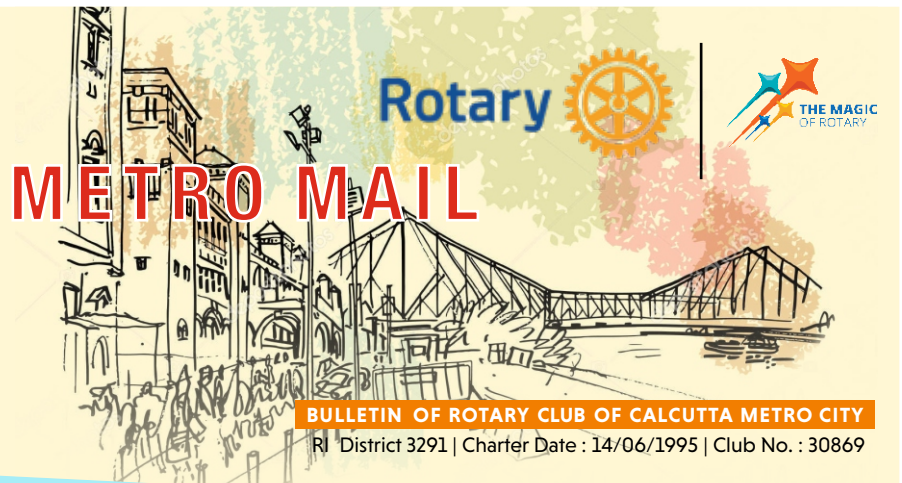


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Despite 77 years of independence, India is still far from achieving 100% literacy, a sobering reality, that reflects the failures of successive governments at both the central and state levels. Literacy is the backbone of any nation's progress, yet it has been treated with a casual approach and tokenism. Government schemes, while launched with much fanfare, have often been plagued by poor implementation, lack of political will, and corruption. The result is a staggering number of illiterate adults—estimated at 25-30% of the population—and millions of children who are either out of school or dropping out before completing basic education.

One of the most glaring issues has been the failure to address school dropout rates, especially in the post-COVID era. The pandemic exacerbated an already precarious situation. Schools, particularly in rural areas, lacked the infrastructure for online learning, leaving millions of students without access to education for nearly two years. The post-pandemic dropout rate surged as many children, particularly from marginalized communities, were forced into child labor to support their families. Additionally, girls were disproportionately affected, with many being pushed into early marriages. These children are now at risk of becoming part of the next generation of illiterates, unless drastic measures are taken.

While non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like Rotary have played a significant role in supplementing government efforts, they too have failed to fill the gap completely. Despite their various literacy drives and initiatives, the sheer scale of the problem requires more than sporadic efforts and symbolic gestures. Rotary, for instance, has undertaken numerous campaigns to improve literacy, but their impact has often been limited by a lack of coordination with government agencies and insufficient funding. In many cases, these NGOs serve as temporary fixes rather than addressing the root causes of illiteracy, such as poverty, lack of infrastructure, and gender discrimination.

However, there is hope that the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 could provide the much-needed structural reforms to address these issues. The NEP aims to make education more accessible, equitable, and inclusive by promoting early childhood education, reducing dropout rates, and focusing on foundational literacy and numeracy. The policy also emphasizes the use of technology in education, which could help bridge the gap for students in remote and underserved areas. Additionally, the NEP's focus on vocational education and flexible learning paths could prevent dropouts by making education more relevant to the needs of the students.

Yet, even the best policy will fail if not implemented effectively. The NEP's success hinges on the government's commitment to invest in infrastructure, training, and monitoring. Moreover, partnerships between the government, NGOs, and local communities are crucial. Only through a collective and sustained effort can India hope to achieve 100% literacy.

India's literacy crisis is not just a failure of policy but of political will and social neglect. Governments must stop treating literacy as an afterthought and take bold steps to address the issue. Only then can India truly progress as a developed nation.

Subhojit Roy

Rotary International

Presidential Message September 2024



The Magic of Rotary is belonging, and it's a feeling that can appear when you least expect it.

Earlier this year, I was in Slovakia serving as a president's representative during a six-week trip through Europe. When I wrote to Katarina Cechova, governor of District 2240 at the time, I mentioned that my grandmother Veronica Zilka grew up in a small village in the area before settling in the U.S.

It wasn't long before Cechova tracked down my grandmother's village, Jakubova Vol'a. She even organized a visit for me, where I received an unforgettable Slovakian welcome.

When I entered the community center of Jakubova Vol'a, a small crowd of people dressed in traditional Slovakian clothing greeted me. They sang with beautiful and powerful Central European voices that reminded me of my grandmother.

A lot of families play cards or games when they get together. When I was young, my father would pick up his accordion and lead my family in song. My grandmother would sing along with her impressive voice.

When I walked into the community center and heard traditional music from my childhood — when I saw a woman play the accordion the way my dad played — I suddenly felt like a little girl sitting at my grandmother's house in Monessen, Pennsylvania. I burst into tears of joy at the memories.

But the magic didn't stop there. District Governor Cechova really outdid herself. A local genealogist worked with a videographer to make a short film about my grandmother. We watched the video together in the community center.

When the video ended, I turned around and saw a man standing in the back of the room. I quickly learned that this stranger, Frantisek Zilka, was my second cousin. His grandmother and mine had been sisters. I felt like I had been struck by lightning.

I visited my newfound cousin's home, which happens to be the home where my grandmother was born. There, he shared old photographs I had never seen of my dad, my uncle, and my grandmother.

Since then, I can't stop thinking about my family of Rotary. When I refer to you as my family, I'm not just being kind. I really think of everyone in Rotary as my family. But I never would have imagined that my Rotary family would introduce me to long-lost personal family.

Sitting in that community center listening to traditional Slovakian music from my childhood filled me with joy and a profound sense of belonging. I am so grateful to District Governor Cechova and everyone who helped create that magical experience.

As members of Rotary, we have a unique opportunity to share the same magic with each other and with the world. I encourage you to consider how you can help spread that magic and ensure other members of your club — other members of our Rotary family — feel like they truly belong.

Stephanie A. Urchick

President 2024-25

Rotary Commits Funds to Polio Outbreak Response in Gaza

By Rotary International



The recent detection of variant poliovirus type-2 isolates in environmental samples and the confirmation of a 10-month-old child who has contracted polio in Gaza is a stark reminder that as long as polio exists anywhere, it is a threat everywhere. The ongoing crisis in Gaza has contributed to reduced routine

immunization rates and an increased risk of vaccine-preventable diseases, including polio. The crisis also poses a significant challenge to fully implementing disease surveillance and vaccination campaigns.

The World Health Organization (WHO) considers there to be a high risk for the spread of this polio strain within Gaza and internationally, particularly given the current situation's impact on public health services.

A humanitarian pause has allowed a two-round polio vaccination campaign that began in Gaza on 1 September. Initial reports indicate the campaign started successfully, with teams showing strong commitment and high levels of community participation.

Rotary is committing US\$500,000 to bolster the initiative, channeling these funds through a dedicated Polio Outbreak Response Fund. This contribution represents Rotary's sustained support to the WHO in combating polio globally.

Rotary will continue to work with its partners in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative and other agencies as vaccination efforts unfold.

Financial contributions to the PolioPlus fund will help Rotary and its Global Polio Eradication Initiative partners achieve a world in which no child is paralyzed by polio again.

— September 2024

Rotary Projects around the Globe

September 2024

By Brad Webber



Canada

About 200 college students, faculty, and community members took turns swinging baseball bats at junkyard vehicles during a Car Smash for Charity event organized by the Rotaract Club of Vancouver-University of British Columbia. The fundraiser, held each of the past three years before final exams, “offers people a fun way to relieve stress or test their own strength, while supporting a wonderful cause,” says Sara Lee, a past co-president of the club. The event, held on the campus quad in April, raised more than \$2,200 Canadian for education-related endeavors. A scrap car company delivered a Volkswagen and a Chevrolet and collected the remnants afterward for recycling. “Our team is continually amazed at the response the event receives,” Lee says.



United States

The Rotary Club of Patchogue in New York has raised more than \$138,000 over the past dozen years by feting civic and business leaders in rollicking style. The most recent soiree, held in March to roughly coincide with St. Patrick’s Day, attracted nearly 250 guests. Attendees paid \$125 each for food and drinks and to listen to friends and relatives roast local celebrities. “There were some slightly embarrassing stories of their childhood and baby pictures,” says Paul Moran, a club member and organizer. A band featuring Moran and other Rotarians performed cover tunes to help lead the merriment. More than \$17,000 was donated to the Patchogue Community Service Foundation, principally for youth services, including **Camp Pa-Qua-Tuck**, a residential program for people with disabilities that is operated by Rotary District 7255.

- **26 million+Registered motor vehicles in Canada in 2022**
- **11% Share of New York state residents of Irish descent**



England

Christopher Hill was diagnosed with a heart condition at age 38. A past president of the Rotary Club of Bolton Lever in Greater Manchester, he has since become an advocate for automated external defibrillators. In 2022, Hill’s club joined five other Bolton-area Rotary clubs to purchase a nearly \$1,900 defibrillator for the **Bolton Steam Museum**. “When you are out there in the countryside, you can be miles and even hours from one,” but when needed, Hill says, “it is needed in minutes.” Hill takes to area trails as leader of a walking group, prompting the Bolton Lever club to acquire a portable, single-use defibrillator that Hill carries on the treks. All 33 club members have attended training sessions and refresher courses on how to operate the machines.



Italy

Brushes and rollers in hand, members of the Rotary Club of Torino Lagrange converged on a youth center to supply a fresh coat of paint. The club members spent a weekend in April and about \$1,500 sprucing up the facility, which offers counseling services and a gathering place for people ages 14 to 28. “The aim is to help young people overcome difficult moments and face changes in a welcoming, confidential, and judgement-free environment,” says club member Raffaele Battaglini. The club partnered with students at an arts high school who made paintings for the center.

- **425 Britons who die each day of cardiovascular disease**
- **27% Portion of Italians ages 15 to 29 at risk of poverty or social exclusion**



India

The Rotary Club of Bombay Seacoast staged a concert and high tea reception in May for about 150 veterans injured on duty and their families. Club members tapped their connections with local celebrities, among them the emcee, Neeta Mirchandani, the wife of club member and singer Vijay Mirchandani. “The jawans (soldiers) participated with full joy and excitement as several kept dancing and clapping to the music, with the families of many joining in toward the end,” says Sampath Iyengar, a past club president. “Some of the jawans seated on chairs or in wheelchairs participated as a mark of solidarity, their chairs lifted by their fellow jawans who still had strength in their arms, love in their hearts, and deep empathy for their fellow ex-soldiers without limbs.”

This story originally appeared in the September 2024 issue of Rotary magazine.

District News

Bem-vindo Presidente
Welcome President
Mario & Denise
Register Today!

Register at Rs. 100/- only

Hosted by DGs & DGEs of Zone 6

6:00 pm • 1st October, 2024
GD Birla Sabhaghar, Kolkata

সমাগম
Samagam
14 & 15 SEPTEMBER 2024
Hotel Sonar Bangla Taki

1st President Secretary Assistant Governor Zonal Secretary Team MEET

Rates:
Twin Sharing Rs 5700/- (inclusive of all taxes)
Single Occupancy Rs 8500/- (inclusive of all taxes)
Accommodation for ONE night, Breakfast, TWO Lunches, Dinner and Hi-tea.

CLUB NEWS

Thalassaemia Awareness



Rotary Club of Calcutta Metro City conducted its 3rd Thalassaemia awareness session at the Challapara IIM&C a remote village in South 24 Parganas The session was attended by 95 students, from classes VIII and IX.

The students were extremely attentive, participating with great enthusiasm in Q & A session and at the end of it all students and the teachers took an oath that they shall play an active part in eradicating thalassaemia. PP Rtn Subhojit Roy who was the session speaker also gave a task to the students that each one should speak about thalassaemia to a minimum of 10 people make them aware and report back to the teachers leading to a multiplication method of spreading awareness.

PP Rtn Jharna Mitra who coordinated the session was also present on the occasion.

An evening of Indian Art & Culture with the Maestros



As part of a joint initiative of Sanchita Dance Foundation, Rotary Club of Calcutta Metro City, Ministry Culture, Govt. of India & Techno India University, an evening dedicated to Indian Music & Dance was presented at the Rotary Sadan on 15th September '24. The program began with the traditional lamp lighting and 1 minute's silence in memory of 'Abhaya', the unfortunate victim of the RG Kar rape and murder case which is under Supreme Court's suo moto consideration and CBI's investigation.

The evening featured doyens and legends of Hindustani classical music and Classical dance forms with Sangeet Natak Akademy winner India's foremost flautist Pdt Ronu Majumdar accompanied by a veteran percussionist Pdt Prosenjit Poddar.

This was followed by Padamshree Bharat Natyam exponent Pratibha Prahlad presenting an exhilarating dance performance which left the audience awestruck. She concluded with a short speech on her deep pain and anguish about the 'Abhaya' death which created a deep impact on the minds of the audience.

The third segment witnessed felicitation of Guru Poushali Mukherjee and Guru Sutapa Talukdar (our club's past recipient of Swayam Siddha) for their contribution towards their classical dance form Odissi. Among others IPP Rtn Amrita Basu and Rtn Deepanwita Banerjee.

Sanchita Dance Foundation and Guru Sanchita Bhattacharya felicitated PP Rtn Subhojit Roy for his continued contribution towards popularizing Art and Culture across India and globally through his work as columnist and Public Relations specialist. Among others PP Rtn Arindam Ghosh and IPP Amrita did the honours.

The final act of the evening was a traditional Mahari performance by Rupasree Mahapatra.

The program was presented on stage by Guru Sanchita Bhattacharya and PP Rtn Subhojit Roy.

The last words by PP Rtn Subhojit were, "We shall carry back the prayer in our heart for 'Abhaya' and our resolve that we demand justice."

The Rotary fraternity was represented by PDG Rajendra Khandelwal, PP Rtn Ashif Sha and her spouse Marufa, PP Rtn Anand Sharma and PP Rtn Pushpita Sharma. the club was represented by PP Rtn Subhojit Roy, PP Rtn Arindam Ghosh, PP Rtn Deepu Mullick, IPP Rtn Amrita Basu, Rtn Deepanwita Banerjee and Rtn Bandana Mullick.

Greetings

PDG Shyamashree Sen for 21st September



Edited & Published by PP Rtn Subhojit Roy

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