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REGULAR MEETING No. 2964

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Christmas in Kolkata, the "City of Joy", is a spectacular, inclusive festival blending history, culture and community, where Park Street transforms into a dazzling fairyland of lights, attracting people of all faiths for music, food and celebrations echoing its British Colonial past and Anglo Indian heritage, making it a truly cosmopolitan event beyond just religious observance.

Kolkata's rich colonial history, including its time as the capital of British India, established Christmas as the major event, a legacy seen in grand celebrations and traditions that persist today. Christmas here is a universal celebration. Embraced by Bengalis and people from diverse backgrounds, much like Durga Puja or Diwali.

Park Street, the heart of festivities is illuminated with lights, attracts massive crowds for live music, food, stalls and a festive atmosphere especially around Allen Park. Bow Barracks, is a historic Anglo Indian enclave and offers a glimpse into the traditional Christmas with its red-brick buildings, carols and community spirit. St. Paul's Cathedral and St. John's Church become focal points for midnight masses and decoration, attracting visitors from all communities.

During the Christmas season, Kolkata sparkles with lights, stars and festive decorations creating a magical ambience. Bakeries buzz with Christmas cake sales, while restaurants serve festive feasts like roasted turkey and shopping malls offer Christmas sales. Clubs and hotels organize Christmas Eve musical parties and special Christmas lunch. People dressed as Santa Clause distribute gifts to the children in schools, clubs, hotels and homes. Carol Evenings are also organized in various places.

FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK

**** "Main kuchh qubool karna chahta hun, Brigadier Sahib"** (I have a confession to make), said Pakistani Brigadier Khwaja Mohammad Naser (Retd), to his Indian guest in Lahore, Brigadier Madan Lal Khetarpal. Naser then disclosed that in the 1971 Indo-Pak war. It was he who had killed Brigadier Khetarpal's son, 2nd Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal on the battlefield.

It was 2001, and Brigadier Khetarpal, who was born in Pakistan's Sargodha and came to India during the 1947 Partition, was visiting his ancestral home. But the trip that was supposed to be one of nostalgia turned into one of shock, and later, reconciliation.

Naser, a Major commanding a Patton tank squadron in Pakistan's 13 Lancers armoured regiment, was leading the attack against Indian positions at Basantar on December 16, 1971.

Naser came to know about Brigadier Khetarpal's 2001 visit to Pakistan, and connected with him through mutual military academy alumni networks. He volunteered to be his host and guide.

The Pakistani officer revealed that 2nd Lieutenant Arun was on the opposing side and had destroyed several of their tanks. Eventually, only the two of them remained, their tanks positioned just a few hundred metres apart, facing each other. They fired at the same time, and both tanks were hit. But as fate would have it, Arun was killed in action.

"Your son was a very brave man, Sir. He was singularly responsible for our defeat," said Naser. Arun Khetarpal was posthumously awarded the Param Vir Chakra, India's highest wartime military

honour. Making the ultimate sacrifice at 21, Arun Khetarpal remains one of the youngest Param Vir Chakra awardees.

2nd Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal's acts of valour have echoed through the decades. Now, his story is being retold on screen by filmmaker Sriram Raghavan in the upcoming war film Ikkis. Amitabh Bachchan's grandson, Agastya Nanda, is playing Arun Khetarpal in the film.

The film's title, Ikkis, meaning 21, is inspired by Arun's age when he laid down his life on the line of duty. His brother, Mukesh Khetarpal, once said in an interview, "I have aged, but Arun never will."

THE BATTLE OF BASANTAR, WHERE ARUN KHETARPAL WAS IMMORTALISED.

Though India had been actively supporting the Bangladesh liberation movement for months—offering training, weapons, and aid to the Mukti Bahini guerrillas—the war officially began on December 3, 1971. Pakistan launched Operation Chengiz Khan on December 3, with a series of air strikes targeting air bases in northwestern India.

While the eastern front dominated headlines with the swift fall of Dhaka, the western theatre saw gruelling ground battles.

Fought between December 3 and 16 in the Shakargarh Bulge region—known to Pakistanis as the Battle of Bade Pind—this engagement pitted India's 17 Poona Horse against Pakistan's 16 Infantry Division, supported by the 22nd Cavalry Regiment equipped with US-supplied M-48 Patton tanks.

The terrain—which was flat with an open expanse dotted with sugarcane fields and shallow rivulets—favoured the Pattons' superior speed and firepower. But Indian Centurion tanks, with their 105mm guns and composite armour, proved resilient in defensive hull-down positions.

HOW ARUN KHETARPAL TURNED BASANTAR INTO A GRAVEYARD OF PAKISTANI TANKS

Enter 2nd Lt Arun Khetarpal, a 21-year-old, fresh from the Indian Military Academy (IMA), commissioned just months earlier into the 17 Poona Horse.

As enemy tanks surged forward in a classic blitzkrieg manoeuvre, Indian artillery from the 18th Cavalry laid down a barrage, but it was the tank crews who bore the brunt.

Khetarpal's tank, positioned on the left flank, spotted a spearhead of five Pattons attempting to ford the rivulet.

Without hesitation, Khetarpal manoeuvred into an exposed position, his 20-pounder gun spitting fire in defiance.

In a hail of shellfire, he knocked out the lead Pakistani tank with a point-blank shot to its turret, then pivoted to destroy two more in quick succession.

Eyewitness accounts from fellow troopers described the scene as Arun Khetarpal's tank being a whirlwind, firing, reloading, advancing, non-stop.

By noon, Khetarpal had single-handedly accounted for four confirmed kills, with a fifth Patton left burning and abandoned.

His actions disrupted the Pakistani formation, buying precious time for reinforcements. However, as the enemy regrouped, a Patton's 90mm round struck his Centurion's engine compartment, igniting a blaze.

His commander ordered evacuation. But Khetarpal's response became a legend. "No Sir, I will not abandon my tank. My main gun is still working and I will get these btards."**

Moments later, Khetarpal fired one final shot, crippling another enemy tank before succumbing to a hit from an enemy tank.

Pakistan lost 46 tanks, including 38 Pattons, while India took a hit of 14 Centurions.

The Battle of Basantar was the second-largest tank battle since in World War II, with the Battle of Asal Uttar the largest.

ARUN KHETARPAL: A FOURTH-GENERATION SOLDIER

Born on October 14, 1950, in Pune (then Poona), Arun Khetarpal was the son of Brigadier Madan Lal Khetarpal, a veteran of World War II and the 1948 Indo-Pak War.

Arun was a fourth-generation soldier. His grandfather fought in World War I, and his great-grandfather in the Sikh Khalsa Army under Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

In June 1967, at age 16, Khetarpal joined the NDA's 38th Course in Foxtrot Squadron (cadet number 7498/F/38), where he rose to Squadron Cadet Captain.

He was commissioned on June 13, 1971, into the 17 Poona Horse.

Around six months later, Arun's Young Officers' course at Ahmednagar was abruptly halted due to the escalating crisis in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

Recalled to his unit, he boarded a train to Delhi, towing his Java motorcycle—a gift from his father. With hours to spare before the Punjab Mail to Jammu, Arun unloaded the bike and rode it home.

His brother Mukesh, then a student at IIT Delhi, said in an interview with The Times of India: "Arun parked his bike and walked in, looking extremely handsome in his black Armoured Corps dungarees." The air, Mukesh described, was thick with tension as the Khetarpals knew a war was in the offing. That night, Mukesh said the family had an early dinner.

At the dinner table, Mukesh quoted his mother directly, who said, "Sher ki tarah ladna, Arun, qayar ki tarah wapis mat aana". Arun smiled back at her mother.

Days later, Arun lived up to her words.

A PROFOUND, UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER IN PAKISTAN AFTER THREE DECADES

In 2001, nearly three decades after the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War, Brigadier Madan Lal Khetarpal (retd), Arun's father, decided to travel to Pakistan.

At 81, he wanted to revisit his ancestral home in Sargodha for "one last look".

Brigadier Khetarpal landed at Lahore's Allama Iqbal International Airport on an Air India flight. There, he was warmly received by Brigadier Naser, a retired officer from Pakistan's 13 Lancers. Naser, connected through mutual military academy alumni networks, volunteered as host and guide, insisting Khetarpal stayed at his Lahore home rather than a hotel.

Over the next few days, Naser accompanied him to Sargodha, where they visited the Khetarpal family's pre-Partition home.

On the third evening of the three-day visit—coinciding with Ramzan Iftar—the two Brigadiers shared a meal at Naser's cantonment residence.

Post-dinner, as they settled into chairs in the garden, Naser made a confession to Brigadier Khetarpal. The Indian military veteran was left him stunned.

"Main kuchh qubool karna chahta hun, Brigadier Sahib" (I have a confession to make). Khetarpal, who addressed Naser as "beta", said: "Kahiye, beta, main sun raha hun" (Tell me, son, I am listening). Naser then disclosed his role in the war. As a Major commanding a Patton tank squadron in the 13 Lancers, he led the counterattack against Indian positions at Basantar on December 16, 1971.

He described Arun as "standing there like a rock", single-handedly destroying multiple Pakistani tanks, before their duel.

"Your son was on the opposite side... He destroyed many of our tanks, and finally, it was just the two of us left facing each other with our tanks just a few hundred metres apart. We both fired simultaneously,

and both our tanks were hit. It was, however, destined that I was to live, and Arun was to die."

"Your son was a very brave man, Sir. He was singularly responsible for our defeat," said Naser. Stunned but composed, Khetarpal asked, "How did you know it was Arun's tank?"

Naser recounted approaching Indian troops after the ceasefire on December 17 to recover the bodies of Pakistani soldiers.

Curious about his formidable foe, he inquired: "Bahut bahaduri se lade aapke Sahab. Chot toh nahi aayi unhe?" (He fought with great bravery. Was he injured?).

The soldiers replied: "Sahab shaheed ho gaye."

Only later, upon learning of Arun's Param Vir Chakra award and his age did the full weight sink in. Naser told Brigadier Khetarpal: "I didn't know he was only 21, Sir. We were both soldiers doing our duty for our nations."

The encounter left both Brigadiers, one, a father of a hero, and the other, who killed for his country, with a mix of feelings.

Khetarpal returned to India but was unable to tell his wife that his host was also their son's killer.

When India Today Magazine spoke to Brigadier Khetarpal in Delhi, the officer was ever the gentleman. There was no rancour for Naser. "I'm an old soldier, I know the feeling. It's a will to dominate on the field."

In Lahore, Naser echoed his Delhi friend. "In battle you don't see faces or people. You only see the tank... Arun Khetarpal was singularly responsible for our failure that day. He was a very brave man."

[Editor's note: Rtn. Sameer presents yet another unputdownable article. For such articles, it is impossible to lay down a number of words restriction. Keep them coming Sameer.]

BIRTHDAYS

1st January is the Birthday of Rtn Kamal Sethia

6th January is the Birthday of PP Rtn Ranendra Kishore Dasgupta

7th January is the Birthday of Mrs.Gitasri Sengupta

PROJECTS COMPLETED THIS MONTH:

- 3rd December – On the occasion of International Day of persons with disabilities, visited the Cheshire Home and spent some time with all the 12 disabled women of the Home. We also made a need assessment which would help us to plan our future Projects there.
- 9th December – Awareness Programme on Cervical Cancer and Thalassemia at Sofia College and Asleha College in Nalhati. This was a joint Project in association with BOGS
- 9th December – Cervical Cancer HPV Vaccine were administered to 123 underprivileged girls of the age group of 9 to 15 years of Southend Scholl in Nalhati. This too was a joint Project with BOGS.
- 18th December – Distributed 20 blankets to the inmates of Amader Padakhep. It is a Home for orphan and homeless boys of the age group of 4 to 14 years.

PROJECTS COMING UP:

- Fund Raising "Fun Fiesta—Carnival"
- Start a year-long Bakery Training classes for the inmates of the Light House for the Blind. This is a joint Project with Aspiration Bengal
- Start a year-long joint Project with Aspiration Bengal, on Sculptor making, with the inmates of the Calcutta Deaf and Dumb School.
- Health Camp at the Cheshire Home and Mary Cooper Home.

DISTRICT NEWS:

ROTARY INTERNATIONAL DISTRICT 3291 – DISTRICT CONFERENCE.

09 JANUARY 2026 – POLLING FOR DGN & COL REPRESENTATIVE ELECTIONS

10 & 11 JANUARY 2026 – DISTRICT CONFERENCE

VENUE: EAST SIDE PAVILION, NICCO PARK, KOLKATA.

ROTARY INTERNATIONAL NEWS:



Larry Lunsford is the President-Nominee for Rotary International, slated to begin his one-year term on July 1, 2027, representing a long-time Rotarian from Kansas City, Missouri, chosen for his extensive leadership and dedication to Rotary's mission of service and global unity, having served in various key roles within the organization before his nomination in 2025.

Key Details:

- **Nomination:** Selected by the Rotary International Nominating Committee in August 2025.
- **Term:** Will serve as President for the 2027-2028 Rotary year.
- **Background:** A member of the Rotary Club of Kansas City-Plaza, he first encountered Rotary through a Rotary Foundation scholarship in 1981.
- **Experience:** Includes serving as an RI Director (2013-15) and a Trustee of The Rotary Foundation (2021-25).
- **Focus:** Aims to inspire members to tackle global challenges, build skills, and unite people for good.

MEET A FEW MEMBERS JOINING OUR FAMILY TODAY:



Hi, this is **RUKMINI GANGULY**. After completing my Bachelor's Degree in English Honours, I did my diploma in Business Management from the Institute of Modern Management and joined Mongrace Montessori House as a teacher. Afterwards, I joined Planet EDU, where I used to conduct IELTS examination. However, with my sons growing up, I changed my role to that of a home maker.

Later, in 2019, I joined Pathchala, an NGO, as its President. As on date, my long association with

Pathchala has allowed me to address the issues of education, health and skill development activities of the children in an expeditious manner.



Hello, this is DEBASISH LAHIRI. Having completed my Master's Degree in Economics, I joined the Department of Income Tax. After successful completion of my career, during this year, I have retired from the post of Commissioner of Income tax.

Post retirement, I have engaged myself in the activities of NGO, Pathchala. With the kind of exposure I have gained during my service, I try to manage financial health of Pathchala by administering its budget, fiscal compliances and supervising the strategic decisions.



I am NILINA, daughter of late Rtn Jayanta Mitra & Alok Mitra. I've returned to India after 2 decades in the UK & am Chairperson of Women's Interlink Foundation, a charity working on empowerment of vulnerable women, children and families. Service is my life purpose. Traveling, nature, big cats & soul coaching enchant me.

[For those who have joined recently, Nilina will be a 3rd Generation Souwester.]



Hello, I am ATANU MAJUMDER, a software professional with prior civil services experience in West Bengal. My career has taken me across India and abroad, enabling collaboration with diverse cultures and opportunity to work in rural areas. I enjoy reading, music, traveling, and sports. My family includes my wife Tanushree, a teacher, daughter Aishani, a final year computer engineering student and son Ahan, in 10th Standard.



I'm INDRANIL DAS a practicing Chartered Accountant based in Kolkata. I run a professional firm with a dedicated team, focusing on taxation, audits, and financial advisory. Beyond my profession, I have a deep interest in community development, education, and ethical leadership. Giving Audit and Assurance services to various Government Schemes which are directly linked to Social cause has found a common motive for Joining Rotary and connect directly with the ground work.

Also joining the family today will be RUPA SINHA, whose profile was printed in the WHISTLE dated 24 October 2025.

**ON BEHALF OF PRESIDENT RUMA, THE WHISTLE
WISHES YOU AND YOUR FAMILY A MERRY
CHRISTMAS AND A VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR.
ENJOY EVERY MOMENT OF THIS FESTIVE SEASON.
STAY SAFE.**

**Don't worry much about
what you eat between
Christmas & New Year !!
It's what you eat between
New Year & Christmas
that really matters !!!**