings, such as crawfish macaroni. When I arrive at 11.30am, there's

already a sizable queue wrapped around the block beneath shade tents. But I'm determined to experience the Prices' signature creations (the couple sold their turkey legs outside the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo before opening the restaurant in 2017). A juicy drumstick liberally glazed with Hennessy justifies the 45-minute wait.

Sated but still curious, I take a Lyft back to the hotel and pick up my rental car for a deeper foray into the Third Ward. My destination is a series of understated white shotgun houses. You wouldn't know it from the road, but some of the houses are standalone galleries that feature rotating exhibits from local or visiting artists. A jungle of houseplants overwhelming a 1960s-era couch and television set. Golden orbs superimposed on floor-to-ceiling photographs of oil refineries.

These are the Project Row Houses, the brainchild of Third Ward artists and community leaders who saw the derelict houses as potential incubators and hosting grounds for creativity. But the Project Row Houses are also a living thesis that art can be an engine for social transformation. And the galleries aren't the only innovation here. Other row houses are set aside for young single mothers seeking a supportive, creative environment where they can raise their kids. The older houses sit smack in the middle of modern duplexes owned by a sister corporation, Row House CDC, that provides affordable housing to community residents.

At the Project Row Houses visitor centre, I meet a former resident, Trinity Williams, a mixed-media artist who moved to Houston from the Northeast and raised her three boys in one of the duplexes. "It takes a village to raise a child, and this right here is the village," she says, as we check out the well-stocked community food fridge



**Outside the convention centre, the 30-foot tall kinetic sculpture Wings Over Water incorporates a 1,488-square-foot water fountain.**

that Project Row Houses set up in one of the shotgun houses this summer. Williams has worked for Project Row Houses as a docent — a cross between a teacher and a guide. In 2018, with her sons grown and out in the world, Williams was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, which drove her to pursue her art full time. "For me, it's a way of healing," she explains. Her work, which includes mixed media on canvas and photography, as well as sculptures made of 'upcycled' materials, has appeared and been sold at Houston exhibitions and galas.

What I'm learning, quickly, is that the more you wander around and bump into Houstonians, the more likely it is you will find yourself exchanging life stories or swapping telephone numbers with someone. For a city so gargantuan and diverse, there's a foundational gregariousness here. It manifests in spontaneous conversations, but

also in socially-minded projects that Houston's communities have undertaken and shared in together.

Near the eastern edge of the Third Ward, I'm greeted with another of these group projects: Smither Park, a grassy lawn that would be understated if it weren't for the incredible glimmering mosaics that artists have built on the pathway, walls and shade shelters in the park. Colourful shards of glass, kitchenware and electronics depict tigers, angels, fish, and creatures yet to be named. As I enter the park, a young woman emerges from a blue Camaro parked nearby, a camera in one hand and an iced coffee in the other. "Pretty spicy out here, huh," she exclaims, and I offer a gallows quip. It's humid as all get out. And yet, here we are.

In summer, Houstonians tend to save their outdoor exploits for early or late in the day, when the sun isn't



quite so fierce. At sunset, I go for a jog in Buffalo Bayou Park, a 160-acre corridor of cypress and cottonwood trees and glassy streams: a preserved piece of the wetlands on which Houston was built. I notice a crowd gathered on a hillside, staring at an unremarkable bridge that crosses the park's central waterway. I join them to see what's up. A family tucking into big bags of Chick-fil-A enlightens me. Waugh Bridge, the crossing we're staring at, is home to 250,000 Mexican free-tailed bats, and at sunset, the bats depart from the crevices of the bridge for a hedonistic night of scarfing down insects. I've got dinner reservations at Mastrantos, a restaurant with Venezuelan, Italian, and Spanish flair that offers a chorizo carbonara that seduced my stomach during my pre-trip research. But this seems vital. So I join the spectators. Promising squeaks echo from under the bridge.

At 8.13pm an immense cloud of bats flutters past us for minutes. I can't help but wonder: Where are they going?

### Future vision

There's something humbling yet intriguing about that consortium of bats flying toward some unknown destination. The memory of their flight still gnaws at me the next morning as I drive west of Downtown to Montrose. One of Houston's more eclectic neighbourhoods — a potpourri of colonial-style homes and Modernist condos, gardens, bistros, patio bars and art galleries — Montrose feels as socially accessible as Downtown, but leafier and quieter. Powered by an emerald-striped pistachio croissant from Common Bond Bistro & Bakery, I head for the Rothko Chapel, a non-denominational house of worship and a work of art. The interior walls feature massive obsidian paintings by Mark Rothko, with the faintest traces of purple and gold. A skylight illuminates the silent chamber.

So what do people come here to worship? In two words: social justice. Rothko Chapel is regularly visited by civil rights activists and spiritual leaders, united by a vision of common good. To honour individuals who have upheld or advanced human rights, the chapel bestows the biennial Óscar Romero Award, named after the assassinated Salvadoran bishop canonised by Pope Francis in 2018.

I've come not to be surprised to find such a shrine in the heart of Houston. During my 48 hours here, I've witnessed natural and man-made beauty that reflects the local ecology and international heritage of this city. I've seen what happens when you take people from all over the world and set them down in a metropolis on the Gulf Coast. They put their heads together and create new things, and they also put their own spin on the classic foods,

art, and pastimes that make life worth savouring.

As a visitor, you can walk right into their workshops, as I do after my Rothko visit, ducking into the misted patio of a Vietnamese-American bistro called Kâu Ba. You can order some traditional brunch fare here — fancy eggs, mimosas, etc — or you can dig deeper and discover (as I did) what's in the dish mysteriously titled 'Grandma's Subsidy'. It's an homage to chef Nikki Tran's grandmother, who endured the fall of Saigon in 1975 and learned to throw nourishing meals together with pantry odds and ends. It's a delicious mélange of umami flavour, more complex than its minimalist appearance would suggest.

I'm due at George Bush Intercontinental Airport in an hour, but rather than feeling crestfallen about leaving, I'm envious of those who have yet to touch down in Houston. It's the kind of city you want to tell others about.

I want to leave Houston on a note of ellipsis — a vision of what to explore the next time I'm here. So instead of driving straight to the airport, I head southwest, travelling beyond the Loop to Chinatown (now often called Asiatown) on the city's outskirts, where the Blood Bros BBQ proprietors grew up. I pass apartments and strip malls until I reach the Teo Chew Temple. Domed brick-coloured roofs; a statue of Quan Am, the goddess of mercy; and strings of paper lanterns set the scene, along with the sweet aroma of incense. In a courtyard to the right of the entrance, teens practise a form of martial arts, the clatter of their sticks echoing through the temple interior. I'm greeted by a council of Buddhist deities, their likenesses manifested in paintings and sculptures. We will meet again, they seem to say.

*Miles Howard is a Boston-based writer.*

© Rotary



# Wood deserves a second innings

Preeti Mehra

**L**iving sustainably is not only about generating green energy, harvesting water, and segregating your waste. It means embracing a whole new lifestyle and a way of thinking that is markedly different from the 'standard' urban uncaring way of life. It means actively discerning what would be harmful for the planet and what would be a friendly action in every aspect of living — be it your food, wardrobe, your linen, your gadgets, your kitchenware, your artefacts, or your furniture.

Let's take the last aspect this time — furniture. Ninety-nine out of a hundred times most furniture in every house is made of wood which comes from the precious tree. It is the basic unit of what provides us forests — the lungs of the earth — and gives humans and other living beings oxygen, their essential life force. It goes without

saying that the more trees you save, the more you will be contributing to climate amelioration, improving air quality, enhancing biodiversity, preserving soil, and conserving water. Trees literally moderate the effect of the sun, wind and rain.

But what does this have to do with you, you may ask? A lot, if you are moving house or replacing a sofa set, cupboard or dining table. If you resist the temptation of going in for furniture made of fresh wood, you will contribute to creating less demand for felling trees.

I remember when I shifted to Mumbai (then Bombay) in the 1980s as a youngster, I went out scouting for furniture that was reasonably priced but had character. At an old Parsi market, I came across this hardy quaint queen size bedstead that could be dismantled and transported with ease. It must have easily been 40 years old. Falling totally in love with this solid (teak, I presumed) piece on which you could mount a mosquito net, I brought it home. When our son was born several years later, we had its legs shortened as it was rather high to negotiate a newborn. Since then, the bedstead travelled with us from Bombay to Chennai to Delhi and today in 2021 it sits pretty in the house of a young friend, who got married last year. To cut a long tale short, the Parsi bedstead looks as elegant as it was when we bought it. One big screw that got lost has been replaced by an enterprising carpenter.

This story is just an example of how timeless a piece of furniture can

be. Of course, there would be moments when you get tired of the same look or the dimensions of your house and feel the need to change the furniture. If you want to go green, here are some options to consider before you decide to get rid of the old faithful: You could reupholster it with fresh fabric, trim its cushioning and go in for a brand-new spiffy look. Alternately, you could get a professional restorer to do the job





for you — she or he could either give it a shiny makeover or a classic vintage appearance. Chairs, sofa sets, old couches get a fresh lease of life without a single tree being chopped off!

Of late, start-ups have come up which are into furniture and have opened up green choices. One of the most innovative in India is the House of Kieraya (HoK) run by young entrepreneur Ajith Mohan Karimpana. It comprises the online furniture shops Furlenco and Furbicle. The latter caters to those who refuse to leave a carbon footprint — it offers professionally refurbished furniture at reasonable cost. The sub-brand Unlmt provides a furniture subscription service and monthly rental for those who cannot or do not wish to invest in buying furniture upfront.

So, what happens when you move from one city to another? Your furniture goes back to the company which provides you the same furniture at your new destination as a free service. In fact, you can walk into a new house with just your clothes and rent the entire gear that you need to start a home, including sofas, beds, tables, workstations, storage and appliances. The company offers all models — rental, subscription, re-commerce and retail.

Apart from an online offering, every city has its own old furniture market. Delhi matches Mumbai's Oshiwara market with its own Amar colony stalls where you can find the most interesting pieces. We picked up two old world writing tables from there. Bengaluru, Chennai, and other cities also have their own equivalents and rummaging for classics is an excursion by itself.



Furniture, in fact, can tickle the imagination in many different ways. The possibilities are endless. I have a friend who has turned her old car tyres into excellent sitting stools. She has picked up driftwood from a riverbank and refurbished it into a bedside table, placed a glass over a traditional Kerala metal *uruli* (community cooking vessel) to fashion it into a coffee table. She has repurposed an old cycle into a stand for drying clothes.

Another friend requisitioned all the old wooden trunks abandoned in his ancestral home and his late grandmother's carved treasure chests. With the help of a professional, he refurbished them into bedside tables, wardrobes, even a bookshelf and a bar table.

If these experiments are not for you and you would rather go in for new stuff, then try to sell your old furniture, don't dump it. Or simply donate it to someone who believes in the crucial 'Rs' — recycle, reuse, repurpose, refuse to buy new — to save the planet. If this is not done, your furniture — be it wood, plastic, metal — will end up exactly where you don't want to see it — in the city landfills or its debris floating on the sea.

*The writer is a senior journalist who writes on environmental issues.*

Designed by N Krishnamurthy





## Creating magic with the bansuri

# Hariprasad Chaurasia

V Ramnarayan

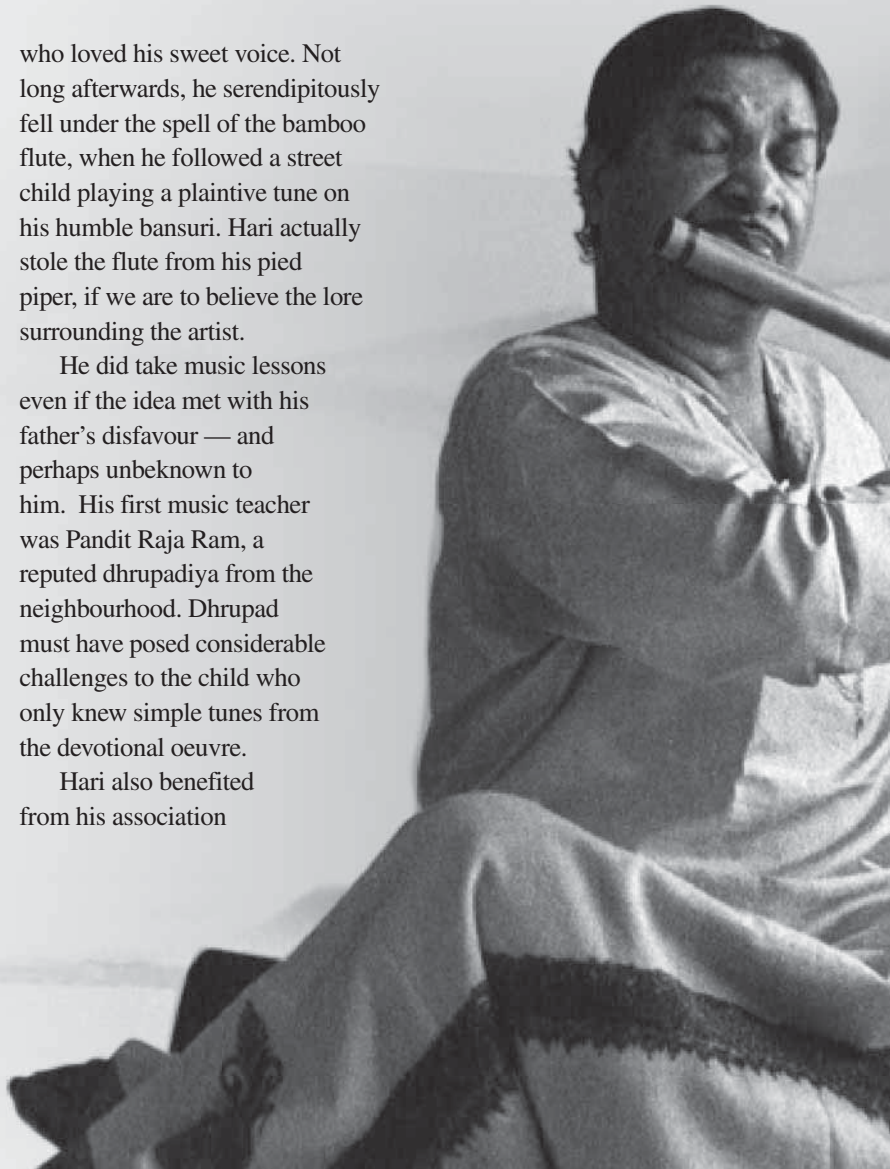
**F**lute maestro Hariprasad Chaurasia seems a genetic oddity — a consummate and world renowned musician born to a wrestler father and a homemaker mother who never went to school. The parents had no artistic pretensions, the mother died young, when the boy was barely four, and the father dreamt of his sons becoming wrestlers and earning name, wealth and fame through exploits in the *akhada*. Hariprasad, the youngest, born on July 1, 1938 at Allahabad, however, discovered the joy of music even as a child, and yearned to achieve excellence in the field. Despite — or perhaps because of — Chedilal Pehelwan's towering paternal presence, he also developed a distaste for wrestling, though he faithfully did everything to stay strong and fit as demanded of an aspiring wrestler. He swam, ran, exercised — and, naturally, ate well.

Parental disapproval aside, little Hari joined the chorus of devotional singing in a nearby temple, encouraged by the family's neighbours and the temple priests

who loved his sweet voice. Not long afterwards, he serendipitously fell under the spell of the bamboo flute, when he followed a street child playing a plaintive tune on his humble bansuri. Hari actually stole the flute from his pied piper, if we are to believe the lore surrounding the artist.

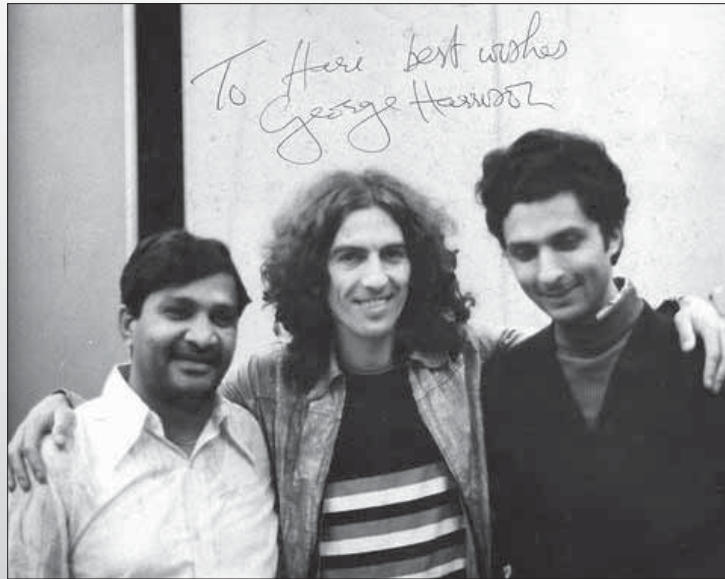
He did take music lessons even if the idea met with his father's disfavour — and perhaps unbeknown to him. His first music teacher was Pandit Raja Ram, a reputed dhrupadiya from the neighbourhood. Dhrupad must have posed considerable challenges to the child who only knew simple tunes from the devotional oeuvre.

Hari also benefited from his association



with an ayurvedic doctor and neighbour Kailashnath Chaturvedi, whose family had a keen but amateur interest in music. At the Chaturvedi home, he regularly joined in the impromptu practice sessions in which father and two sons sang and played the harmonium and the tabla.

Soon Hariprasad was singing solo at the temple. According to Chaurasia's biographer Uma Vasudev, (*Romance of the Bamboo Reed*, Shubhi, 2005) many of Chedilal's neighbours entered into "a conspiracy of silence" hiding Hari's musical exploits from the father's eyes and ears, as they knew he would not approve, bent as he was on a wrestling career for his son, especially after a mysterious illness claimed the life of eldest son Shivprasad at 17.



Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia, Beatles' lead guitarist George Harrison and santoor artist Shivkumar Sharma.

Hariprasad earned a college degree in the arts stream though he had been impetuous and starry-eyed enough once to run away from home and wrestling, his pet hate, to seek his fortune in Bombay cinema. He and a friend knocked on the doors of film

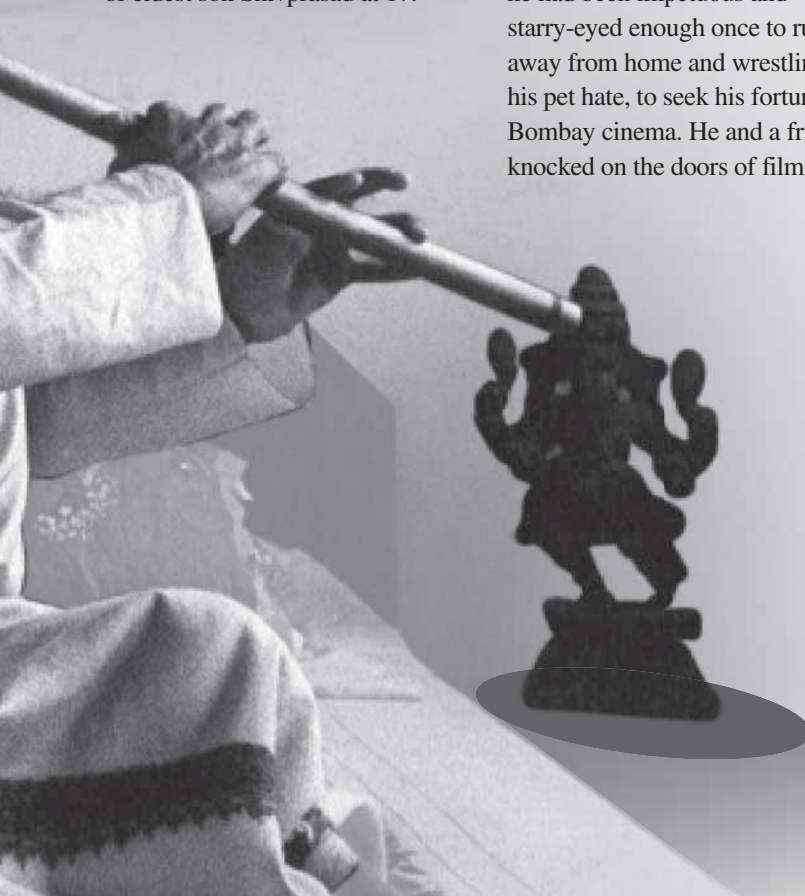
studios in vain before some kindly soul gave them some sage advice and sent them back home. Father forgave son and all was well.

Chedilal was smart enough to enrol Hari in a typewriting class. Armed with a BA degree and exceptional typing speed, Hari found a job as a typist first in the office of the Praja Socialist Party, and later at the Allahabad Milling Company, which offered him better pay. All seemed well, with

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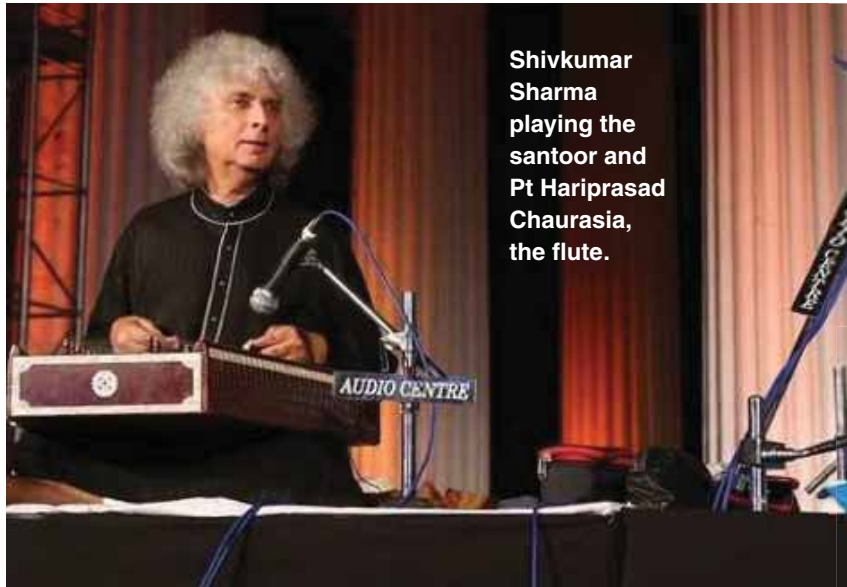
Hariprasad earned a college degree in arts and the starry-eyed lad once ran away from home to seek his fortune in Bombay cinema.

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Hariprasad seemingly reconciled to his regular job, until one day he happened to listen to a flute concert on the radio by AIR artist Pandit Bholanath which drew him back into the magic world of music. He walked into the AIR office seeking an appointment with Bholanath. He impressed him enough for him to eventually accept him as his *shagird*. Passing his audition test, Hariprasad was accepted as a Grade ‘B’ AIR artist, creditable for someone of his youth. By this time, Hariprasad was well immersed in music, practising during his lunch hour and after the day’s work. The secret of his musical exploits was finally revealed to Chedilal when his early concert appearances were reviewed in the local press. Pleased with his son’s new found success in music, firmly grounded as it was in steady employment, the pehelwan relented enough to allow Hari a break from wrestling.



**Shivkumar Sharma playing the santoor and Pt Hariprasad Chaurasia, the flute.**

Allahabad was now a prominent centre of Hindustani classical music, thanks largely to music festivals and conferences conducted under the aegis of the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya founded by Vishnu Digambar Paluskar. Hari attended these festivals and soaked in some of the

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Hariprasad Chaurasia has always admired and respected fellow musicians, be they his juniors, peers or seniors.

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**With tabla player Ustad Alla Rakha.**

great music on offer from the likes of Amir Khan and DV Paluskar, though to his regret, he never had the opportunity of attending a flute concert by Pannalal Ghosh, arguably the greatest exponent of the art. According to musician-journalist Sivapriya Krishnan writing in the performing arts monthly *Sruti*, Chaurasia made bold to meet eminent musician and guru Alauddin Khan in his hotel room during one of these conferences, and he advised him to enrol himself in his famous gurukul at Maihar to learn from his daughter Annapurna Devi, the surbahar expert. (As quoted in



switched to playing left-handed as a token of his reverence to his guru. Thus embracing the Maihar gharana as he did, Chaurasia also added several new dimensions to bansuri music, incorporating both the vocal (gayaki) and the instrumental (gatkari) styles of flute playing, revolutionizing the way the instrument was treated by the artist and received by the audience.”)

His typing and stenography skills earning him a job in the

government’s district planning office, Hariprasad was able to devote all his spare time on music practice, now with his father’s grudging approval. As a regular performer for AIR Allahabad, he jumped at an opportunity provided by programme executive Shantimaya Ghosh to apply for a permanent job in AIR at either Lucknow or Cuttack. Chaurasia struck gold, though he did not know it at the time, when posted to Cuttack, his second choice.

*Sruti* magazine, “Such a migration from Allahabad to Maihar was then a dream too far for the young man but Allauddin Khan’s invitation remained permanently etched in Hariprasad’s heart and mind, and he pursued his ambition relentlessly while establishing himself as a flautist contributing to the song and dance routines of Hindi cinema in the 1960s. Annapurna Devi was then leading the life of a recluse after the breakup of her marriage to sitar maestro Ravi Shankar. Chaurasia just refused to take no for an answer, and besieged her house with his never ending attempts to win her approval. When the nod came, it was accompanied by stern demands: to unlearn a great deal of what he knew before learning anew; to play with greater sustain rather than in staccato phrases; to go deeper into individual ragas rather than indulge in virtuosity. Bizarrely, Hariprasad even



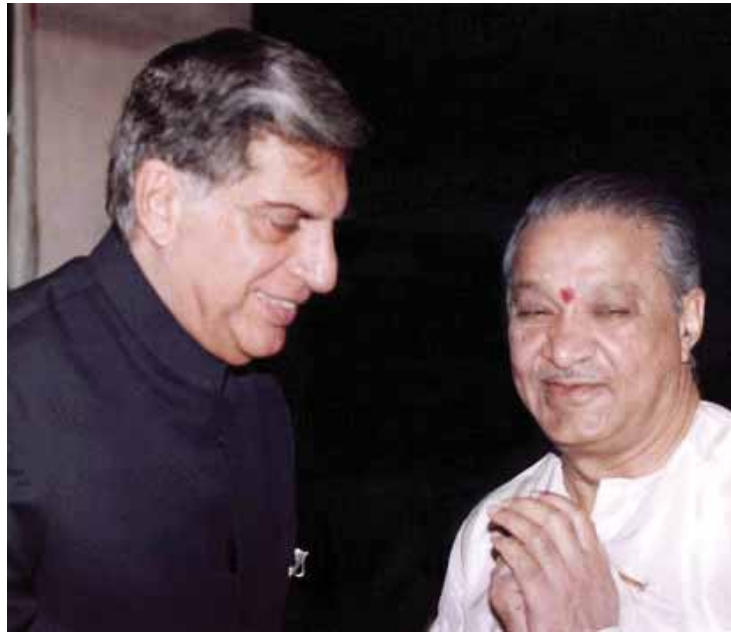
With tabla maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain.





the gift of their legacy when they performed there circa 1972–73. Shiv-Hari became a successful duo on the concert platform and in record labels in India and abroad. They also worked together as music directors in the Hindi film industry, notably in movies like *Silsila* and *Lamhe*, before eventually parting as friends to strengthen their individual identities as outstanding musicians.

Once he “arrived” as a leading artist, Chaurasia came to be known for his infectious humour and bonhomie through the decades. At Kalakshetra, Chennai, in 1982 or thereabouts, he gave such a mesmerising performance that one critic hailed him as a modern day Krishna who cast a spell on a hall full of gopis in the Brindavan that was Kalakshetra



With industrialist Ratan Tata.

that evening. There was a magical raga *Kedar* on offer if memory serves one right, and when a young female fan expressed her appreciation for it, the flautist shot back with a glint in his eye, “You know, I played it especially for you”. He had been equally disarming before the concert, when another fan asked him to play the raga *Hemant*. “I don’t know that raga yet. I’ll go back and learn it from my guru before my next concert here,” he said in all earnestness. Another sample of his wit: Midway through a concert, he announces “Interval, fortyfive minutes.” When the audience lets out a collective sigh, he explains: “Interval for tea, five minutes.”

For someone of such humility, Chaurasia boasts a considerable repertoire of ragas including some of south Indian origin, *Charukesi* and *Hamsadhvani*, for instance. His mastery of morning ragas is complete. After all he played

them countless times in films to herald a new dawn; only we didn’t know that those beautiful scenes amidst mountains and brooks were often announced by such a distinguished musician.

Hari Prasad Chaurasia has always admired and respected fellow musicians, be they his juniors, peers or seniors. And he continues to honour them with dedication through his Vrindaban Gurukul, the home of soirees he curates to this day at his Mumbai home, taking Hindustani music to true lovers of the art in an intimate setting. Its Bhubaneswar branch is his way of saying ‘thank you’ to Odisha, the state that through AIR Cuttack and PVK gave him his major break. His musical journey has probably taken its final turn — a serene and profound bend.

*The writer is an author and former editor of Sruti magazine.*

Designed by Krishnapratheesh S





## Wordsworld

# Present 'purr'fect



**Sandhya Rao**

Life lessons from the comfort of friendship between a man and his cat.

There are a few people in my life with whom no conversation is complete without a discussion about books: What are you reading now? Have you read this one? How did you like that other one? So, when I opened a surprise package the other day, my response to its contents was entirely in the spirit of this relationship.

Normally, I allow packages to rest for a couple of days before ripping them open; this time that rule was ignored, don't-know-why. Inside, to my utter, utter delight, were four books: *New Kings of the World: Dispatches*

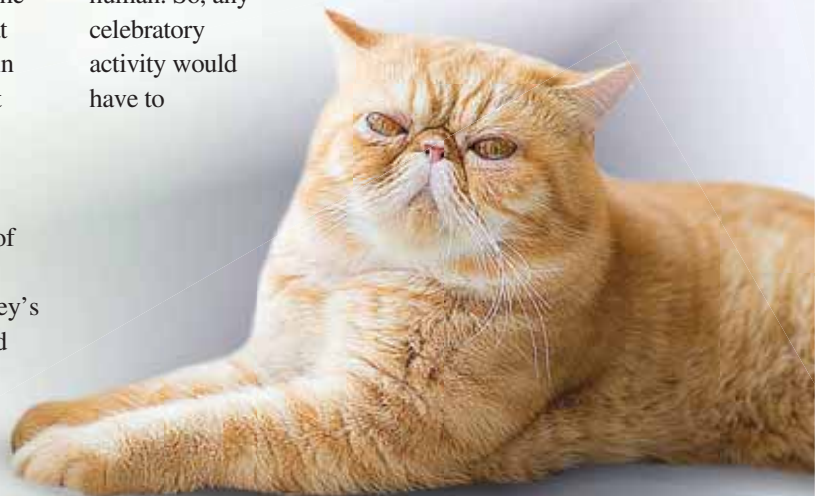
*from Bollywood, Dizi, and K-Pop* by Fatima Bhutto; *Holy Cow! An Indian Adventure* by Sarah MacDonald; *Patriots & Partisans* by Ramachandra Guha; and *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* by Nayomi Munaweera. The blurbs made it clear that each book was unique in style and theme: 'a vast cultural movement... emerging from outside the Western world... about the new arbiters of mass culture — India's Bollywood films, Turkey's soap operas, or *dizi*, and South Korea's pop music'; 'Kathy Lette\* meets Tom Robbins\*\* on a

slow train to Varanasi with Bill Bryson\*\*\* supplying the onion bhajis... very very funny'; a collection of essays defending 'the liberal centre against the dogmas of left and right... with style, depth and polemical verve; and a 'sweeping yet intimate saga' set in a time of a terrible, divisive civil war. Such a sweep of voices, from Pakistan, Australia, India and Sri Lanka! I couldn't have asked for a better delivery.

However, you're still in for a treat: *The Travelling Cat Chronicles* by Hiro Arikawa; but first, the back story. My sister will soon celebrate a milestone birthday and her family and friends have been confabulating over what we can do to make it special given that she lives in faraway London and we are hostage to a pandemic. She has two pets, Socks and Diego, who are Norwegian Forest cats, and animal lovers will tell you their pets are human, more than human. So, any celebratory activity would have to

have something 'cat'chy. Since she also loves to read, the first item on the list was reading material. Google threw up several suggestions, among them Hiro Arikawa. The book arrived (at my address, to be sent on later) and I was so captivated by the delicate, Japanese-chic cover, I began reading it instantly.

I was actually going to talk about something else in this column (with an interesting back story as well), but Hiro's storytelling bowled me over. Reviewer Lynn Truss says on the back cover, 'Anyone who has ever unashamedly loved an animal will read this book with gratitude, for its understanding of an emotion that ennobles us as human beings, whether we value it or not.' Writer Fiona Melrose says, 'The uniqueness of this book is its subtle yet persistent charm that insinuates itself into your heart.' 'Bewitching and



comforting' says the *Sunday Telegraph*.

*The Travelling Cat Chronicles* is all this and more. Translated from the Japanese by Philip Gabriel (and I have no way of knowing how true it is to the Japanese), the story reads the way we generally perceive Japanese art, and anything Japanese, really: simple, spare, aesthetic, functional, sophisticated to the point of Zen... The bare bones of the storyline go something like this: Satoru is orphaned as a boy and he goes to live with his aunt. He is sad but finds refuge in a deep love for cats and the love he receives in return from them. When he is older, he rescues a cat whom he adopts and names Nana, apparently Japanese for the number seven because the cat's tail is shaped like a '7'. Then, one day, Satoru and Nana set off in a silver van to visit various of Satoru's friends from childhood and youth, ostensibly to find Nana a new home because Satoru can no longer keep Nana. We don't know why. In the process we travel back and forth between the past and the present as the

journey takes the two through different seasons in different regions of Japan meeting the different kinds of people Satoru's childhood friends have grown up to become. Each journey and each encounter bring something new into the lives of Nana and Satoru. Through all this, Nana's voice reaches us with its observations and comments on humans and life and the experience of being a cat. The interplay of human voice and cat voice reaches to the readers a rich sense of life and learning with gentle and affirming affection.

It is a feel-good book with the sensibility of life's immense possibilities. As you read, you sigh with agreement, you are moved to tears, you laugh out loud. You see what Nana means when he arches his back or his fur stands on end, you understand what he communicates when he rubs himself against your leg, you unravel the whole dynamic between cats and dogs and how some people are dog people and some are cat people. In other words, you learn a great



deal about being a cat, or a dog, and, most definitely, about being a human being.

For instance, there's a passage about them coming across horses in a field, so they stop to look at them. Satoru says: *'Look, they're watching us, Nana'*. And Nana says: *Not just watching but carefully checking us out. They wanted to see if we were a danger to them. If we had been close enough for them to realize we were just a human and a cat, they would have been relieved. Given their size, I didn't think they needed to worry. But animals have an instinct. Whatever their size, horses are grass eaters, and grass eaters have a long history of being*

*hunted by meat eaters. This makes them timid and skittish. On the other hand, we cats may be small, but we're hunters. And hunters are fighters. We're on our guard, too, with creatures we don't know, but when it comes to a fight, we're more than willing to face up to animals much bigger than us. That's why when dogs meddle with cats for fun, they end up whimpering, their tails between their legs. A dog ten times our size? Bring it on!*

There's mystery too because we don't know why Satoru wants to give Nana away. Every time Satoru tries to give Nana away, something happens and he doesn't, much to the relief of both. This melody plays right through the book, through all the events described and scenarios painted. That's the word. The book, at one level, is like a delicate watercolour painting depicting the reality of the landscape that's being traversed but exuding a magical aura at every turn. By the time you reach the end of the novel, you are filled with a sense of peace in an ever-expanding space.

As a bookseller from Waterstones, a well-known chain of book stores, says: *'This is the book I am giving everyone.'*

*The columnist is a children's writer and senior journalist.*

\*According to Goodreads, Kathy Letter divides her time being a fulltime writer, demented mother and trying to find a shopping trolley that doesn't have a clubbed wheel. \*\*Tom Robbins' novels are complex, often wild stories with strong social undercurrents, a satirical bent, and obscure details. \*\*\*According to Wikipedia, Bill Bryson writes on travel, the English language, science and other nonfiction books.



# Mahabs 21

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Zone 4,5,6 & 7 | 10-12 Dec 2021 | Mahabalipuram | Tamil Nadu

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# Mahabs 21

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Local Site Seeing  
10:00 am to 1:00 pm  
Saturday: 11.12.21



#### *Puducherry*

Aurobindo Ashram  
Beach, Auroville  
10:00 am to 5:00 pm  
Saturday: 11.12.21



#### *Kanchipuram*

Kamakshi Amman Temple  
Kanchipuram Silk House  
10:00 am to 5:00 pm  
Saturday: 11.12.21



### POST INSTITUTE TRIP TO TIRUPATHI

Start Date & Time	Return Date & Time
13.12.2021 (Monday) 5:00 am from Mahabalipuram	13.12.2021 (Monday) 9:00 pm to Chennai



CHAIR MMMs OFFICE

PRIMARY SUPPORT

Rtn Sareesh Agarwal: +91 - 90255 05051

SECONDARY SUPPORT

Rtn Pavithra: +91 - 91599 90345

Rtn Afroze : +91 - 75029 77555

# Recharge and reboot at Mahabalipuram

Kiran Zehra

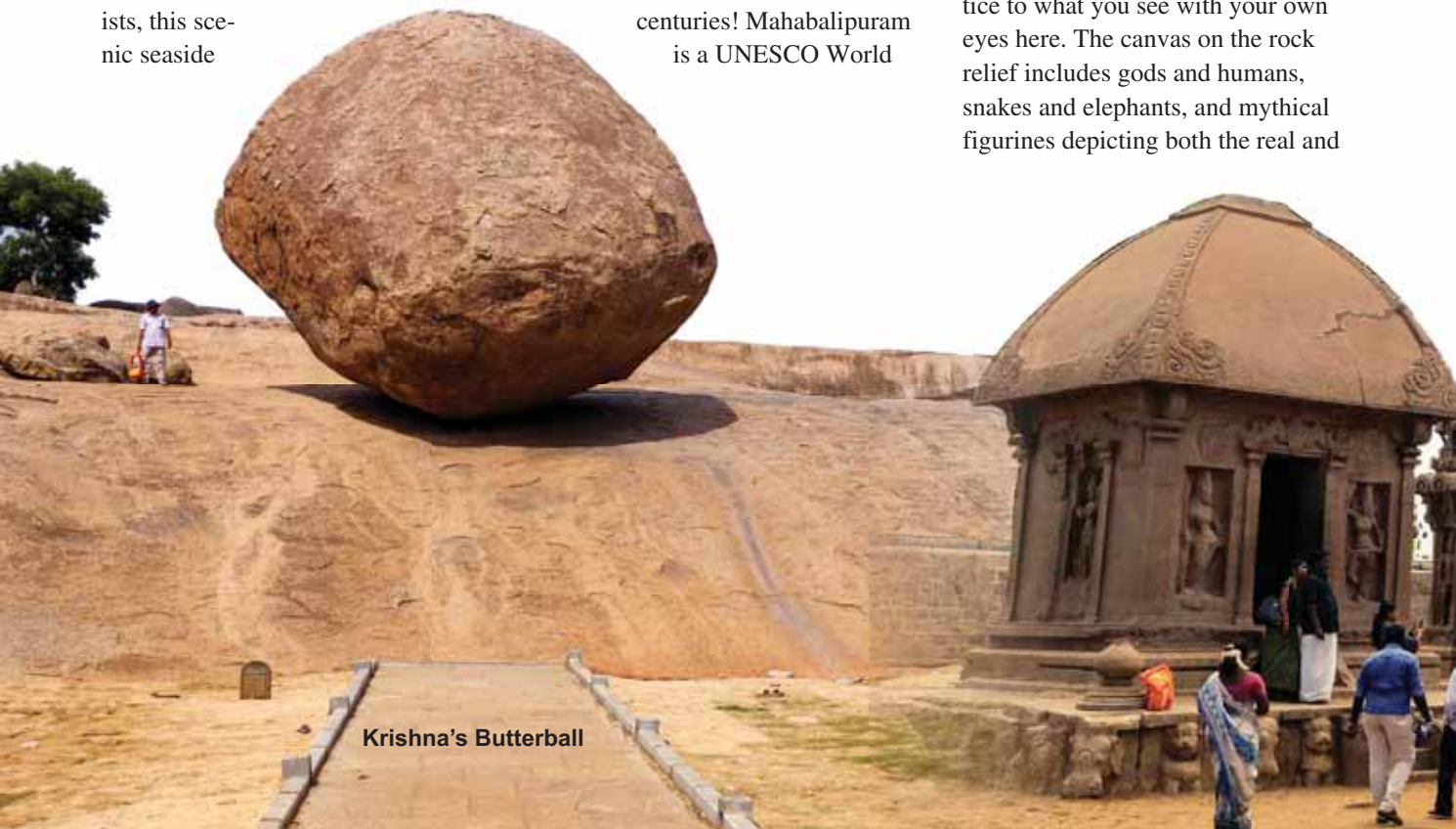
**S**avour a delicious slice of raw mango coated with red chili and salt as your eyes feast on the huge monoliths and monuments at Mahabalipuram, the venue of the 2021 Zone Institute. Located 60 km from Chennai, the beach town on the shores of the Bay of Bengal is known for its rock-cut monoliths, monuments, myths, culture, a pristine beach, fresh seafood, and boisterous monkeys. Any number of warnings or gestures won't scare them away until you throw your snack at them out of fear!

Buzzing with foreign and domestic tourists, this scenic seaside

town is dotted with cottage shops that sell a range of heritage artifacts and memorabilia. An excited group of youth pushing the 250-tonne boulder called Krishna's Butterball down a slope makes a first-time visitor wonder at this spectacle. Legend has it that Lord Krishna dropped a huge blob of butter that turned into a giant stone. The 20-ft tall, 16.5 feet-wide rock has remained in its gravity-defying position for nearly 1,200 years. It remains unclear how this iconic rock sustains its balance on a small base. It is said that the 2004 tsunami has uncovered several monuments and rock edifices that were hidden under the sea for centuries! Mahabalipuram is a UNESCO World



Heritage site as the rock sculptures, temples and monuments were built by the Pallavas during the 7–8<sup>th</sup> centuries. A walk through the cave temples will take you to a magnificent 100 ft-long monolith called Arjuna's Penance. No good picture can do justice to what you see with your own eyes here. The canvas on the rock relief includes gods and humans, snakes and elephants, and mythical figurines depicting both the real and



Krishna's Butterball

The last remaining Shore Temple.



celestial worlds. Even as you internalise the beauty of the carvings, the open-air museum of the Pallava architecture will throw open to you the Pancha Rathas. The structures will make you ponder as to how, at an age and time when technology was non-existent, they engineered such exquisite architecture.

The Shore Temple right on the water's edge is a 10-minute walk from Krishna's Butter Ball. The five-storied rock-cut temple

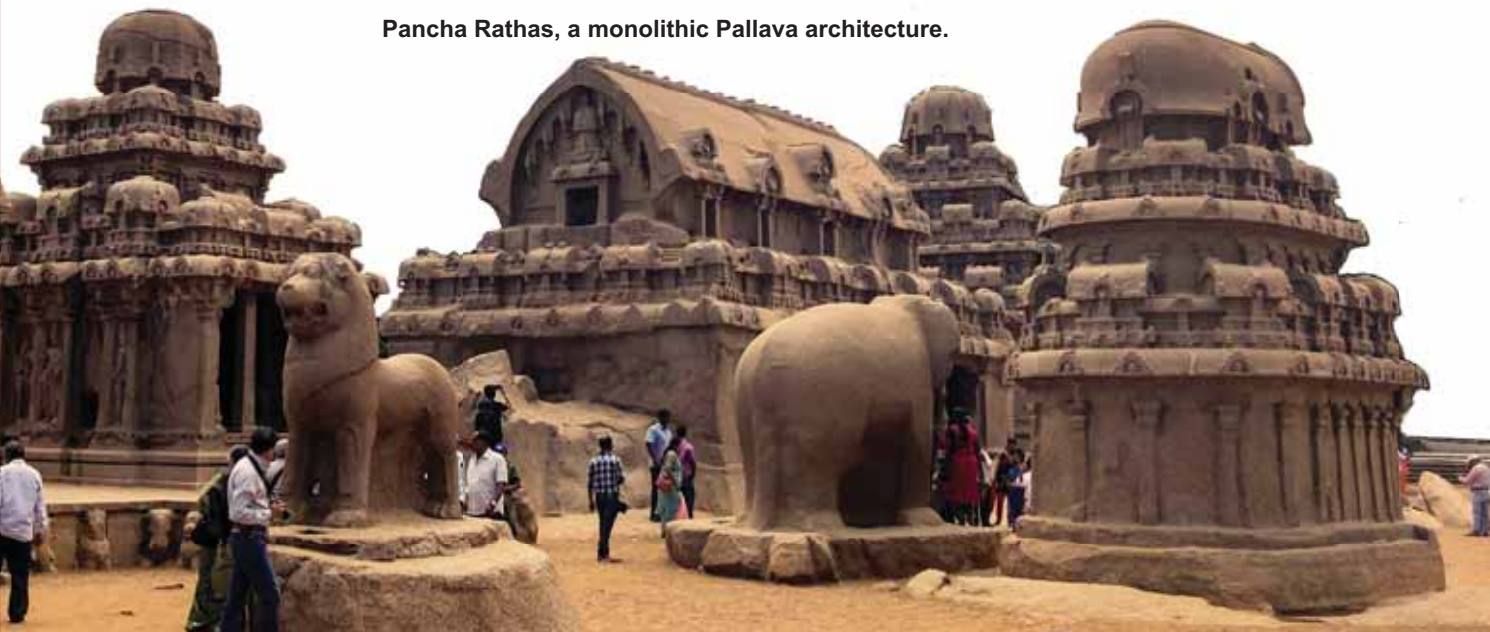
was built during the reign of King Narasimha Varma II and is one of the oldest stone-built structures in southern India. This complex of three separate shrines stands entirely on a naturally occurring granite rock and is dedicated to both Shiva and Vishnu. Overlooking the Bay of Bengal, the temple is said to be part of a seven-temple complex, six of which have gone under the sea. Here your tour guide will inform you that "Marco Polo in his travel book has

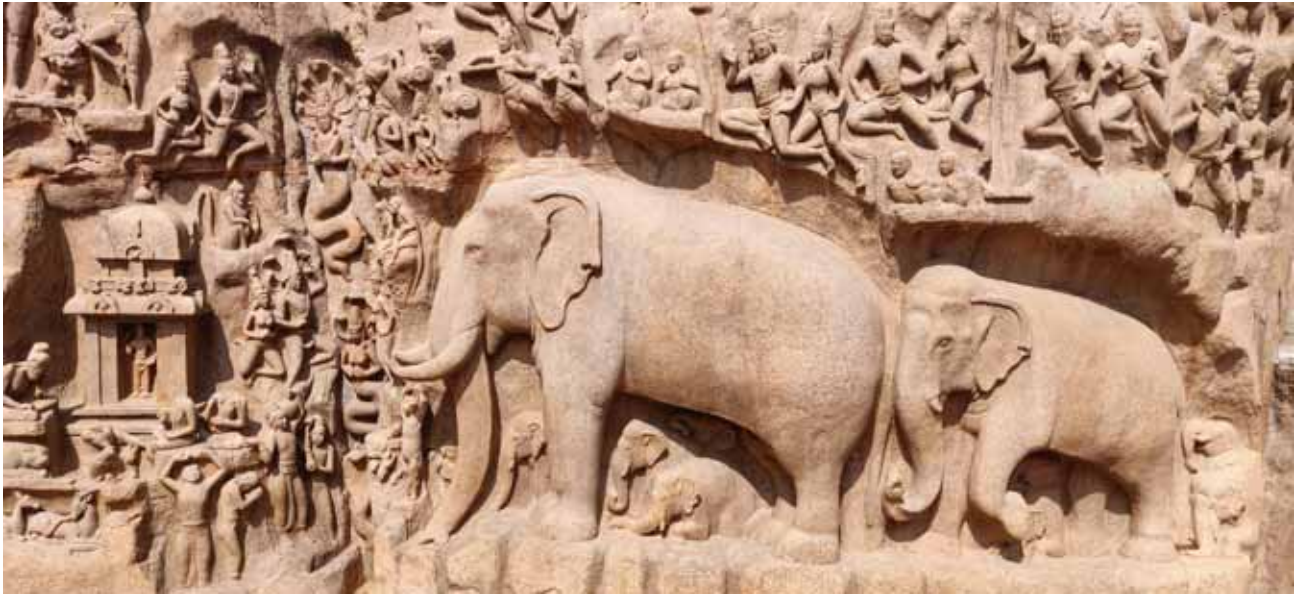
mentioned this temple as part of the Seven Pagodas."

The lighthouse, a round masonry tower made from natural stone, is also an interesting place to explore and the view of the Bay of Bengal from atop is mind-blowing.

The walk back through the bustling marketplace is both exciting and alarming with *narikuruvas* (gypsy families) in groups pestering you to buy handmade beads and other accessories made of shells.

Pancha Rathas, a monolithic Pallava architecture.





**A section of Arjuna's Penance, one of the largest rock reliefs in Asia.**



**A narikurava girl.**

The shops along the way will entice you with various charms, antique jewellery, stone idols, and souvenirs carved from granite. "The Buddha and elephant are fast-moving pieces. If you are looking for Vaastu Tortoise you may consider this one, it costs ₹150. The showroom price is ₹700," says Rajendran, a sculptor, putting to rest a piece he was diligently carving. The shopping emporiums around the monuments are ridiculously expensive. It is best to buy from the smaller shops and hawkers who are open to bargain. As he wraps my order of four small elephant statuettes, I ask him where he learned sculpting.

"Sculpting in Mamalapuram (as the locals call it) is a family vocation. My father used to carve

and so did my grandfather. My 12-year-old son can easily sculpt a Shiva lingam," he says. So, does he want his son to be a sculptor too? "No, he goes to school and I want him to become a doctor," he replies.

Recharge and reboot at the beach resorts in Mahabalipuram. Tucked away between casuarina groves some resorts are complete wellness retreats. Indulge in the vast range of therapies that include spa treatments, yoga, meditation, and holistic sessions on request at your resort, or simply sit at the beach sipping some exotic wine. Whatever you do at Mahabs, as it is fondly called, you will leave here feeling rejuvenated and refreshed.

Pictures by  
Kiran Zehra



## Membership Summary

As on October 1, 2021

RI District	Rotary Clubs	No of Rotarians	Women Rotarians (%)	Rotaract Clubs	Interact Clubs	RCC
2981	131	6145	7.70	40	52	234
2982	76	3551	7.24	46	98	71
3000	135	5350	9.21	89	259	213
3011	124	4620	27.12	70	117	36
3012	131	4122	27.05	64	76	61
3020	77	4676	7.31	29	166	350
3030	96	5073	15.04	116	237	362
3040	102	2639	14.70	48	81	196
3053	67	2747	16.67	31	48	118
3054	183	7411	20.36	102	175	563
3060	111	5155	15.00	62	70	147
3070	123	3289	15.66	38	23	59
3080	97	4113	13.20	128	157	115
3090	89	2279	4.26	37	46	123
3100	104	2351	11.27	10	19	146
3110	134	3678	11.01	14	17	106
3120	90	3616	16.48	60	31	55
3131	139	5477	23.79	105	227	131
3132	90	3604	10.90	31	122	165
3141	117	6360	27.01	134	177	102
3142	103	3681	20.57	78	137	80
3150	113	4138	13.07	75	135	118
3160	76	2461	6.79	14	20	82
3170	137	6092	14.43	82	238	171
3181	86	3418	8.86	33	194	115
3182	84	3401	9.73	42	124	104
3190	158	6768	18.44	153	201	70
3201	152	5924	9.20	98	87	61
3203	91	4701	8.10	72	233	36
3204	61	1971	6.09	17	22	13
3211	145	4778	7.81	7	24	133
3212	143	5246	12.68	74	204	153
3231	97	3671	8.12	28	81	419
3232	152	7493	17.00	112	212	99
3240	101	3541	15.90	59	405	216
3250	106	3955	19.97	63	73	185
3261	90	3169	18.52	14	23	44
3262	122	4092	14.37	65	48	86
3291	167	4130	23.22	133	95	647
<b>India Total</b>	<b>4,400</b>	<b>168,886</b>		<b>2,473</b>	<b>4,754</b>	<b>6,185</b>
3220	76	2364	16.41	86	131	75
3271	129	2110	16.92	91	134	24
3272	161	1963	17.17	64	21	47
3281	303	8128	18.95	263	147	208
3282	175	3995	11.86	196	47	47
3292	153	6039	17.25	167	127	127
<b>S Asia Total</b>	<b>5,397</b>	<b>193,485</b>		<b>3,340</b>	<b>5,361</b>	<b>6,713</b>

### Rotary at a glance

Rotary clubs	:	36,922
Rotaract clubs	:	10,609
Interact clubs	:	16,673
RCCs	:	11,875
Rotary members	:	1,196,404
Rotaract members	:	227,177
Interact members	:	383,479

As on October 18, 2021

# Find your inner wanderer the vagus nerve

**Bharat and Shalan Savur**

**H**ave you heard this saying? ‘Some wander to get lost and some to find themselves.’ It’s a beautifully apt observation because our inner wanderer does play hide-and-seek with us if we upset the poetic rhythm of our well-being.

And how would we upset our rhythm? By almost anything—stressful relationships, negative thoughts, unpleasant encounters, food that our digestive system cannot process... so who exactly is this inner wanderer who gets all hot and bothered over such matters?

**It is the emotional vagus nerve...** the nerve of all nerves that gets its name ‘vagus’ from Latin, and means wandering, rambling or strolling. And it does exactly that — *par excellence!* It starts in the brain and then rambles south all the way to our gut, connecting to various organs on the way. It’s the Mississippi of nerves — majestic, long, large and more complex than any river with its plethora of filament-like tributaries.

And if our vagal activity is weak, we can get disoriented, anxious, depressed, suffer from headaches and neck pain. It can even worsen the symptoms of arthritis, inflammations, epilepsy. Since it also plays a role in regulating our heart beat, it can cause tachycardia too — where the heart begins to beat speedily yet irregularly.

That’s why, many health experts say, that when you look after your vagus nerve, you look after your

body-mind health. Yes, indeed, it’s a very human, very emotional nerve. If you take interest in its well-being, you’ll find your health, your disposition improving in various subtle ways. You’ll be less prone to sudden spurts of irritation and more relaxed in your responses, more comfortable with people and situations that upset you earlier, more flexible where you were rigid.

**A nice neck massage.** The thing is to take charge of your overall being in simple, easy ways. When you massage your neck, you feel good because the vagus nerve feels good. Sure, a massage improves the blood circulation to the region, relaxes tense muscles in the neck and shoulders, but it’s the responsive vagus nerve that sends the sweet, healing tingle through the back of your head as if to say, ‘Thank you. That feels good, please continue.’

A selfie neck-and-shoulder massage is very relaxing. I recommend it. In tense moments, keep massaging these regions, you will feel better, balanced, more able to manage things. It doesn’t end here because that flash of inspiration, that genius of an idea comes when you are completely relaxed. It could be attributed to the vagus nerve but more research needs to be done before we can come to this conclusion. Having said that, researchers do submit that ‘the vagus is about rest and digest.’

It is said that in 494 BC, Rome was brought to the brink of a civil war between the common people and the ruling aristocrats. The general resentful feeling was that the aristocrats did nothing. Peace was restored when the consul narrated a teaching tale to the citizens. It goes: There came a time when the members of the body collectively grew annoyed with the stomach. There it sat, doing nothing, while the rest of them toiled to bring food to it, the stomach did no work to procure food for itself. So, the other members of the body decided that they would no



longer bring food to the stomach. The hands would not lift it to the mouth, the teeth would not chew it, the throat would not swallow it and this would teach that lazy stomach a lesson.

The whole body began to weaken and, the members learned that digestion and utilising food for energy and health of the body was as important as procuring it. The rulers had their place in society as did the stomach in the body. A dangerous situation was averted.

**Digestive messages of the vagus.** In this context, the vagus nerve could certainly create a mini war in us if we give our stomach food it cannot digest. Remember, this nerve runs from brain to gut and its messages are a two-way transmission. So always eat in calm, conducive conditions. Switch on soothing instrumental music while dining. The stomach cells and digestive system cannot literally hear, but the ears take the music in, send it to the brain and the vagus carries it to the stomach and back to the brain. Also, have food that your system can digest easily. Stick to small or moderate portions.

Foods that stimulate the vagus nerve in a positive way, say nutritionists, are flaxseed, fish with omega-3, polyphenols in tea, milk and yoghurt. Avoid foods that give you any form of adverse reactions such as bloating, skin rash, throbbing in the head, indigestion, dizziness or nausea.

**Ensure sweet meets.** How many of us bond human to human? It's key to our health. And the vagus nerve insists: whenever we socialise, we must do our sincere best to ensure it's a pleasant encounter. As friend Jai, on a long pilgrimage, recently said, 'The sweetest moment in life comes not from a polite smiling hello, but from the feeling that someone truly wishes from his or her heart the best for you.'

Make every meeting a goodwill meeting today and may it stay as a pleasing memory for tomorrow. Meanwhile, Ken Keyes Jr's rider is, 'You add to the suffering in the world when you take offence, just as much as you do when you give offence.' Anything positive, loving, cheerful, pleasing relaxes the vagus nerve. It cannot take hostility of any kind.

Apparently, the vagus nerve is central to our well-being — our ability to love, relate, learn, enjoy beautiful music, be inspired — in short, all the higher functions of being human are via this great nerve. That's why it rejoices and tones up when we think and do anything lovingly, willingly, wholeheartedly, when we feel a 'wow!' at learning something new, when we feel transported on a Beethoven track or a breathtaking sunrise, or are inspired by a beautiful piece of poetry, a rags-to-riches story... It's our wow nerve!

Further, when we feel safe, are even-minded, when we laugh, love, when our mind becomes luminous in acceptance and joy, it too becomes blissful and subtly encourages our healing and creative processes. Without it, we'd be unable to engage with one another. But it needs us to feel safe, loving and positive to function optimally.

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**A selfie neck-and-shoulder massage is very relaxing. In tense moments, keep massaging these regions, you will feel better, balanced, and more able to manage things.**

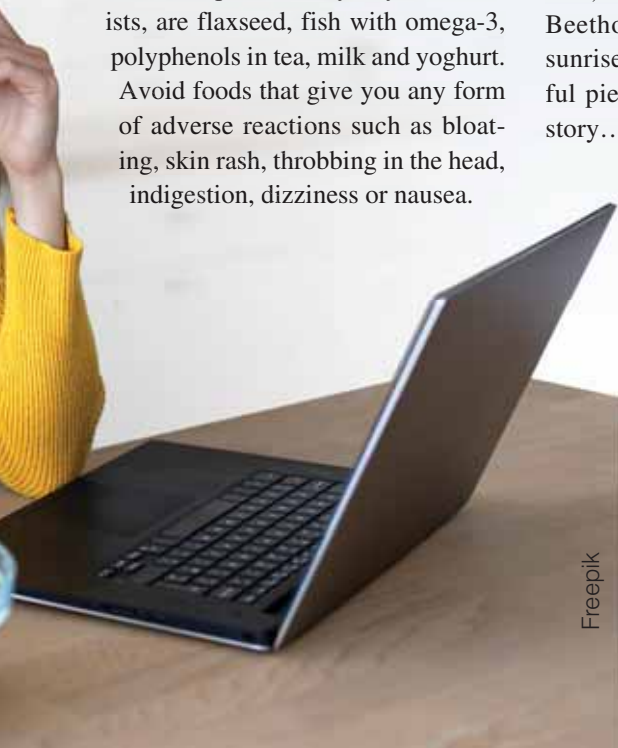
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**Exercising the vagus.** A few simple exercises that stimulate it are: The torso twist, abdominal crunches, massaging the abdominal area in circles — 30 times each. Another lovely activity is: Press your palms together hard — your elbows at shoulder level — until you feel them vibrating with the force. Simultaneously, hold your breath. When you can't hold it any longer, stop pressing the palms and breathe out explosively like a diver coming up for air. It's amazing!

Since the vagus nerve runs through the throat, tone it with a nice session of chanting, humming, singing, gargling — all or any. Splash cold water on your face. Stand under the shower and let it spray your neck with cool water. Whenever you feel hot and bothered, stand facing the air conditioner or an open refrigerator. An ice pack on the head and neck are also great nerve toners. The vagus loves the cold and responds favourably to it.

Finally, please stress less, breathe more. Another gem from pilgrim Jai: 'Boss, it's time to just be happy. Being angry, sad and overthinking isn't worth it anymore. Just let life flow.' Absolutely.

*The writers are authors of Fitness for Life and Simply Spiritual – You Are Naturally Divine and teachers of the Fitness for Life programme.*



# Presidential Conference **in Korea**

## Team Rotary News



RI President Shekhar Mehta (third from L) and Rashi being greeted at the airport on their arrival for the presidential conference in Gyeongju, Korea.

**T**he first presidential conference for this Rotary year was held at Gyeongju in the North Gyeongsang Province, Korea. Rotary's two areas of focus — Disease prevention and treatment, and environment care — were discussed. RI President Shekhar Mehta was the chief guest and he honoured Park Ji-min, a member of the popular South Korean boy-band BTS, for his contribution of

100 million won (\$84,000) to the Polio Fund.

President Mehta urged the Korean Rotarians to participate actively in the Each One Bring One (EOBO) initiative to strengthen Rotary's membership and focus their service initiatives to empower girls.

Other notable speakers at the conference included former Environment minister Kim Myung-ja, Ehwa Women's University professor Choe

Jae-chun, former Korea Environment Corporation chairman Chun Byung-seong, Korea University professor Choi Jae-wook and Dr John Alderman Linton, chair of the Severance Hospital's disease control department.

Over 60,000 delegates from across Korea signed into the programme which was streamed live on Youtube. President Mehta later attended the Zone Institute for zones 11 and 12 at Gyeongju. ■



## Fogging machine to fight mosquitoes

**R**C Bagha Purana, RID 3090, has installed a handy fogging machine in a van for mosquito control and it was inaugurated by DG Parveen Jindal. A slogan, 'No mosquito, no dengue', was coined by the club as part of its campaign against the vector disease.

The fogging machine, along with the van, costs ₹1.3 lakh. In his address, DG Jindal noted that the mosquito control project would be of great significance as dengue



cases were rising rapidly each day. The project was also appreciated by the local people, thus enhancing the public image of the club in this locality. Club president Sukhraj

Singh and secretary Jaswant Singh were supported by Rtns Munish Garg, Kewal Krishan Garg, Rakesh Kataria and Rajesh Babbar in implementing the project. ■

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## RC Pondicherry White Town — RID 2981



The club sponsored the medical treatment of baby Iniyam who was affected by severe aplastic anaemia with an amount of ₹35,000 going towards the stem cell transplantation. A cheque was presented to his parents.

## RC Delhi Safdarjung — RID 3011



Van Mahotsava was celebrated with support from RC Delhi South and Residents Welfare Association of Greater Kailash. So far, the club has planted 550 species of native trees.

## RC Hosur — RID 2982



Around 300 nurses were felicitated with certificates and stainless steel water bottles for their service to Covid patients. The club sponsored 21 CCTV cameras (₹1.25 lakh) for use by Mathigiri police station.

## RC Sonipat Midtown — RID 3012



The club, along with Brake Parts India, organised an eye-testing camp. Rtn Dr Ashish Rawal and his team screened 180 patients. Three people were identified for operation.

## RC Chinnamanur — RID 3000



Dress material and sweets were donated to an orphanage by club members. The inmates and the caretaker thanked Rotarians for their gesture.

## RC Visakhapatnam — RID 3020



Over 200 students took part in a chess competition organised by the club. Vizag Children's Club supported the event.

## RC Kalwan — RID 3030



Twenty-one outstanding teachers were honoured with Nation Builder Awards at a gala event with Nilima Mishra, Ramon Magsaysay awardee and recipient of Padmashri, as the chief guest.

## RC Jaipur Bapu Nagar — RID 3054



Club president Narendra Mal Mathur sponsored a cardiac surgery (₹75,000) on a young girl whose father is a construction labourer at Jhunjhunu. Mathur has funded six paediatric surgeries so far.

## RC Indore Professionals — RID 3040



A blood donation camp was held jointly with 21 other Rotary clubs, Lions club, Bharat Vikas Parishad Ahilya Nagari and Brahma Kumaris. DG Mahendra Mishra visited the camp.

## RC Jalandhar Central — RID 3070



Club president Amit Dureja and PDG Parvinder Jit Singh visited the Kusht Ashram, a leprosy centre, along with members to provide food to 150 inmates on Annapurna Day.

## RI District 3053



RI President Shekhar Mehta and Rashi visited the Rotary Blood Centre and Rotary Thalassaemia Day Care Centre in Jodhpur.

## RC Ambala Midtown — RID 3080



Forty desk-benches were donated to the Government Senior Secondary School, Sultanpur, which will benefit 80 students under a district project which targets 10,000 dual benches for schools this year.

## RC Sri Ganganagar Marwar — RID 3090



Two thousand notebooks were distributed to students in a slum colony and at government schools. Apart from enhancing RI's public image, this will promote literacy.

## RC Navi Mumbai — RID 3142



Over 150 units of blood was collected at two camps — one for thalassaemia patients and the other for cancer patients. The club was feted by the Corporation Blood Bank for arranging 11 donation drives in the last one year.

## RC Moradabad Achievers — RID 3100



Two water coolers were installed at the Manokamna Mandir and at the old bus stand at Moradabad to benefit pilgrims and commuters.

## RC Nellore — RID 3160



Over 10 rice bags worth ₹15,000 were distributed to Dalit families at Kothuru village. Snacks were given to children.

## RC Bibwewadi — RID 3131



The club will be providing 250 computer tabs, four lakh sanitary napkins, 12,500 self-help booklets, 2,500 bottles of vitamin medicine and 1,250 bottles of pepper spray to girls through the year.

## RC Hubli East — RID 3170



Under Defeat Diabetes campaign, the club screened 540 patients in a day at five different places in Hubli. They were checked for the blood sugar level and given consultations.

## RC Hassan Royal — RID 3182



A training session on office administration was conducted with the help of an expert. District judge Ravinath was the chief guest at the programme held at the Kattay gram panchayat office, Hassan taluk.

## RC Alleppey Greater — RID 3211



New clothes worth ₹50,000 were given to 100 underprivileged women at two villages adopted under district project Ente Gramam on the eve of Onam festival.

## RC Bangalore Lakeside — RID 3190



A multilingual reading device and a portable online player-recorder were donated to visually-impaired inmates at the Mitra Jyoti. The device can be plugged into Android mobiles to read content and provide audio output.

## RC Nagercoil Supreme — RID 3212



DG Jacintha Dharma inaugurated Covid vaccination drives in partnership with the municipal corporation in which over 500 Rotarians and their family members were inoculated.

## RC Perumbavoor Central — RID 3201



Municipal chairman Sakir Hussain donated smartphones sponsored by the club to students to help them attend online classes.

## RC Adambakkam — RID 3232



The club joined hands with Rajan Eye Care Hospital to hold an eye-screening camp. Out of 165 beneficiaries, 17 were identified for cataract surgery.

Compiled by V Muthukumar

# IPL

## Performance vs result



TCA Srinivasa Raghavan

Every year the IPL resurrects an annual dilemma for followers of cricket: do you support the team that takes its name from the city you live in or the city that is your 'hometown'? For example, should I, with my gloriously Tamil name, support the Chennai team or should I support the Delhi team because I have been living in Delhi since 1958? This dilemma assails Bengalis, Maharashtrians, Punjabis, Kannadigas, Rajasthanis, Andhraites etc also if they live in a city that has an IPL team. Many people similarly conflicted have simply chosen to ignore the problem by not talking about it. But every now and then you come across someone who insists on supporting a team that you don't care about but which happens to be your 'hometown' team. This has happened to me a few times when someone has asked me which team I support. My response has been the same each time. I say I support the team at the bottom of the points table, regardless of its city. When asked why I don't support either Delhi or Chennai I say I will support them as soon as they hit rock bottom. This usually works and the fellow stops pestering me.

But the other day I was asked this question by a 10-year-old boy, the grandson of a friend. The child was very insistent and would not accept any of my answers because he simply couldn't understand how anyone

could support the worst performing team or not support his 'hometown' team or the team of the city in which he lived. I tried explaining it to him, first jocularly, then seriously and finally irritatedly. As must have happened to you also at least once with children, the boy became frustrated and nearly began to cry. His grandfather then walked over and asked me to stop teasing the boy, which I decidedly wasn't doing. I was just trying to explain to him that, beyond a point, loyalty is irrelevant in sport or indeed in any endeavour that requires skill. I mean, really, who cares as long as you see great performances? I was trying to teach the boy to focus on the right thing, namely, the performance of individual players rather than on

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**A student can get 99 per cent and yet not get admission to the college of his or her choice because someone else has got 99.01 per cent.**

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the outcome, which matters much less unless you are the betting kind.

What happened next was interesting. That the boy could not understand what I was saying was to be expected. He was just a child anyway. But it was his grandfather's inability to follow my logic that was so surprising. I tried to argue my case saying outcomes are all too often more a matter of luck than the performance itself. Sachin Tendulkar played several fantastic innings but India lost the match because luck was against one or two of the other key players. You can see the same thing across all sports. In fact, you can see this in practically all competitive activities. A student can get 99 per cent and yet not get admission to the college of his or her choice because someone else has got 99.01 per cent. Believe it or not this happens all the time, especially when the number of applicants is as large as it can be in India.

Bowlers and batters provide the best example of skill versus luck. Out of the six balls a bowler is allowed five can be terrific deliveries but if even one is just a teeny-weeny bit off, it can be hit for a six. The same thing is true in reverse of batters. One piece of bad luck is all that they are allowed. At ten the child is too young to understand this but I am hoping his grandfather will persist and eventually make the boy look at performances rather than outcomes. ■

# In Brief

## Rotarian felicitated for Covid-relief work



Rotary India Covid Task Force chairman PRID Ashok Mahajan was felicitated by the Maharashtra government for his contribution towards Covid

relief and paediatric heart surgeries. He was honoured by Dr Bharati Pawar, state health minister. Rotary clubs in India have partnered with various government agencies to vaccinate over two million Indians against Covid.

## An eco-friendly dyeing process



The American fashion brand Ralph Lauren has introduced a new way to dye cotton, that uses 90 per cent less

chemicals, half the water and 40 per cent less energy. In association with four other companies, the clothing designer has developed a way to significantly reduce the amount of water, chemicals and energy needed to colour cotton without compromising on the hues or texture. The new technology named *Colour on Demand* will enable the recycling and reuse of all the water from the dyeing process, with zero wastage, using the current dyeing equipment already in the factories.

## Russian film crew returns to earth



A Russian female actor and film director returned to Earth after spending 12 days on the International Space Station (ISS) for shooting a space film. The three-

person crew comprising actor, director and cosmonaut Anton Shkaplerov stepped ahead of a NASA-led project that aims to shoot for a *Mission Impossible* sequel. The crew landed on Oct 16 at the Baikanour Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan just after midnight. The project marks the expansion of the commercial space market to include filmmaking.

## Grauer's gorillas flourish in Congo



From a previous global estimate of 3,800 individuals, the number of Grauer's gorillas, the world's largest gorilla subspecies, has almost doubled to 6,800. An earlier peer-reviewed paper led by Wildlife Conservation Society in 2016 showed a decline of almost

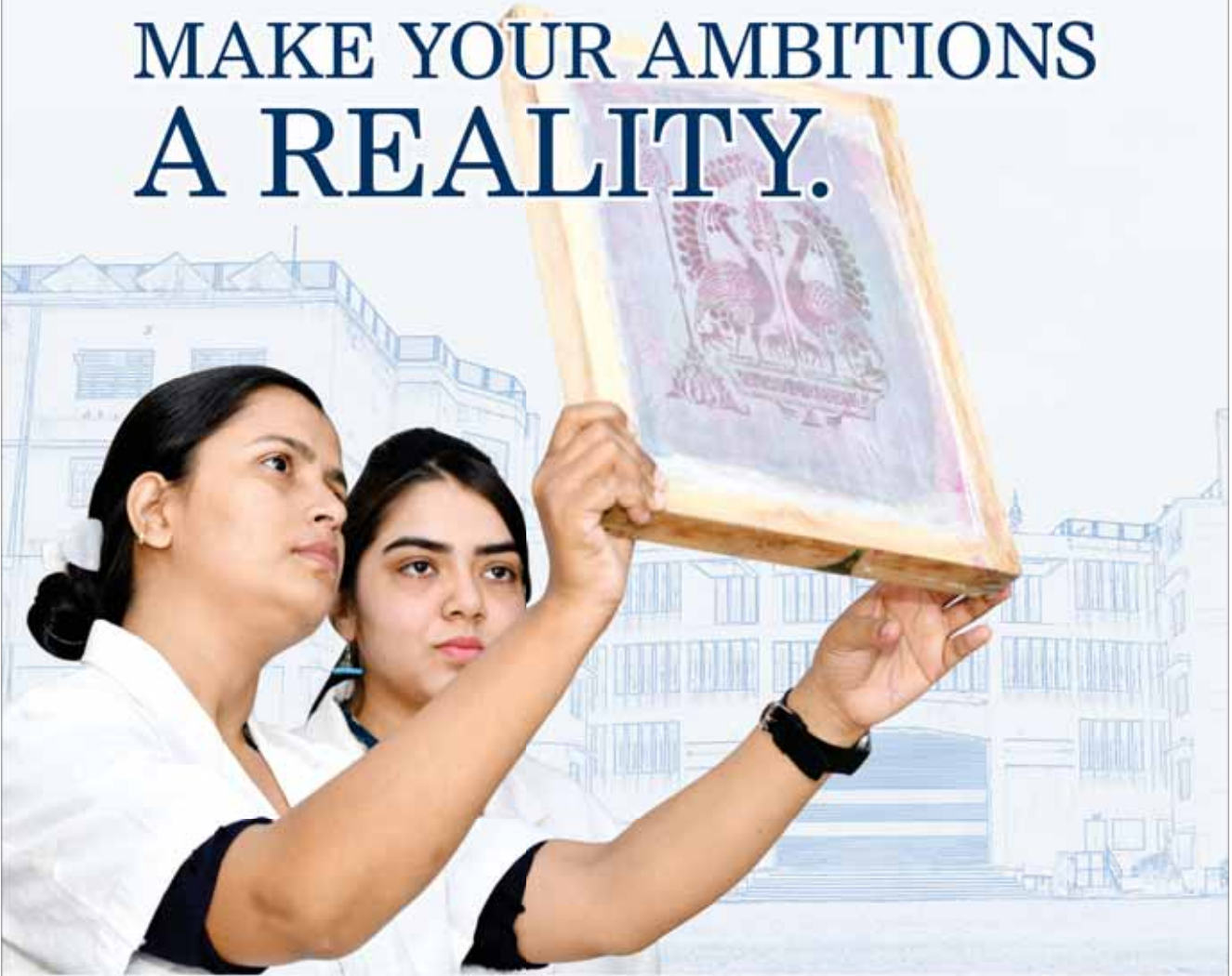
80 per cent in the population of these gorillas. The revised estimate comes from the recent field surveys conducted in September 2021 at eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, the animal's largest remaining habitat, an area that was previously inaccessible for surveys.



## A Crying Room in Spain

In 2019, 3,671 people committed suicide in Spain, the second most common cause of death after natural causes in the country. One in 10 adolescents has been diagnosed with a mental illness while 5.8 per cent of the overall population suffers from anxiety, according to a government data. To remove the stigma attached to mental health, Spain has started a project named *La Lloreria*, or the Crying Room. Anyone can walk into the room and cry or call helplines to seek expert's advice. The initiative is part of Spanish PM Pedro Sanchez's 100 million-euro (\$116 million) mental healthcare drive.

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