



UNITE
FOR
GOOD

ASHOKA
NEWSLETTER
JANUARY, 2026

ROTARY CLUB OF DELHI SOUTH

R. I. President: Rtn. Francesco Arezzo

District Governor: Rtn. Dr. Ravinder Gugnani

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE TO THE CLUB



A Purposeful Beginning

January has truly set the tone for what promises to be a year of energy, service, and meaningful impact for the Rotary Club of Delhi South.

The month began on an auspicious and festive note, with celebrations around Makkar Sankranti and Lohri festivals, reminding us of renewal, gratitude, and the joy of togetherness. These traditions

resonate deeply with Rotary values—marking new beginnings, collective harmony, and the spirit of giving.

In alignment with Vocational Service Month, we translated intent into action by hosting a Family Day at the Arya Samaj – ETASHA Centre. It was heartening to witness families come together to celebrate dignity of labour, skill development, and livelihood creation. The smiles, conversations, and shared moments reaffirmed our belief that empowering vocations empowers families and communities.

Our engagement with youth took a decisive step forward through an entrepreneurship and vocational interaction with Rotaractors. The exchange of ideas, aspirations, and real-world insights underscored

Rotary's commitment to mentoring the next generation—equipping them not only with skills, but also with values of leadership, ethics, and service.

On the service front, January stood out as a month of significant public health outreach. Multiple cervical cancer awareness, screening, and vaccination camps were conducted across Delhi and extended pan-India. These initiatives reflect our unwavering focus on preventive healthcare, women's well-being, and scalable impact - touching lives well beyond our immediate geography.

What makes this start truly special is the collective spirit with which our members, families, partners, and volunteers have come together. January has shown us that when fellowship, vocation, youth, and service move in unison, Rotary's impact multiplies.

As we step into the months ahead, let us carry forward this momentum - strengthening projects, deepening partnerships, and continuing to serve with compassion and purpose.

A great start to the year, and an even greater journey ahead.

Warmest Regards

Kaval Verma

President 2025–26

Rotary Club of Delhi South

LIFE IS PRECIOUS

Recent weeks have gently reminded our Rotary family of a truth we often overlook in the rush of daily life — life is fragile, unpredictable, and deeply precious.

We stood together in concern and prayer for President **Kaval's son-in-law Amaan**, whose sudden health emergency showed how swiftly circumstances can change and how vital timely care, family strength, and collective support truly are.

We were also worried about **Rtn**

Amarjit Singh, who faced a sudden heart condition. By God's grace and prompt medical attention, he is now doing well and recovering — a reassuring reminder to value health and act early.

Our thoughts remain with our former veteran RCDS member, **Pradeep Bahri**, who is courageously battling cancer. With faith and resilience, he is on the path to recovery, inspiring us all with his strength.

At the same time, we share the grief

of our Secretary, **Rtn Dr Shweta Javali and Rtn Kirit Javali** on the loss of their mother. A parent's passing leaves a void that words cannot fill, and we stand with them in solidarity and compassion.

These moments remind us that service is not only about projects — it is about empathy, presence, and care for one another. Let us cherish each day, support each other wholeheartedly, and never forget that life is precious, and so is our Rotary family.

BLANKET DISTRIBUTION DRIVE TO THE NEEDY

BY RCDS MEMBERS

AREA OF FOCUS : ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



RAJNI & SOM DUA



SAM & NINA BHANDARI



NAMAN & PRIYANKA AGARWAL
Distributed blankets and Revri in Sankranti



350 Blankets distributed to caddies by NISHANT KALIA,
SHRUTI KALIA, AMARJIT SINGH, SHWETA JAVALI



ILA JAIN



DEEPAK KAPOOR & SARITA KAPOOR



AMARNATH GOYAL



Blankets distributed at the Arya Samaj Centre by ILA JAIN, SOM & RAJNI
DUA, SARITA KAPOOR, JAYSHREE SAWHNEY & DOLLY BRARA

The Blanket Distribution Drive to the Needy, undertaken by the members of Rotary Club of Delhi South (RCDS), was a focused winter-relief initiative reflecting the club's enduring commitment to Service Above Self. Recognising the severe impact of Delhi's winter on vulnerable communities, RCDS members came together to provide warmth, care, and dignity to those most exposed to the cold. Over 2000 blankets were distributed by the members.

They identified high-need locations such as pavements, shelters, construction sites, and night homes. Hands-on distribution by members, ensuring respectful interaction and equitable reach was conducted. Over 2000 blankets

were distributed (Kiran, Anil - 100, Sarita & Deepak - 100, Shruti & Nishant - 100, Mini & Pramod - 50, Dolly & Arvinder - 50, Arjun & Chitra - 50, Kriti & Sumit - 100, Amar Nath & Shashi - 100, Rita & Suneel - 50, Rajni & Som - 50, Usha & Ashok - 50, Neeru & Raghubar - 50, Ila - 30, Alok Bhargava - 50, Pradeep, Rita 100, Naman & Priyanka - 200, Rekha & Vinod - 50, Deepak & Vaneeta - 100, Rachna & Rohit - 50, Raji & Rajinder - 50. Nina & Sam - 50, Neeraja & Laxmi - 50, Amarjit & Dimple - 200).

Beyond physical warmth, the drive delivered compassion and human connection. For recipients, it meant relief and reassurance during harsh conditions; for RCDS members, it reinforced the



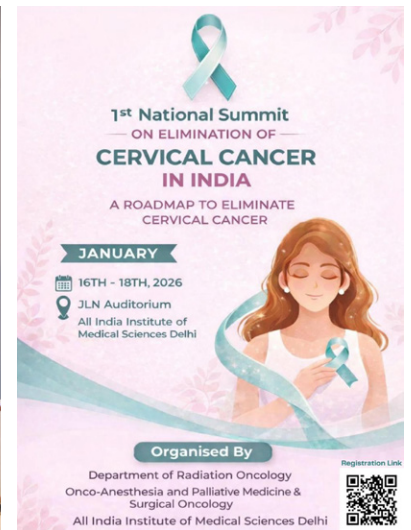
SUMIT & KRITI MAKHIJA

values of empathy, fellowship, and meaningful community service. The Blanket Distribution Drive stands as a simple yet powerful example of how collective action by RCDS members can create tangible, life-enhancing impact—bringing warmth not only to bodies, but also to hearts, during the coldest days of winter.

1ST SUMMIT ON ELIMINATION OF CERVICAL CANCER IN INDIA

January 16-18, 2026

AREA OF FOCUS : DISEASE PREVENTION & TREATMENT



AIIMS, New Delhi organised the 1st National Summit on Elimination of Cervical Cancer in India from 16th -18th January. Our Interact School, Gyan Bharti School Interact Club supported the summit by deputing two students (who got vaccinated during our drive at their school), a parent and a teacher who participated on a panel discussion. The theme of the session was - "Building Trust, Understanding and Collective action for HPV Vaccination & Screening."

The note from the Parent who attended says it all: " Good evening, it was a good experience especially for the children. We all got to express our view points during the panel discussion and it was good to meet and talk to people of such diverse fields."





Parent-Teacher-Student Dialogue Session

"Conversations for a Cervical Cancer-Free Generation"

Theme: Building Trust, Understanding, and Collective Action for HPV Vaccination and Screening

Session Objectives:

- ✓ Clarify myths and misconceptions around HPV vaccination and screening.
- ✓ Foster open dialogue on cultural and social acceptance of vaccination for adolescents.
- ✓ Discuss accessibility challenges and how schools and families can work together to overcome them.
- ✓ Empower students and teachers as advocates for preventive health

Points of Discussion:

- ✓ Address safety, efficacy, and side effects of HPV vaccines for girls and boys.
- ✓ Discuss HPV screening options, starting age, and recommended frequency.
- ✓ Counter myths linking HPV vaccination to early sexual activity; promote culturally sensitive communication.
- ✓ Explore strategies to enhance access ad equity in rural areas.
- ✓ Build trust through schools, health workers, and clear communication with communities.
- ✓ Engage students and teachers as advocates for HPV



Scan QR or use the link to Register
<https://forms.gle/rceGueRhM31l5pSp8>




Date: 18 January, 2026
Time: 12:30 PM to 1:00 PM
Venue: JLN Auditorium, AIIMS, New Delhi

Organised By
 Department of Radiation Oncology
 Onco-Anesthesia and Palliative Medicine &
 Surgical Oncology
 All India Institute of Medical Sciences



LOHRI CELEBRATION WITH THE RCDS FAMILY

January 11, 2026

AREA OF FOCUS : FELLOWSHIP

On 11th January 2026, the Rotary Club of Delhi South (RCDS) family came together to celebrate Lohri in a spirit of warmth, festivity, and fellowship—true to the values that bind our club.

The evening unfolded around the traditional lohri fire, symbolising gratitude, prosperity, and new beginnings. Members and spouses soaked in the festive mood as lively Punjabi and Bollywood music set the rhythm. The ladies danced joyfully around the holy fire, while the gentlemen cheered them on, adding to the camaraderie and cheer that defined the celebration.

A sumptuous dinner followed, enjoyed by all, and the evening

became even more special with a warm birthday celebration for R'anne Dolly Brara, highlighted by a heartfelt song from Rita Ji and evergreen melodies by the ever-charming PP Rtn Arvinder Brara.

What truly made the evening memorable was the post-dinner gup-shup—those relaxed conversations, shared laughter, and unhurried moments that reflect the close bonds of the RCDS family.

For those who joined, the memories will be cherished; for those who could not, you were missed. The Lohri celebration was yet another reminder of the joy of togetherness and the strength of fellowship that defines Rotary Club of Delhi South.



FAMILY DAY AT THE ARYA SAMAJ SKILL CENTRE FOR THE UNDERPRIVILEGED

January 12, 2026

AREA OF FOCUS : ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



On 12th January, we successfully hosted Family Day at the RCDS/ETASHA Arya Samaj Centre with the B-SMART batch of our Skill Training Centre, and it turned out to be a truly productive and memorable event.

We were honored to have PP Anil K Agarwal, PP Som & Rajni Dua, PP Lalit & Jayshree Sawhney, PP Pramod Agarwal, Rtn Ila Jain, R'anne Sarita Kapoor and R'anne Dolly Brara from the Rotary Club of Delhi South grace the occasion. The event featured a variety of engaging activities, including alumni sharing their journeys, current batch reflections, and parents sharing their experiences.

Our esteemed guests addressed both parents and trainees, sharing encouraging and motivational words that inspired everyone to work towards a brighter future.

A proud moment for us all! Etashians received yet another award from Rotary Club of Delhi South for "Outstanding Vocational Service."



PP Rtn Anil k Agarwal had brought one of his executives with him who would help the trainees and offered youngsters who wish to work in Russia, the help to get training. They would have the option of a good salary, food, accommodation and air tickets if they decided to go to work in Russia.

Additionally, blankets were distributed to our trainees and their parents, adding warmth and care to the celebration.

Indeed, it was a meaningful, inspiring, and unforgettable day for everyone involved.



ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

January 12, 2026 | by PP Rtn Som Dua



1. When we address the issue of Economic & Community Development, we are to consider India's Demographics. About 25% of our population is Young, needing education & Skilling. Next 65% of our population is Adult, needing livelihood & the balance 10% is Elderly needing social security.

2. Unfortunately, our present Economic Growth has not been able to generate enough jobs to meet Adults livelihood requirements, leading to about 20% unemployment. Our per capita income per annum is also low at about USD 2,400. only against that of USA which is USD 90,000. This shows our low productivity.

3. Although, we have growth-oriented policies & reforms, our almost 8 cr MSMEs are not sufficient to achieve the desired growth rate to match with a Developed Economy. The target for Viksit Bharat @ 2047 is GDP USD 30 trillion against the present level of USD 4 trillion.

4. We need to engage with our youth to

encourage, motivate & inspire them to opt for Entrepreneurship as a career instead of seeking jobs. Let's Mentor our youth for Entrepreneurship to capture new opportunities & explore their ideas to Integrate with Value Chains in emerging areas like Agri, Digital, Circular & Green Economies. They need to work on innovations for new solutions, use local resources & create local jobs to avoid migrations. This will facilitate Regional Socio Economic Development also.

5. Mentoring will help in Entrepreneurship Capacity Building for Inclusive Growth, Prosperity, Sustainability & Self Reliance. Institutions like Rotary, BYST, PHDCCI, AIMA etc provide us opportunities to create awareness for Entrepreneurship & also empower EWS women & Youth for Self Reliance & make a significant contribution in Socio Economic Development to achieve Mission Viksit Bharat.

LETS CONVERT JOB SEEKERS TO JOB CREATORS

ENTREPRENEURSHIP SEMINAR BY PP SOM DUA

January 18, 2026

AREA OF FOCUS : ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

On 18 January, 2025, an insightful and enriching session on Entrepreneurship with Rotaractors was organised with PP Rtn. Som Dua and Key Mentor at BYST. The session focused on developing an entrepreneurial mindset rooted in ethics, values, and social responsibility. PP Som Dua shared practical experiences and key learnings from his journey, highlighting the importance of mentorship, resilience,

and value-based decision-making in entrepreneurship.

The discussion also drew meaningful connections between entrepreneurship and Rotary values, encouraging participants to think beyond profit and towards sustainable and inclusive growth. The session was interactive, inspiring, and left the audience motivated to explore

entrepreneurship as a powerful tool for innovation and positive societal impact.

Thank you to all the Rotaractors for organising the program so professionally and their active participation.

Also thanks to PP, Rtn Deepak Kapoor, PP Rtn Anil K Agarwal, Rtn Rajiv Seoni, R'anne Rajni Dua and Rtn Ajay Kumar for your participation and encouragement.

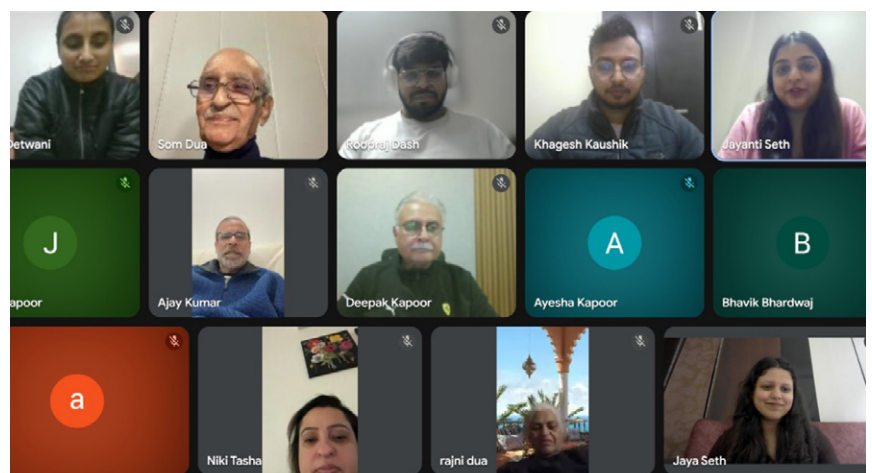
ROTARY ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM

Conducted Entrepreneurship Class for Rotaract Club of Delhi South & college students. It covered its Definition, its Importance, Methodology, Mentoring & Capacity Building for Per Capita GDP for Socio Economic Development. Q/A Session was very inspiring. Let's convert Job Seekers into job creators.

MASTERCLASS
Unlock Your Potential: An Exclusive Online Session

FEATURING SOM DUA, FCA, FCS

- Corporate Management Consultant & Advisor
- Recognized by Rotary District 3011 as Golden President
- Expert in Business Growth, Leadership, & Mentoring
- Involved in Rotary & Entrepreneurship Development Programmes



Testimonial from Rotractor Mansi

Thank you so much Sir, for taking your valuable time to conduct such an insightful session. Your guidance, experiences, and practical perspectives on entrepreneurship gave us a lot to reflect upon and learn from. The way you connected entrepreneurship with values, ethics, and real life applications made the session truly meaningful. We are grateful for your mentorship and support, and we look forward to learning from you again in the future. Thank you once gain Sir for inspiring and guiding us.

ROTARY DIST. 3011 & SAFGR GOLFERS TOURNAMENT

January 29, 2026

AREA OF FOCUS : DISTRICT EVENT

At the Rotary District 3011 & SAFGR Golfers Tournament on 29th January at Jaypee Wishtown golf course in Noida. RCDS was well represented by PP Rtn Arvinder Singh Brara, Rtn Madhavan, Rtn Dr Neeraj Bhalla, and Rtn Nishant Kalia. They played all the 18 holes of the course and joined in the fellowships over tea /coffee and thoroughly enjoyed the cocktails and dinner which followed, in true RCDS style.

Arvinder got a prize for getting on the green in two shots on hole number 7 which he clarifies was because 7 is his lucky number. Nishant Kalia introduced the other three RCDS players to the SAFGR head PDG RTN Parag Sheth . THE DG Dr Ravi Gugnani was present at the closing function and also at the cocktails and dinner and recognized the active participation of RCDS in fielding 4 of their golfers in the event.



CERVICAL CANCER VACCINATION CAMP

AREA OF FOCUS : DISEASE PREVENTION & TREATMENT

Inter-District Cervical Cancer Prevention Initiative – Gujarat

In a remarkable example of Rotary collaboration, Rotary District 3011 and Rotary District 3060 joined hands to implement Cervical Cancer Vaccination Projects across six towns and villages in Gujarat, reaching deep into communities with preventive healthcare.

The initiative was warmly acknowledged by District Governor Amardeep Ji (District 3060), along with Presidents and Rotarians from participating clubs, who expressed heartfelt gratitude towards District 3011 and Rotary Club of Delhi South for their leadership, planning, and unwavering support.

Vaccination Coverage – Town-wise Break-up

Location	Beneficiaries Vaccinated
Vapi – Mandir	139
Vapi – School	117
Silvassa – School	273
Umarsadi – Morning Session	50
Umarsadi – Evening Session	26
Bharuch	63
Kosamba	635

Total 1,303 beneficiaries

This large-scale outreach stands as a powerful testament to Rotary's commitment to preventive healthcare, inter-district cooperation, and impact-driven service. The notes of appreciation received from Presidents and Rotarians across District 3060 further reinforce the significance and success of this initiative.

Together, Districts 3011 and 3060 have demonstrated how collaboration multiplies impact — truly living the spirit of Service Above Self.



Message of Appreciation from the District Governor

“Great work done today in service to humanity.

Thank you very much, Rtn. Vandana Ji, and DG Ravi Gugnani (Dist. 3011) for your support in this noble cause.

We highly appreciate your efforts, Rtn. Vandana Ji, in carrying out this incredible project.”

— District Governor, Rtn. Amardeep Singh Bunet District 3060 and District First Lady – Rtn. Kamaljeet Bunet

दिवा बाराकर भारडोली-व्यारा बाराकर 14-01-2026



CERVICAL CANCER VACCINATION CAMP

January 24, 2026

AREA OF FOCUS : DISEASE PREVENTION & TREATMENT

Inter-District Cervical Cancer Prevention Initiative – Andhra Pradesh

Under the guidance of District Governor Rtn Dr Ravi Gugnani, a Cervical Cancer Camp was organised in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana District Governer Ram, PDG Ravi Vadlamani and DGE Uday Pilani ji for actively supporting this project. On 22nd to 24th January 2026, over 8000 children from the underprivileged section of society were vaccinated. Cervical cancer is very widely spread in this part of the country. Our children here need to be protected against it. Delhi South and 9 clubs from this District were involved with this program.



CERVICAL CANCER VACCINATION CAMP

January 28, 2026

AREA OF FOCUS : DISEASE PREVENTION & TREATMENT

Continuing our commitment to preventive healthcare and community service, on 28th January 2026, we successfully vaccinated 229 students and nurses at Amrita Hospital. The enthusiasm and cooperation of the hospital staff and young participants made the camp smooth, efficient, and impactful. Such initiatives reaffirm our belief that timely prevention, awareness, and collective effort can make a tangible difference in safeguarding health and building a healthier society. We are grateful to everyone who contributed their time, support, and goodwill in making this programme a success.



CERVICAL CANCER VACCINATION CAMP

January 29, 2026

AREA OF FOCUS : DISEASE PREVENTION & TREATMENT

On 29th January, Rotary club of Delhi South, Rotary Club of Faridabad One, Rotary Club of Faridabad Central and Rotary Club of Faridabad Excellence organised a Vaccination Drive at Association for the Welfare of Handicapped, Dabua-Pali Road, Faridabad. 118 Children were vaccinated. All the children were with Special Needs, who are most vulnerable in our society. They were mostly deaf and dumb, blind with Down Syndrome or having Autism. Project was carried out with valuable support from DG Dr Ravinder Gugnani and Vandana Bhalla.



A SACRED JOURNEY TO A DIVINE LAND



This is a story of how outlandish dreams can actually come true. This is the story about fulfilling a heartfelt wish. This is the story of our Yatra to Kailash- Mansarovar. I am referring to the magnificent Mount Kailash, the abode of Shiv and Parvati, that exudes an aura of supreme spirituality and is regarded as the cosmic axis, the center of the universe. Nestled in the Himalayas between India, Nepal and Tibet, it is a revered place for many religions and communities. Tibetan Buddhists call it Gang Rinpoche and consider it the home of Demchok, who symbolizes supreme bliss. Jains revere it as the site where their first Tirthankara, Rishabhdev, attained liberation and Bon followers regard it as the seat of their founder, Tonpa Shenrab. Worshippers from all over the world flock to do darshan of this holy land in pursuit of spiritual awakening and moksha.

Today I wish to share our momentous journey to this holiest of holy lands. Allow me to digress a bit and take you back in time to the very beginning. It all started on a cold, snowy winter afternoon in Kobe, Japan. The year was 1995... the year the Great Hanshin earthquake had struck the city. We were at the epicenter but that story has already been told. Gathering some sense of normalcy in the aftermath of the traumatic experience of near death I started working at Canadian Academy, the international school where our children, Richa and Anupam studied. I had opted for the library due to my love for books. That particular day as I was walking around the book shelves finding research material for a student my eyes fell on this book in the travel section. On a whim I pulled it out. It was a huge glossy rectangular book titled Journey to Mount Kailash. The blurb said it is one of the most fascinating and secretive places on earth, in fact considered the centre of the world. In my childhood I remember my grandmother telling us stories about Bhagwan Shiv and his abode in Kailash. For us it was some far far away land alive only in our imagination. My curiosity piqued, I flipped through the pages and suddenly in my mind Mt Kailash transformed into something that actually exists! I was mesmerized by the glorious photographs, each page opening this forbidden and exciting place in my mind. By no stretch of imagination was this land on my radar but I was getting sucked into its wondrous natural beauty, legend and mystery. I made a promise to myself that one day I would be there soaking in the divine beauty.

Fast forward to 2007. We are now living in Shanghai, China. A decade and more has passed since the wintry day in Japan and my dream is almost forgotten. However, a chance encounter with an acquaintance who had just returned from this very pilgrimage gave us the incentive needed and rekindled the desire to do this challenging but beautiful journey. We Indians always envisage going to Mansarovar via India but the possibility of doing the journey from China via Lhasa looks very doable now. The stars were aligning to make my dream into a reality. As the thought of actually doing the trip crystalized, not an easy one for sure, we got a big thumbs up from our son Anupam who agreed to join us in this adventure. We were ecstatic.

This Yatra is full of challenges of physical endurance, emotions, and not the least of a strong heart! For this trip to succeed a lot of preparation was required before the execution! Planning the itinerary, tickets, permits, medicines, winter wear and very obviously food (after all we are Indian and vegetarian). Paramount was physical fitness as the Tibetan plateau is at a high altitude, meaning less oxygen in the atmosphere, harsh, unpredictable and very cold weather. We earnestly started to brisk walk daily to build our stamina and improve our physical conditioning. Our medical kit included tablets to help us manage the low oxygen.

Another constraint was that traveling in Tibet is highly restricted, especially for foreigners. One needs permits to enter each prefecture which we will travel across to reach our destination. All foreigners need a visa for Tibet even though they are living and working in China. The Tibetan guide we hired helped us procure all the necessary documents and engaged a 4 wheel jeep and driver for us.

Next on the list of chores was shopping for gear for extreme cold weather. Down jackets, gloves etc were easy but we could not find sleeping bags to fit our length, oops, height ! We actually lay down on the shop floor and tried them much to the amusement of other shoppers. At 6.5 feet Anupam had a tough time to get his size.

To ensure that we were physically fit for the trip, we underwent various medical tests recommended by the Govt of India for the Yatra. Both Pradeep and I got a clean chit.

Not sure about availability of food to our taste, we packed lots of snacks, nuts, ready to eat food.

A small nugget...because of the pressure difference all our snack packets like bhujia, kela wafers etc bellowed out like balloons on landing in Tibet.

I contacted an Indian monk who had undertaken the yatras to get some valuable tips. He suggested keeping a potli or tiny bag of camphor like a locket around our necks. Its vapour helps in breathing. I made one for each of us.

Finally D-day arrived. We were super charged as we embarked on a journey of a lifetime, that too, on my birthday, September 1, chanting Ganpati Bappa Morya. To this our guide added the Tibetan chant OM Mani Padme OM. I confess that I chanted both shlokas like crazy on many difficult moments throughout the trip. It just kept our spirits up, gave us strength and a calmer heartbeat.

We flew from Shanghai to Lhasa, capital of Tibet, via Chengdu. At Shanghai airport an official asked us to open our luggage. The culprit was the big torch we were carrying. I was more worried about all the theplas, mathri and parathas inside! After examining the harmless torch the official gave an ok. I heaved a sigh of relief. We were glad we carried it. On the shores of the lake we had a flat tyre and that torch was a life saver.

The view of the Tibetan plateau from the airplane was an



entirely new sight for us. High snow covered mountains and deep valleys criss-cross. Lhasa airport is a strip on the edge of a cliff. Our guide expressed his delight to be ferrying Indians. He had not only travelled and studied in India but could also speak a smattering of Hindi. It is very common for Tibetans to go to Nepal and then cross the open border between Nepal and India for work or education. He had fond memories of his stay. Tibetans are culturally inclined towards Indian civilization and there are several similarities. We share a lot of traditions and their script looks very similar to Bengali script. Throughout the trip he kept us engrossed in his stories about the occupation of Tibet by China and the resultant damage to their identity, culture, language and religion. It is a totalitarian regime bent on changing the demographics and wiping out the national identity of the Tibetans who are forced to live in fear.

Our hotel in Lhasa was a Tibetan style ancient building with intricate wooden carvings and paintings on the pillars and ceiling. It was centrally located in the old part of town adjacent to the famous Jokhang temple. We could see the temple from our room. The first thing we noticed was that many Tibetans were doing shashtang namaskar and prostrating themselves and only then entering the temple. Others were prostrating and doing "mattha tek" all around the temple.

Lhasa is about 10,000 ft above sea level and can cause altitude sickness in some. Along with sightseeing the couple of days we stayed there helped us in acclimatization from sea level of Shanghai to much higher altitude.

On day one we saw the grand Potala palace where Dalai Lamas lived and worked for centuries till the Chinese attack forced the current Dalai Lama to flee to India in 1951. Potala Palace is now a vibrant museum and the best place to learn about the culture and history of Tibetan Buddhism. The name "Potala" comes from Mount Potalaka, the home of Avalokitesvara, the Buddha of Compassion. The palace has sacred chapels, stupas, murals, Buddhist relics, artifacts and scriptures. It used to be the center of Tibet's political and religious life till the annexation by China.

Next day we visited the Sera Monastery renowned for its monk debates held in its vast grounds. It was fascinating to see scores of monks young and old in their red flowing robes debating each other animatedly. Monk debate is a form of discussion of Buddhist knowledge and argument about life and philosophy. Monks question each other and answers are given with exaggerated hand gestures. It's a riveting sight. It is considered a method for them to learn. Debaters often employ various hand movements to enhance the intensity of the debate. It was great fun to watch. Our guide translated a bit for us.

Jokhang temple was the last major attraction in Lhasa. Buddhist temples have rotating prayer wheels shaped like cylinders all around the periphery. In Tibetan Buddhism, it is believed that spinning the prayer wheel generates positive energy, purifies negative karma, and brings peace and harmony to both the practitioner and their surroundings. Each turn of the wheel symbolizes the turning of the "Wheel of Dharma," which represents the Buddha's teachings and the path toward enlightenment. Huge copper bowls filled with Yak butter are used as lamps to spread a beautiful warm radiance in the sanctum sanctorum.

The Jokhang temple is surrounded by narrow lanes overflowing with shops selling souvenirs and street food. We bought Tibetan metal prayer bowls that resonate a beautiful Om or hum sound as we move the mallet around its polished rim. We were fascinated by the thangka paintings depicting images of Buddha in various forms using the most vibrant colors. The rotating prayer wheel, the prayer bowl and the thangka are very sacred religious and spiritual artifacts. They assist in focusing the mind for meditation and harmonize one's energy for healing.

Tibetans have a unique way of welcoming guests. They place a pure white sacred silken scarf/stole around the neck and shoulders to welcome people. It is considered a form of giving respect. We received several of these as we proceeded with our journey.

Unfortunately, on day one itself, Pradeep was bitten by an insect. What we were hoping to avoid had happened. The insect bite triggered fever and altitude sickness kicked in with headache and discomfort in breathing. We thought of returning back home as Mansarovar is around 15000 feet above sea level. Pradeep said he will use oxygen as needed and we went ahead. However we decided not to go to Everest Base camp which was part of our itinerary and move on straight to the holy lake.

Armed with oxygen cans, a fluttering heart filled with anticipation and deep desire to reach our goal we started the long drive to Mansarovar, a journey of more than 1213 miles. On the way we stopped to see the Dramkok lake, its serene waters, peaceful and calming and the prettiest shade of blue one can lay eyes on.

The road for most part was asphalt and the ride was smooth. Our driver was also Tibetan so we had lots of open political discussions. To keep altitude sickness at bay we were advised to drink plenty of water which resulted in many restroom breaks. But there were no restrooms, in fact, not a tree in sight all through the journey! Most of the route is open grassland, hardly a bush or two. We were gung ho and took it in our stride!

We stopped by a local monastery where the head monk offered us welcome tea made with yak butter. He spoke to us about Buddhist sutras through our guide. Many common traditions in our two cultures added an extra warmth to the talk. Of course the tea was quite an acquired taste, to say the least, but we finished our cups out of courtesy! This special yak tea keeps the body warm, much needed in these parts.

Next halt was Lhatse and by late evening we were in Shigatse. Each town we passed we were stopped at a police check post and had to hand in our passports and permits. Police officers peeped into the jeep to verify each face with our passport. Once it was dark they shone torches at our faces. It was quite unsettling and not a very pleasant experience.

Both sides of the highway was a vast expanse of grassland, strewn with rocks and boulders. Tibetans use these stones called Mani (gem) to make stupas along roadsides or near temples. These piled stone structures are sacred and often engraved with the mantra "Om Mani Padme Om" and built as devotional offerings in the Himalayas. They are physical manifestations of prayer, spiritual protection, and reminders of compassion.

As we travel onwards we see typical Tibetan houses, with the special area on top for storage of food. From a distance we



can spot yaks grazing on the sparse grassland. We saw many mountain goats as we entered the Himalayas. The plastic waste and garbage we encountered on the way was testimony to the thousands of tourists and devotees who visit this land. Given the harsh conditions it is not easy to dispose of it conveniently.

A very unique feature of the landscape is the Tibetan prayer flags.. Beautiful rectangles in bright vibrant colors,, tied criss-cross on long strings fluttering in the icy wind. Row upon row of these bright flags beckoning a welcome to habitation and some hot succor. The five colors represent the five elements—blue for space, white for air, red for fire, green for water, and yellow for earth. Each flag carries auspicious prayers, especially the mantra “Om Mani Padme Hum”. It is believed the wind carries blessings of peace, compassion, strength, wisdom and goodwill to all beings far and wide.

Frequently, we witnessed Tibetans on the road prostrating themselves, standing up and again prostrating repeatedly just like our shashtang namaskar. Instead of walking or taking transportation to the holy land which is a thousand miles away. They complete the entire journey prostrating on the ground. What hard labour of faith! Difficult to imagine if not seen by my own eyes. As they say, faith can move mountains. It was very humbling to see the Shraddha of the devotee. It will take them weeks to reach their destination but their devotion will help them reach their goal.

As the journey progressed we were losing our appetite and forcing ourselves to eat. The high altitude was also depleting our energy levels. Our suitcase full of goodies was not appealing any more. We carried a big flask of hot water refilled regularly to make our own chai using tea bags.

At times we just managed to eat plain rice at wayside eateries.

In Shigatse we visited the Tashi Lhunpo monastery, the seat of the Panchen Lamas. The tallest and largest bronze Jampa Buddha statue in the world is in this monastery. Jampa Buddha in Tibetan Buddhism is the same as Maitreya Buddha in Chinese Buddhism. During the cultural revolution the Chinese communists broke statues, burnt scriptures, and opened the stupas containing the relics of the 5th to 9th Panchen Lamas, and threw them in the river. Many parts of this monastery were destroyed.

We spent the night at Shigatse in a local hotel which was full of foreigners. We met some Germans and Americans all going to Kailash. In fact, one lady was an air hostess with Lufthansa visited us in our home in Shanghai a few weeks later.

The next morning we travelled to Saga. This is the last town before Mansarovar. We could now see the mountains in the far distance. We were climbing higher and as we entered a valley we saw the Bhramaputra flowing below us. Another wow moment! In Tibet, the Brahmaputra River is known as the Yarlung Tsangpo meaning “The Purifier”. It originates near Mansarovar lake and is characterized by clear, silt-free water in Tibet due to the cold, dry climate, contrasting with its later, silt-heavy journey in India. It travels eastward across the Tibetan plateau for about 1,625 km through the world’s deepest canyon before turning south into India. Part of the journey that day we drove along the banks of the river. We stopped for a break and climbed down to the river bank and refreshed ourselves with the clean cold crisp water.

On the way to Saga we encountered a huge traffic jam of a kilometer. Our driver decided to bypass this hurdle and took a side lane. First he covered the number plate of the jeep with a cloth. We presumed he did not want to get in trouble with the authorities. This side road was really treacherous going through river beds of sand, fields, and sometimes just rocks and boulders. It was quite a scary ride especially when we crossed small streams or big dips in the road. We held on to our lives and I kept chanting all the mantras I could think of. We heaved a sigh of relief once we were back on the road.

The final leg from Saga to Mansarovar was spectacular. As we travelled westward the mighty Himalayan range appeared and the landscape changed dramatically. Our eyes were totally in for a feast. Imagine our excitement. Seeing the Himalayas from the other side! We crossed many high mountain passes, one of them was Mayumla pass at 4900 mt. The car was warm enough but it was biting cold outside. It was an effort to pee.

It was late afternoon when we neared Lake Mansarovar. We were finally arriving. Before we could lay our eyes on it we stopped at Chui monastery perched on a rocky hill offering a serene view point. Monks were chanting mantras sitting on their little desks. This is a must visit site on this journey. We passed by Seralung and Gossul monasteries as we started our parikrama of entire lake. These monasteries add deep spiritual energy to the region. The atmosphere is peaceful yet awe-inspiring—many visitors describe a sense of calm, purity, and connection.

At 4,590 meters above sea level, Lake Mansarovar is one of the highest freshwater lakes in the world. The serene turquoise blue water, surrounded by snow-capped peaks, creates an atmosphere of deep spiritual tranquility. The lake’s still and clear waters symbolize the pure mind. The lake is perfectly round, displaying different hues depending on the sunlight. It is situated on a very high-altitude plateau, and is surrounded by rolling brown hills. There are wind-carved rock formations, open grasslands, scattered nomadic settlements with mani stones and prayer flags every few miles. The region around the lake is the source of four major rivers: Indus, Sutlej, Brahmaputra, and Karnali, a tributary of the Ganges. Pilgrims believe that taking a dip in its holy waters washes away sins and purifies the soul. Hindus believe that each rock big or small around the lake is equivalent to a Shiv linga. We collected a few to bring back for our friends and families.

As we took another turn in the road which was quite primitive and not pucca, the real magic happens. On the north side of the lake in all its majestic grandeur is Mt Kailash, glorious, splendid and looking heavenly in the slanting rays of the setting sun. We immediately got off the jeep and stared at the awesome fascinating creation of nature, a mountain we have traveled thousands of miles to see. We bowed our heads in prayer and gratitude. As the sun set we got back in our jeep to continue driving round the lake.

Soon there was a heart stopping moment when the driver lost his way in finding the camp where we were to put up for the night. He kept going back and forth. By now it was pitch dark. The road was barely there. He veered off of it and we plunged into a huge dip in the sand. Oh my gosh I can’t tell you the shock I went through. And in the darkness, the driver, disoriented, almost drove into the lake. Thank god he managed to brake just on the edge or we

would have plunged in and achieved moksha in reality! My heart was in my mouth! We were just getting over this almost calamity when we had a flat tyre. As they say, trouble comes in pairs! The driver and guide got down to change the tyre but their torch was missing. This is the moment the torch we were carrying came to the rescue. Anupam got down, retrieved the life saver and helped the two fellows. Seeing them struggle Pradeep and I decided to offload as well to reduce the weight of the jeep. OMG it was so biting cold I tremble to describe it. I was back in the jeep in a jiffy. Anupam gave a big hurrah ... he was looking up at the sky and urging me to come look. I reluctantly got down, and lo and behold, what a site it was. There was no sky; it was just dazzling stars. Countless of them shining as they do, only we urbanites never ever get to see them due to artificial light and pollution. One can clearly see the Milky Way in the sky above Mansarovar. This is a sight which the eyes will never see again. Wildest dream, never dreamt came alive!

Coming back to our predicament, we thought we may have to spend the night in the jeep. Fortunately, Lord Shiva heard our prayers and finally the tyre was fixed and the camp was located. It was just a basic room with wooden cots and blankets. This is where the sleeping bag came in handy. We were so exhausted and numb with cold that Anupam had to help us into the bags. We let him handle all the formalities. We were just so grateful to have him with us.

It was still dark when we woke up the next morning, and frankly, we hardly slept. We waited with bated breath for the first rays of the sun to fall on our legendary Kailash. There was not enough oxygen in the air but it was compensated by huge anticipation and excitement amongst us. After what felt like a lifetime, the sun reared its head and there emerged the abode of Lord Shiva in all its glory, defying what a mountain should actually look like. Standing at 6,638 meters (21,778 ft), a near-perfect, symmetrical pyramid with four steep faces facing the cardinal directions. There are indentations, almost like steps, on one flank, as if beckoning us to higher planes leading to heaven. Mount Kailash dominates the landscape. It is often snow-capped, creating one of the most dramatic backdrops on Earth. We were lucky to have totally clear sunny weather and the best sighting. Kailash's perfect pyramid shape is thought to represent a giant cosmic energy generator. Very true! Just a glimpse was enough to energize us ..our hearts filled with pure ecstasy and our mind trying to think philosophical thoughts about life, nature and God. It forces us to truly feel the blue dot and the magnificence of nature in front of us.

The long wait of a decade was worth it. A breathtaking, almost achingly beautiful image etched in our minds and hearts forever. What a magical sight. I was so emotional, eyes moist and heart beating fast in pure joy. We could not take our eyes off it. I am sure if it was not so biting cold I would have actually shed a tear but it would be frozen.

We wanted to do the ritual bathing at Mansarovar before we did our Puja but the water was so icy cold we could barely wet our feet and hands. Even filling the amrit water of the lake was difficult. After a few bottles which I filled very enthusiastically I could no longer bear the icy cold water stabbing my hand and

had to request our guide to fill the rest of the bottles.

For us the meditation and prayer at Lake Mansarovar was the spiritual heart of the trip. We performed our vedic Havan right beside the lake. We lit the Havan kund and chanted our mantras. Since we were the first from our families to have the good fortune to do pilgrimage of this holy land, Pradeep's wish was to carry along with us the spirit of our ancestors, family and friends. Pradeep decided to make a list of all their names and finally we had hundreds. He carried it to place it alongside us as we did the havan. We wanted everyone to be part of this divine moment and share in the blessings received.

After completing the rituals, we drove up to Darchen, the starting point of the parikrama or kora around Mount Kailash, which takes about 3 days. Given Pradeep's discomfiture due to the thin atmosphere we decided not to venture further and leave it for another day.

Our final stop was Lake Rakshastal, a saltwater lake, which lies south of mount kailash. It is stark, barren, and has a mystical appearance. Its crescent shape contrasts with Mansarovar's round form, symbolizing opposing energies in Hindu mythology.

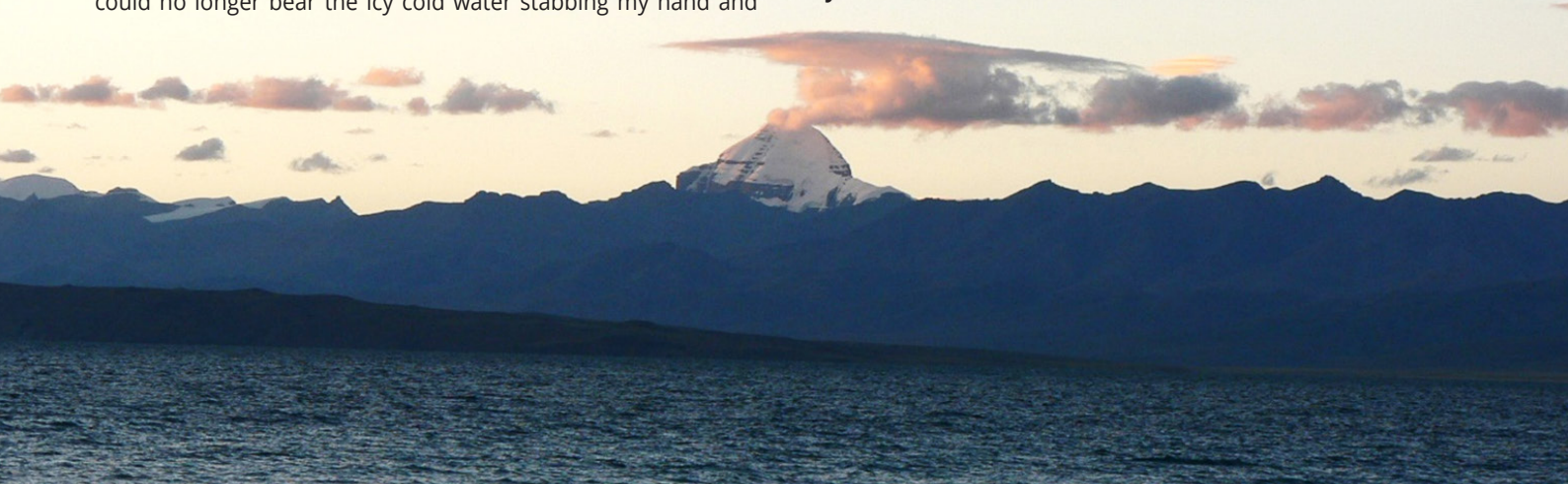
Bowing our heads in prayer we said farewell to Kailash Mansarovar and headed back east to Lhasa chanting Jai Ganesha and Om Mani Padme Om, fully satisfied at completing our travels successfully.

We bid goodbye to our Guide and driver and headed back to Shanghai via Chengdu. We had a ton of leftover food packets and oxygen cans which were very happily accepted by our guide.

This Yatra was indeed a once in a lifetime spiritual journey for us, with no expectation, just pure wonder of actually having done it! It was not only a feast for the eyes, but a renewal of the heart and food for the soul. I can't find the right words to describe my feelings. With deep gratitude to Shiv ji for encouraging us all through to witness something magical, mysterious and oh so holy. Grateful to have our son join us for this momentous trip. But for his support, we would have perhaps turned back from Lhasa itself. He gave us the much needed strength, both mental and physical to continue on. Although we did not do the kora due to Pradeep's altitude discomfort we still returned with renewed physical strength and determination. Once we were on regular terra firma the cobwebs of altitude lifted. Pradeep was fully invigorated and running about!!

Mt Kailash has never been climbed as it is considered inviolably sacred. No religion permits it. Even the Chinese government adheres to this rule. It is said that some Russians tried but never succeeded. Nature has set its own limits and no one can trifle with it. Once people have completed 13 koras they can go up to the Buddhist caves but never beyond. As one author put it, Mt Kailash is part Everest and part Mecca but perhaps we can substitute it with Ayodhya as this analogy touches our hearts. Its aura exudes divinity, purity and magnificence. Mt Kailash can never be conquered but experiencing it propels us to conquer our own greatest mountain: the ego.

By R'anne Rita Kumar



GRAND MUNDAN CELEBRATION PARTY FOR THE MOST ADORABLE KABIR

A joyous and heart-warming Grand Mundan Celebration was held for little Kabir, surrounded by love, laughter, and blessings. The occasion was made even more special in the presence of his proud grandparents, Rtn Dr Vaneeta Kapoor and PPDG Rtn Deepak Kapur, whose happiness and pride were evident to all.

Adding profound grace to the celebration was Kabir's great-grandfather, PP Rtn Satish Kapur, whose affectionate presence and heartfelt blessings filled the gathering with warmth and positive energy. Little Kabir, clearly enjoying every moment, was seen soaking in the

love, joy, and vibrant energy around him—an image of pure happiness.

The highlight of the afternoon was the musical performance by Harshdeep Kaur a renowned Punjabi Bollywood singer who had everyone dancing away to her songs.

It was a beautiful celebration of tradition, family bonds, and generational blessings—an occasion that will be cherished by all RCDS members who were part of this memorable day. It became a great fellowship.



TIMELESS NO-FAIL VANILLA CAKE RECIPE

An easy delicious no fail simple cake I have been making for the last 60 years.

3 cups flour, 4 level tsp baking powder, A pinch of salt, Sieve these thrice, Mix together 1/2 cup butter, 1/2 cup oil, 2 cups castor sugar, Separate 4 eggs & beat whites till soft peaks are formed. Keep aside.

Now add the yolks one by one to the butter mixture. Once mixed add flour little by little alternating with one cup room temperature milk.

Once all milk & flour is added add 2 tsp vanilla essence. Finally fold in egg whites taking care to cut & fold so as to not let air escape. Can sprinkle nuts on top if desired. Bake in two 8 inch greased & floured tins at 180 degrees C for about 30 to 35 mins. Check with a clean knife to see if done. Cool before removing from tin. Enjoy.

Rajni Dua



HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Rajinder Sehgal	06-Feb
Kirit Javali	12-Feb
Shirin Khajuria	12-Feb
Devendra Taneja	16-Feb
Som Nath Dua	20-Feb
Sanjay Khajuria	24-Feb
Shailen Verma	24-Feb



HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

Chitra & Arjun Mehta	03-Feb
Shashi & Amar Nath Goyal	07-Feb
Shruti & Nishant Kalia	07-Feb
Priyanka & Naman Agarwal	11-Feb
Raji & Rajinder Sehgal	15-Feb
Neeru & R S Atroley	15-Feb
Yoko Hirokawa & Vinay Kumar Srivastava	18-Feb
Rita & Suneel Bhasin	23-Feb
Sheetal & Manish Dhawan	24-Feb
Kaval & Shailen Verma	26-Feb
Chhaya & Alok Agarwal	27-Feb