



Rotary International District 3291
Club No. 16197

WHISTLE

E-Bulletin of

Rotary Club of Calcutta South West



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Rotary International President
2025-2026



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2025-2026

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

The proverb, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step," teaches that monumental goals are achieved not by giant leaps, but by consistent, small actions, emphasizing that the daunting task becomes manageable by focusing on the immediate action, building momentum, overcoming procrastination, and finding purpose in the present moment, leading to eventual success through perseverance and breaking down grand visions into tangible, sequential tasks.

The biggest hurdle is often starting. Laziness or fear can paralyze us, but taking that initial, small action – like writing down a plan or telling someone your goal – breaks the inertia and creates forward movement. Each completed small step builds confidence and motivation, making the next step easier, turning daunting challenges into a series of achievable actions, according to Brainly.in.

A "thousand miles" goal (like learning a language, starting a business, or writing a book) seems impossible, but breaking it into tiny, manageable steps makes it less overwhelming and more attainable. Success is a process, not just an end result. Celebrating each small victory along the way is crucial for long-term motivation. Constantly looking at the distant goal can cause anxiety. Instead, focusing on the current step makes the path clearer, more enjoyable, and less stressful, allowing you to experience life as you build it.

How do we apply in life?

The universal principle applies to all aspects of life—personal growth, career, health, or spirituality. The first action, no matter how small, initiates the entire venture. It's not about perfect execution but about taking action. The "how" often reveals itself once you start moving.

FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK

(A Personal Account from Operation Meghdoot, 1985–1986)

By

Col N S Parmar, SM (Retd)

Prelude — A Dream of Ice and Honour

The call came in 1985.

"Volunteers for a *High Risk Mission,"* a handful of words that would change everything.

I was twenty two, restless, and still waiting for the professional courses that would make me a proper soldier. But some part of me already knew where I belonged; up there, where the air thins into faith and survival becomes a daily act of defiance.

I had first heard of Operation Meghdoot in 1982, when I was still in college. India had done the impossible;

climbed into the sky and claimed the Siachen Glacier, the highest battlefield in the world. The idea that men could fight and live there, above 20,000 feet, caught hold of me.

It was the year 1985, I was with 7 SIKH LI, the unit I was Commissioned into. When the Army called for volunteers, I stepped forward. My Commanding Officer was reluctant; I was young, unseasoned, but I wouldn't let go. After several requests and a few quiet warnings he gave in.

Soon, I was made to undergo basic training on snow craft and mountain warfare before my induction for the High-Risk Mission. I didn't know it then, but Siachen would become my teacher, my adversary, and my mirror.

Journey to the Edge

The journey began at Pathankot, where the air still smelled of dust and diesel. From there, I flew to Partapur, a small, wind-scraped base in the Nubra Valley, ringed by jagged peaks that seemed too tall to belong to Earth. Even at that height, the cold was biting. Tin huts creaked in the wind, and the smell of kerosene clung to everything; skin, clothes, memory. We lived on tinned rations and discipline, taking slow walks each day to teach our lungs how to breathe thin air.

After four days, we boarded a helicopter that took us to the Siachen Base Camp, at roughly 12,000 feet, where the glacier began its silent sprawl toward the Karakoram. The camp looked like a stubborn outpost of humanity, fibre huts half-buried in snow, signal tents buzzing with static, and the distant shimmer of ice walls catching weak sunlight.

Helicopters droned in and out, ferrying supplies, evacuating casualties, hovering at the edge of physics. Occasionally, the valley boomed with the sound of artillery, and the mountain swallowed the echo whole.

At night, the world contracted around kerosene lamps. Men wrote letters, spoke softly, stared at photographs. Outside, the wind never stopped talking.

After seven days of acclimatization at the base camp I was attached to 11 JAT and got inducted to the Glacial outpost.

The Induction March

The induction to the glacier was on foot, a four-day climb into air that grew thinner, meaner, Oxygen level depleting with every step.

Our party of six, roped together, carried loads of nearly 30 kilograms each; weapons, rations, and everything we might need to stay alive. The glacier beneath us shifted constantly. It wasn't a road; it was a moving, breathing thing.

We halted at staging camps, lonely snow tents manned by two or three soldiers who had lived there for weeks, melting snow for water, waiting for the next party to arrive.

Every day we moved before dawn, before the sun could warm the slopes enough to wake the avalanches. Beneath the fresh snow, the crevasses hid like traps. One careless step and the mountain would take you without ceremony. The rope between us was more than safety, it was trust in its rawest form. We spoke little. Every word cost oxygen. The world had narrowed to rhythm: step, breath, step, breath.

Gyongla Ridge — The Edge of the Glacier

On the fourth day, we reached Company Headquarters at the base of the Gyongla Ridge, perched at an altitude of about 18,000 feet. The camp was a cluster of snow shelters, fibre huts, and signal wires tangled in wind.

From here, you could see the glacier stretching endlessly ahead, fractured and alive, with the Saltoro Ridge looming between us and the Pakistani positions. The enemy posts glinted faintly in the distance, a reminder that we weren't alone on the roof of the world.

I stayed at the HQ for four days, getting used to the height. But "used to" is the wrong phrase. You never get used to 18,000 feet. You just make a fragile peace with it.

The altitude sickness started creeping in, dull headaches that never left, loss of appetite, sleeplessness. Even resting felt like labour. The body was in open rebellion.

And then there was the weather, blizzards that arrived unannounced, winds that howled like living things. The snow could rise overnight to bury entire huts. When the storms cleared, it was as if the mountain had rearranged the world in your absence.

Life at Das Post

After acclimatization, I was assigned to command a platoon at Das Post, standing roughly 19,000 feet above sea level.

The climb up was steep and cruel. By the time we arrived, I could feel the mountain inside my lungs. Das Post had a single fibre hut, half-buried in snow, surrounded by smaller tents, one fragile bubble of human warmth in an ocean of white.

Every day followed a quiet discipline.

At dawn, we scanned the opposite ridgelines for signs of enemy movement. The rest of the day went to maintenance; clearing snow, checking weapons, keeping the trench paths open. If we didn't, the next morning we might wake sealed inside our own post.

There was no sound but wind. No vegetation, no smell of life. The only living creatures, apart from us, were two pairs of ravens; large, glossy, black as midnight. They perched on nearby rocks, heads cocked, as if watching over the madness of men trying to outlive a glacier.

Helicopters couldn't reach us; the post was in direct enemy view. Supplies came on foot from the Company HQ of 11 JAT; kerosene tins and rations carried through the snow in silence.

The kerosene stove never went off. It melted snow for water, cooked our food, and fought back frostbite. A single bucket of water took hours to make. No one spoke of baths; six months without one was a badge of honour.

The worst ordeal was the morning ritual; the toilet routine. There was no designated place, only a patch of open snow. You carried a bottle of warm water that froze within seconds,

Wrestled through heavy layers of clothing, and prayed for balance. It was absurd, humiliating, necessary. The glacier erased all traces by afternoon.

Only two things never froze: rum and kerosene.

One was forbidden. The other kept us alive.

On clear days, the enemy shelled us; mortars, artillery, the occasional sniping burst. The ice absorbed most impacts, but sometimes the shells landed too close. Twice, our hut took direct hits, walls cracked, snow burst in but by some quiet grace, no one was hurt.

The Avalanche — 20 May 1986

That day began deceptively beautiful, bright, cold, and silent.

By late morning, the Pakistani artillery opened up again. For two hours, the ridge shook under fire. The shells loosened the packed snow layers, already fragile from the early summer sun. When the firing stopped, the silence felt wrong and too perfect.

At 2:00 PM, four of us sat inside the fibre hut. The kettle whistled. Someone laughed. Then the ground trembled, just once.

The avalanche came down without sound, without mercy.

One instant, the world was white and still; the next, it was weight and darkness.

The hut exploded inward. I was thrown sideways. Snow rushed into my mouth, nose, eyes. I tried to breathe and swallowed ice. My arms were pinned, my chest crushed.

A small fragment of fibre from the hut's roof stopped just above my head, creating a hollow no bigger than a

helmet. That scrap of material, nothing more than luck gave me the little air I had left.

At first, I waited for movement, for voices. There were none. Then I realized I couldn't move even my fingers.

The snow pressed against me like concrete, cold and alive. My breathing turned shallow, every inhale stealing what little air remained.

And then came the truth: I'm dying.

The mind, when cornered by death, becomes strangely clear.

I saw my mother's face, soft and kind, waiting for letters that would never come. I saw my father, my comrades, the flag on my shoulder. I thought, absurdly, about the stove still burning inside the hut. I even smiled, the irony of dying buried under the ice at once.

The cold began to bite into my bones. The pain gave way to stillness. I could hear my heart slowing, each beat an echo inside the snow. And then calm.

The fear was gone. I felt suspended, floating somewhere between silence and surrender.

The snow didn't feel like an enemy anymore. It felt like the mountain had decided to take me back.

The last thing I remember was the peace of letting go.

And then, nothing.

The Rescue

They told me later I was buried for eight hours.

From the moment the avalanche struck, Major Mukherji, my Company Commander, led the rescue. He and his men dug through the night; shovels, helmets, bare hands. As the weather worsened, higher headquarters ordered the rescue terminated.

Major Mukherji refused.

"My men are still breathing under that snow," he said, and kept digging.

By 10 PM, they struck a hollow; the air pocket that had saved me. They pulled me out, limp, half-frozen, blue. The medical officer worked on me through the night. Around midnight, I returned from the edge.

At dawn, a helicopter evacuated me to Base Camp.

When Brigadier Jaal Master, Commander of the Sector, flew in from Partapur to meet me, he looked at me for a long moment and smiled.

"Eight hours under snow and not even a chilblain! You're a lucky man."

Then he turned to the men and said,

"Shake his hand — maybe some of that luck will rub off."

For the first time in days, people laughed.

Return to the Glacier

Once my body recovered, my heart wasn't at peace. Part of me was still buried there.

I asked to go back. Permission was granted reluctantly. This time, I was flown by helicopter to Company HQ, then climbed again to Das Post.

We rebuilt the post from what the mountain had spared. The new hut stood firmer, the trenches deeper. We patched communications, restored routine, and slowly the laughter returned. The glacier had tested us; we had answered.

By end of June 1986, my task was complete. I was de-induced and returned to 7 SIKH LI, my parent unit —

alive, but altered.

Epilogue — The Long Shadow of Snow

The mountain stayed with me long after I left it.

For years, I woke in the dark, choking, the body reliving the avalanche. My pulse would race, my breath vanish, sweat freezing on my skin. The doctors called it trauma. I called it the glacier remembering me. It took years before I could sleep through the night.

I owe my life to Major Mukherji and the men of 11 JAT, who ignored orders and kept digging through the storm. And to Brigadier Jaal Master, who turned survival into something almost light again.

Siachen stripped away everything; fear, pride, comfort and left only purpose. It taught me that courage isn't loud. It's the quiet choice to breathe again when the world tells you not to.

Even now, when I close my eyes, I can see it;

the endless white horizon,

the wind cutting through silence,

and the two black ravens gliding across the pale sky.

Siachen spared me once.

But in its own way, it never truly let me go.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: I usually request contributors to the WHISTLE to restrict their articles to 200 words +/- . This contribution by Club Secretary is so interesting, that I have had to be lenient about the imposed restrictions.]

CELEBRATIONS:

- 10th December is the Birthday of Rtn Biswarup Gupta
- 11th December is the Birthday of Mrs. Sarmila Bose
- 18th December is the Birthday of Rtn Somdutta Mitra

PROJECTS COMPLETED THIS MONTH :

- 3rd December was the International Day of persons with disabilities. Our Member Zeena Augustine visited the Cheshire Home for women with disabilities to spend some time with them. She interacted with the inmates of the home and made a need assessment to help our Club to plan Projects there.
- 9th November Rtn Dr.Susmita Mitra Banerjee travelled to Nalhati at a girls' School to conduct an Awareness Programme on Cervical Cancer and Thalassemia and also to administer the Cervical Cancer HPV Vaccine to 123 girls. This was a joint Project of BOGS and RCCSW.

RI. DISTRICT CONFERENCE 2025-2026: 10 & 11 JANUARY 2026.

REGISTER BY 15 DECEMBER 2025 to avail EARLY BIRD DISCOUNT!

RCCSW.....IN ACTION.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES.

3rd. December 2025

Rtn Zeena Augustine visited the Cheshire Home to spend some happy moments with the inmates. It is a Home for women with disability. Some attend classes while some work at the IICP. It was a great experience spending time with the loving lot of ladies there.



CERVICAL CANCER & THALASSEMIA AWARENESS DRIVE

9th December 2025 at SOFIA COLLEGE & ASLEHA COLLEGE, NALHATI

Rtn. Dr Susmita Mitra Banerjee conducted Cervical Cancer & Thalassemia Awareness Drive at Sofia College & Asleha College in Nalhati. More than 380 students attended the Programme. She was the only representative of our club to have conducted this Project successfully. This was a joint project of RCCSW and BOGS.



On the same day ie 9th December at Southend School, Nalhati, 140 underprivileged girls of the age group of 9 to 15 years were administered Cervical Cancer HPV Vaccines free of cost. This too was a joint project of RCCSW and BOGS. Rtn. Dr. Susmita Mitra Banerjee, along with the representatives of BOGS, conducted the project successfully.

After the vaccinations were done the school authorities arranged for a sumptuous breakfast of duck meat, morog meat & Dhuki, a local delicacy followed by lunch of pilau and mutton.



JUST TO REMIND YOU:

13 DECEMBER 2025: DGE. TAPAS BHATTACHARYA meets incoming Club Leaders and introduces his team for 2026-2027.

“MELBONDHON” from 6.00 PM at Saturday Club.

[Attendance restricted to Incoming Club Presidents and invitees]

19 DECEMBER 2025: ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

AND.... ELECTION / SELECTION OF BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2026-2027.

10 & 11 JANUARY 2026: RI. DISTRICT 3291 CONFERENCE.