



Francesco Arezzo
RI President 2025-26



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District Governor RID 3240



Chandana Das
President, Rotary Club of Shillong



Rotaractors and Rotarians at Mawphlang assisting State Disaster Management team in earthquake mock drill.

DGE Dakoju & Paola create history by donating Rs.500 crore to TRF

I am 71 years old. My life was a journey that began in weakness but blossomed into strength. I was born sickly; asthma and eczema kept me in bed for months while other children were at school or playing outdoors. I lost my father at ten. My father had donated every piece of our family land to poor landless farmers as part of a movement in India that encouraged landowners to share their land with the landless."

With these simple and heartfelt words RI District 3192 DGE Ravishankar Dakoju grabbed the attention and captivated the hearts of the delegates at the recent International Assembly in Orlando. But it hardly prepared them for the spectacular announcement that this unassuming Rotarian, known for his spontaneity and unconventional acts, accompanied by his wife Paola, was about to make. Without any hesitation and discomfort, he traced his life's journey. And that story was a typical, textbook rags-to-riches story.

But what was far from textbook or typical was the magnanimity the couple displayed — Dakoju announced that he and his wife had decided to donate about 85 per cent of their wealth — around \$50-60 million — ₹450-550 crore — to The Rotary Foundation. He made this staggering pledge saying: "Years ago, Paola and I shared a dream — that one day, when we have enough to live with dignity, we would return 85 per cent of our wealth back to society. My friends, that day has arrived... and Paola and I are ready to walk that talk."

While this announcement got a standing ovation, what really made the couple the toast of the Assembly hall, if not the whole event, was the brutal honesty and humility with which Dakoju told his life's

Why Indian armed forces are fearless: Brig Basera

At one of the sessions at the Tejas zone institute in Delhi, Brig D S Basera, secretary of the Kendriya Sainik Board (KSB), Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare, Ministry of Defence, enlightened a packed hall at the Manekshaw Centre on why people join our defence forces and why those guarding our nation are fearless. General Manekshaw, after whom the venue was named, belonged to the Gorkha regiment; Basera was from the 35th Gorkha regiment as well. "In case of war, we are the first ones to be launched in any part of the country." Manekshaw was elevated as field marshal in 1973, in recognition for winning the 1971 war when Bangladesh was liberated. Basera himself was a third-generation officer from his family in the Indian Army. "My grandfather fought in World War II, was shot in the head, declared dead, and was awarded the military cross. After 21 days he came back alive, recovered, fought again and was again awarded the military cross!"

Despite all the travails he faced, he motivated Basera's father to join the Indian Army; he fought both in the 1962 and 1971 wars. "In the insurgency, my father lost his right-hand finger and was about to be withdrawn from the army. He remained in the same branch, served in various situations and motivated me to join the army at the age of 18. And today after 33 years of service and four years of training in the National Defence Academy and Indian Military Academy, I

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Raffaela from Laitkor, on her first day of School.
Raffaela, was one of the beneficiaries of the Gift of Life Project of Rotary Club of Shillong. Thanks to Rtn. Kiron Joshi and Rtn.(Dr.) Debashish Das for their humanitarian effort.

Why Indian armed forces are fearless *(Contd from page 1)*

stand before you. My son is with us, and he will join the Indian Army too.”

When he was commissioned in 1992, the insurgency broke out in the northeast and he was involved in the counter insurgency operations, “where you do not know where your enemy is... as the enemy is within. So, we fought a different kind of warfare. And I still want my son to join the armed forces, despite all the challenges. You must be wondering, despite getting shot in the head, losing limbs, and the challenges in my own service career, why do I want that.”

The broader question, he added, was what inspires generations to join the armed forces time and again. “It’s *naam*, *namak* and *nishan*. Our *naam* is Bharat. Our *namak* is the soil, and our *nishan* is our national flag. For these three things, we can go to any extent.”

One of the things that motivated the Indian soldiers and made them fearless was that “the soldiers and their families are taken care of while serving, after retirement and even after death. This is the reason that we are fearless. We don’t have to fear. If we are alive, we have medals on our chest. If we are dead, our name is at the National War Memorial behind India Gate, written in golden words. Every day, thousands of people remember us. What bigger honour than to be wrapped in the national flag while departing from this world,” Basera asked a mesmerised audience.

What makes Indian soldiers fearless is the confidence that their families are taken care of while serving, after retirement and even after death. [Source -Rasheeda Bhagat, Rotary News]

... donating Rs.500 crore to TRF *(Contd from page 1)*

story. He related the sudden death of his father at only 53, leaving behind “seven children, four dogs, and only ₹100 in the bank.” His two brothers had to discontinue their education and take up small jobs. His mother, “less educated and unprepared for the shock, raised us with great difficulty, helped only by the government’s pension, free-schooling, my brothers’ meagre salaries and her extraordinary courage.”

Without any qualms Dakoju related how this tragedy quickly transformed him into a vagabond.... “I drifted... became the leader of a street gang. My friends were jailed, murdered, or lost to alcohol. I sold black market movie tickets; and shoplifted to feed my gang members and failed my school exams three times.”

With neighbours ensuring their children kept away from this youngster, he developed an inferiority complex. But then something extraordinary happened. The local community “punished me, only with love. Hungry, I would go to their homes, and not once did those mothers and sisters turn me away. Their kindness became my lifeline.”

By sheer “luck and grace,” he got a decent education — a degree and a diploma in marketing. For his first job, for which he commuted taking three different buses, he got a salary of just \$2 a month. But suddenly his life changed when he met B S N Hari, who went on to become “more than a family member.” Together they built a thriving real estate business — Hara Housing.

On Dakoju and Paola’s stunning gift to TRF, RI President Francesco Arrezzo posted on Facebook, “This remarkable commitment reflects their deep belief in Rotary’s mission and in the power of people coming together to *Unite for Good*. Their generosity will strengthen our global efforts and expand what Rotary can achieve in communities around the world. I am deeply inspired by Ravishankar’s leadership and the shared values he and Paola embody!” *(Source: Rotary News)*

GREETINGS

Rtn. Suresh Singh celebrates his birthday on 14th February

Members of the Rotary Club of Shillong wish you many happy returns of the day.