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Zone 4, 5, 6 & 7**

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The quota conundrum

One-third quota for women in Indian legislative bodies remains a pipe dream with the additional step needed to implement the Bill, that was unanimously passed in 2023, failing to succeed in the Lok Sabha. The law cannot be implemented until a new census is completed and additional Lok Sabha seats assigned based on its results. The Opposition, concentrated in the non-Hindi belt, bitterly opposes this move, arguing it will penalise the developed states who have more effectively curbed population growth.

But let's leave the blame game aside. What merits a debate is the larger issue of gender equity and leadership positions for women in government and private bodies, including Rotary. At RI, as Rotary President-elect Olayinka Babalola said in his interview to me (Page 12), to get more women into Rotary "we have to make our environment more inclusive, support women and give them opportunities to thrive. I was on the RI Board, when for the first time in 2018, it took the decision that about 30 per cent of our leadership has to be female. And every director is supposed to make that happen." It is encouraging that Rotary's current female membership is around 27 per cent, considering women had been excluded till 1987, when the US Supreme Court intervened to secure Sylvia Whitlock's membership in a Rotary club.

If women had to fight a battle to get into a service organisation like Rotary, imagine how tough it is for them to enter Parliaments across the world. In India, the 2024 general election saw **74 women MPs** elected, four less than in the previous House. This is barely 14 per

cent of the 543-member House, and not even halfway to the one-third mark that the quota envisages.

So what's the scene like elsewhere? In the world's most powerful nation, the US, women's representation at the topmost government level has been dismal. For its first 130 years in existence, the American Senate had no female members! Until 1920, few women ran for the Senate, and until the 1990s, very few were elected, largely because women had no voting rights in many states! Today, in a House of 100, there are 26 women Senators, accounting for an impressive 26 per cent, until you consider that only 64 women in total have ever served in the US Senate throughout its entire history! And the country is yet to elect a female President!

Those occupying a pride of place in women's parliamentary representation are the Nordic countries — Sweden, Iceland, Finland, Norway and Denmark. As of 2023, these nations had 40–50 per cent women parliamentarians. Interestingly, the women in these countries largely get elected by the political parties prioritising women candidates, rather than through any legislative quota system.

Most political systems frown on women's quota saying it compromises competence, but this is hardly true. As RIPE Babalola indicates in his interview: Give women opportunities, create an enabling environment, make them comfortable... and you will find women leaders!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rasheeda Bhagat".

Rasheeda Bhagat

My VP being a former Rotaractor is deliberate **Babalola**

Rasheeda Bhagat



RI President Elect Olayinka Babalola
and VP-elect M Muruganandam.

Incoming RI President Olayinka Hakeem Babalola's charm offensive begins with the easy familiarity with which he speaks to us as he strides into the Rotary News Trust office for this interview. There is neither protocol nor formality that you'd expect from the seniormost leader in any organisation.

After surprising me with his comment "we missed you at the Editors' conference in Evanston," he wonders why I didn't attend it (March 25 and 26). I explain that I was booked on Qatar Airways "and with missiles

flying all over that region my family wouldn't allow me to take that route. I did check out the alternative routes through Europe but they were too expensive."

To his raised eyebrow and unasked question, I laugh and say, "Oh, I decided that. I felt spending ₹4 lakh on the airfare was not worth it." Babalola chuckles and says: "Ok, 'it was not worth it' are the operative words!"

Continuing the banter, I respond: "My boss MMM (RI director and RNT chair M Muruganandam) is not stingy. He would have cleared the travel, but I decided not to go!"

After a bouquet is given, a celebratory cake cut, and pleasantries exchanged with a few senior RI officers who've come to meet Babalola, as we are on a strict timeline, I politely but firmly ask everybody except MMM, his vice-president for the coming year, to leave the room. Later, during the joint interview with the two, Babalola chuckles, and tells Muruganandam: "She's a strong woman, I can see!"



My VP being a former Rotaractor is not a coincidence, it's a deliberate move. It's the first time in Rotary's history; I hope the Rotaractors are excited and recognise the opportunity this gives them.

Yinka Babalola
RI President Elect

As both the incoming Prez, a member of the Rotary Club of Trans Amadi, RID 9141, Nigeria, and his VP, from the Rotary Club of Bhel City Tiruchirapalli, RID 3000, are former Rotaractors, the main question is about how they plan to rope in more Rotaractors and Interactors into Rotary to boost its membership.

"We need to be more welcoming of Rotaractors. I am the first Rotaractor to become RI President. And we are also going to have a past Rotaractor as vice-president. That was not an accident," says Babalola.

A rare coincidence, I comment. "No, it's not a coincidence, it's a deliberate move. It's the first time in Rotary's history, and I hope the Rotaractors are excited and recognise the opportunity this gives them." Also, getting youngsters into Rotary should be viewed through not only Rotaract but the entire gamut of "our youth offerings — Interact, RYLA, Youth Exchange and Rotaract. Each of these programmes delivers different experiences to young

people. Rotaract is that point where career and professional development should happen. Currently we do not have an intentional bridge between each of those programmes; in places where Interact is thriving, Rotaract is not, so when these people leave secondary school, they don't have somewhere to go, and hence we lose them. We have not made a deliberate effort to connect our RYLA programme with the Interact programme, our Youth Exchange with the RYLA or the Rotaract programme."

For instance, many Rotary Youth Exchange students go out and spend a full year or more with Rotary families, attending Rotary events. "Naturally, they expect that once they get back home, Rotary is waiting for them. But when that doesn't happen, it's a huge opportunity lost. We are working on it, and will do something about it; we have what we call a 'Grow Rotaract plan,' which was never there before.

Adds Muruganandam, "Both of us have a clear plan on getting more youngsters into Rotary. Interactors are the prospective Rotaractors, and Rotaractors are the prospective Rotarians. We know the huge, huge potential across the world, especially this part of the world, and I am going to address this opportunity. We have a plan, and coupled with Yinka's vision, we are talking about having over 125,000 Rotaractors by 2030."

While that is the corporate goal for Rotaractors; "in this part of the world, we will work on the formula 1:2:3, which we have given to all the clubs. For every Rotarian, let us think about two Rotaractors and three Interactors. Since we have huge youth potential, we don't want to miss it. Certainly, the future of Rotary lies in the hands of youth."

Also, adds the incoming VP, "Yinka telling you that my being a Rotaractor and becoming the VP is no

It's a misconception that young people don't want to do good.

I believe they want to serve and are seeking opportunities, which Rotary provides.

Yinka Babalola

coincidence, but a deliberate tactic, is by itself a strong message to the entire Rotary world. It's a strong message he wants to give to youngsters, that being a Rotaractor can take you to the position of Rotary's highest echelon of leadership. That is another big push for Rotaract."

Incidentally, apart from being former Rotaractors, both are engineers; while Babalola has over 25 years' experience in the oil and gas sector, Muruganandam has businesses in diverse sectors such as maritime logistics, energy and HR.

On how to engage the youth and make them focus, a difficult feat, Babalola says, "I think there are misconceptions there, the first being that young people don't want to do good. I believe they want to serve and are seeking opportunities to do so. And Rotary provides those opportunities; only we have yet to communicate the value proposition clearly and have not connected with them properly. I am aware that





RIPE Babalola with Sumathi and Muruganandam.



Looking for competent women

We have to make our environment more inclusive for women.

An important focus area of RIPE Yinka Babalola at RI during his year will be increasing women's membership and enhancing their leadership positions. RI has around 27 per cent women as members, though some countries like Egypt have close to 50 per cent. "The Egyptians tell me that they are looking for men," he chuckles.

On a serious note, he adds, "To get more women into Rotary we have to make our environment more inclusive. A male-only environment and a mixed environment are two different things. First, we need to support women and give them opportunities to thrive. I was on the RI Board, when for the first time in 2018 it took the decision that about 30 per cent of our leadership has to be female. And every director is supposed to make that happen; as President-elect, I'm also trying to make that happen. For appointments I have to make, I'm looking for competent women. And when I see them, I give them the opportunity so that they can demonstrate what they are capable of doing."

We are seeking more women in leadership positions where only past district governors are eligible. "Governors are elected by the districts, and if districts don't select women as governors, they are shooting themselves in the foot, because when that opportunity comes, we will leave their men and choose women from other places."

Muruganandam intervenes to say that this is already happening where Babalola has to make the



From L: TRF Trustee Ijeoma Pearl Okoro, RI President Francesco Arezzo's wife Anna Maria, RIPE Babalola's wife Precy Peacockba, and Theresa, wife of RID 9141 DG Anthony Woghiren.

appointments. "For your information, he has appointed a woman — RI director Harriette Verwey from the Netherlands as the chair of RI's executive committee for 2026–27, and his admin chair is another woman... RI director Wyn Spiller from the US."

Babalola reiterates that "this is a very conscious choice. Not only for committee chairs, but also committee members, I always say: I want to see the gender balance. Not only I, but Rotary as an organisation, has been making a special effort to put women in leadership positions at different levels since we took that decision on the Board."

But, he warns, "that's not going to be enough. This same thing needs to

be done at the district, and more so, at the club levels. Because the Rotary club is where everything happens.

If our clubs are not supportive of women, particularly women of child-bearing age, nothing much can change."

To my puzzled look, he says, "Yes, young women, women of child-bearing age because at that point they are dealing with many things. I love telling stories and please allow me to tell this one."

He then relates a gripping story about a club meeting that he had attended. "I just went to a random club meeting and a lady walked in with two children. One of them was about 5, and the other was 18-month-old. The younger one was sleeping in

the stroller... sleeping beautifully. The 5-year-old was simply running about the meeting room."

He was quietly observing the Rotarians' response to this; "they did not react badly. But I've seen situations where Rotarians have said in such cases: 'Can you take this child out? This is not a play place. This is serious business. Can't you keep this child somewhere else when you come to a meeting?'"

With such an attitude, Babalola continues, women would certainly keep far away from Rotary. "Even if they join Rotary, and then get pregnant, they leave Rotary. And if the club is unlucky, they may not come back, unless they are really passionate about Rotary."

The questions which this experience raised in his mind included what if there was a speaker that day. That particular day, the club didn't have a speaker. What if the 18-month-old had got up from his sleep and started crying? How would the members have responded? The most interesting part of the story is that "after that day's meeting, the members took a good decision. They asked the hotel to give them access to the small room adjacent to the meeting hall, requested the men to bring some toys for the children, and the women decided that during every meeting, one of them will serve as a nanny to all the children. And they told the women to bring their children to the club meetings. Thus, more women started coming to the meetings."

The happy ending to this particular story is that "after a while, the men started enrolling for the nanny service, as they wanted to play with children, not just provide their toys. Because some of the older men who no longer have children at home, love the opportunity to play. That is the

kind of club women would like to join... where you know that your family will not suffer and you will not be overstressed. In fact, such clubs might be a motivation for women to come to Rotary, thinking: 'At least today I will have somebody looking after my children and I can have some peace!'"

Muruganandam endorses the push for more leadership roles for women, and says, "I've found that whenever we give opportunities to our women members, they outshine... they do an amazing job. They are committed, focused, hardworking."

His President nods in agreement, and says, "Somebody said if you want a job done, give it to a woman. I say this cautiously, but they show very little distraction compared to men!"

Rotaractors are doing a lot of good stuff in many parts of our world. In fact, where Rotary is thriving, Rotaract is also thriving. Where Rotaract is not thriving, Rotary is not thriving. I have said that 1,001 times."

So, "we have to provide that opportunity for them to flourish and thrive. Internationally, with the *Elevate Rotaract* enactment, "we are saying a few things; we ask our regional coordinators to appoint Rotaractors into their various committees. We are beginning to have Rotaractors as assistant coordinators and currently have a Rotaractor as an assistant public image coordinator in Zone 5. This has to be replicated everywhere, at the district and club levels. We need district governors to do this and engage Rotaractors in a meaningful way and one that recognises their specific skills. It's not inviting Rotaractors to come and arrange the room. That's not what young professionals should



RIPE Babalola and VP-elect Muruganandam cutting a cake at the RNT office in Chennai.

At a glance

RIPE Babalola's response to a rapid round of questions:

Music: Afrobeat, Afropop. I love those.

Religion: I am a man of faith. I'm not very, very religious, but I believe in powers that are beyond me.

Favourite food: Beans and plantains. I can eat plantains three times a day because there are ten different ways of making plantain in our region.

Do you cook: I cook very well... to the annoyance of my wife!

Reading: Books on Philosophy. I like serious things like that... sometimes esoteric stuff that looks deeper than just what you see around you.

Favourite book: I've been reading *Mindstuck*, written by Michael McQueen, a Rotarian from Australia, where he talks about changing mindsets. It's fascinating.

Relax; movies or music: No, I don't watch movies, I don't have time! When I need to relax, when I'm tense, I burn incense. I like fragrance, as fragrance calms me. I get lots of incense from Arabia. I burn incense if I'm indoor, to calm me down. If I'm outdoor, I walk... forest walk for the fragrance from the plants.



Fitness: For fitness, I play golf, I swim when I have the opportunity. But because of my recent travels, all this is becoming a challenge so I sometimes just walk.

Travel, favourite holiday destination: I don't have any, the reason being that there are places I go and I tell myself: I'm going to come back here, but never find time to do so. But there are places where I felt at peace. For example, when I was in Nepal, somewhere close to Mount Everest, I was at peace. Dubrovnik in Croatia is beautiful; here I was sitting on a chair at one of the sea areas or the bays. And I slept off; it was so peaceful.

Dream for Rotary: Next year, I want to restore the emotional connection of Rotarians to Rotary. I've been asking Rotarians to connect to why they need to be in this organisation. If it's only transactional — you give something and you get back something... Take for eg a nanny, whose job is to take care of children; if in that group one is her own child, will you notice? Sure, you will. So the emotional connection makes a difference and I want to restore that. To many of us in Rotary, people ask: What is it about Rotary that you devote so much time, money, everything to it. Well, it's that emotional connection.

be doing. We have to find and leverage their skills.”

Muruganandam adds another dimension when he says, “What is more important for Rotarians to know is how visible are we to the Rotaractors. We have a huge story to tell but we have to tell it to them in a proper way, so that they can hear it. We have to tell that story better and let them know that here we have on offer a network, leadership and service, which is open to them. Then they will certainly get it... the kind of opportunities that are open to them in our organisation.”

Nodding in agreement Babalola reiterates the importance of creating a welcoming atmosphere for Rotaractors to join Rotary. He says that after 10 years in Rotaract, all the Rotarians in his city knew him. “When I was going to join Rotary as a Rotaractor, I walked into my Rotary club meeting. And the club president looked at me and

Rotarians should be visible to Rotaractors, and tell the huge story of Rotary to them in a way they can hear it, and know we have on offer a network, leadership and service.

M Muruganandam
Vice President-elect

said, ‘Rotaractor, what are you doing here today?’ And I said: ‘Mr President, I have come to join Rotary.’ The whole room turned and looked at me. ‘What? What audacity? What is wrong with this young man? Is that how you join Rotary? Look at that. Don’t you know Rotary is by invitation?’ I’ve told that story many times.”

The young man stood his ground and said calmly: “I never knew that a child needed an invitation to come into his parents’ home. But a Rotarian spoke up that day for me, and that’s how I became a Rotarian. We need to be open and demonstrate to the young people that Rotary is a place where they belong and are valued.”

This incident happened in 1993; have things changed now, I quiz both the leaders. While Muruganandam says, “Yes, drastically,” the incoming president says, “No. MMM is talking about what he is seeing here (in our region). Yes, I agree that Rotary has changed a lot since then. But are all Rotary clubs very open and welcoming? The answer is no.”

Did he mean places in Europe or the US? “Not anywhere. Not even in all Rotary clubs in India. Not in Nigeria. But not all Rotary clubs are like that. There are Rotary clubs that have accepted Rotaractors. Take for example MMM! He was a Rotaractor and is now a Rotarian; there is no way he would have come so far if his Rotary club would not have wanted Rotaractors. The same thing is true of my club, and a few clubs like that. But there are still Rotary clubs which are not as open, and not just for Rotaractors, for young people entirely.”

We next come to the question of how closely the President and the VP work, and the need for a good rapport. “Very closely,” Babalola smiles. “Absolutely... we need to have a good rapport. The body chemistry is important, and that is why it is the President



The spouse's role



RIPE Babalola (centre) with his wife Precy.

Yinka Babalola's wife Precy is a member of RC Port Harcourt Passport, and along with her husband, is an AKS member. He first met her at a Rotaract club meet. So, what kind of role did she play in his leadership journey in Rotary, I ask him. "When I addressed the spouses' session at the International Assembly, I told them that when I had attended the IA as governor, I assumed that as my spouse was a Rotaractor, the first female president of a Rotaract club and married to a Rotarian, she knows everything about Rotary. So life should be easy for her."

But a past district governor in Nigeria warned him on his

return that nothing ever prepares a spouse for a Rotarian's year as governor. "The truth of the matter is this... Rotary leadership is very demanding, and you have only 24 hours in a day, anywhere in the world. If you are going to deliver on the demands of leadership, somebody else needs to do some of the things you used to do. That naturally falls on your spouse. If you have a spouse like I had, who understands what the deliverables are, life is easier. And please note Rasheeda, I said life is easier; I didn't say life is easy!"

He adds that "she's a past president of a club, a past assistant governor, and I'm very grateful that Precy is my spouse."

Whenever we give opportunities to our women members, they outshine... they do an amazing job. They are committed, focused, hardworking.

M Muruganandam

who proposes who the VP should be. The bylaws state simply that the VP will do the duties as assigned by the President or when the President is not available. In case that the President becomes incapacitated, the VP goes in as President." He then chuckles and adds: "But I can tell you this VP will have a lot of work to do."

On the qualities that led Babalola to choose Muruganandam as his VP, and the latter's strengths, he says, "Courage. Tenacity. Also, we both share something else; a passion to grow Rotary. I have a record of growing Rotary in my part of the world. He has a record of supporting the growth of Rotary in his part of the world. And in 2026–27, we have a very ambitious goal of growing Rotary across the world. My desire, my aspiration, my goal is that for the first time in many years, Rotary's membership should grow. So, he has a lot of work to do!"

When I comment that at 52, his VP certainly has the energy to achieve this goal, Babalola says, "More than energy, he has the passion. Because you may have energy and not have passion. Both are required. He has the energy, he has the passion, and I don't know if he realises it himself... I see him as somebody who is driven. When I say this is what we need to do, he



understands and I don't need to talk too much about it!"

When I apologise and tell him that despite time running out, I had to ask him one last question on the possibility of Rotary emerging as a peacebuilder in our fractured world,

Imagine our Peace Fellows or Rotarians working in the White House. And in Iran and Israel, or Qatar and other places involved in negotiation. Even when governments don't trust each other, the Rotarians will.

Yinka Babalola

particularly in the background of the US-Israel attacks on Iran, Babalola smiles and says, "Oh, don't mind him (MMM, who has signalled to me the time is over and they have to leave!), after all, you are talking to his President!"

Coming to the question, he says many people have asked him "whether Rotary could play the role of mediator. But as an organisation, I don't think we are built for that. But as a people, we can do much more, because at every side of a conflict, there are Rotarians. And if our Rotarians have the capacity to build peace, which is what Rotary as an organisation is doing, then perhaps things may not go as bad. We can fix things before they get to the point of escalation and become a war."

Giving the example of what is happening in the Middle East, he says, "Just imagine that you have our Peace Fellows, or Rotarians, working in the White House. Imagine you have them on the Iranian side, or in Israel, or Qatar and others who are involved in the negotiation. Then, even when the governments don't trust each other, we will have people who trust one another because of

their membership in Rotary, and they can come to an agreement more easily."

The incoming President believes that in conflict situations Rotary needs to do two things; "leverage our Peace Fellows, and I'm happy that we have our Peace Centers and many of our Peace Fellows are undertaking social change initiatives. They are doing a lot of work, and all of it is related to peace. I hope that as Rotarians we think about the pillars of positive peace and ask ourselves what can we do to engender peace and create lasting impact. Can we influence our governments to take policy decisions that enhance or strengthen the pillars of peace? These are the ways in which we can influence the emergence of a more peaceful world."

He feels much more can be done; "I believe we are not doing enough; we need to do more. And, I must say that Rotary must never take sides in any conflict, because we will always have Rotarians on both sides."

Pictures by Rasheeda Bhagat and special arrangement

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Rotaractors must do GG projects: RIPE

V Muthukumar

The event, 'Lights on Rotaract — a fireside chat with RIPE Yinka Babalola' put the spotlight on issues such as the smooth transition from being a Rotaractor to an active Rotarian, global grant projects for Rotaract clubs, and what 'measurable impact' Rotaractors can bring to Rotary across the world. The event was led by PDRR Karthik Kittu, past member,

RI Rotaract-Interact Committee and past president of RC Bangalore Southwest.

Addressing around 30 Rotaractors from RIDs 3191 and 3192, on the sidelines of the two-day Joint PELS for incoming Rotary club presidents, Babalola said, "now you should take up GG projects, but ensure that you match the eligibility criteria and the TRF guidelines. If Rotaract

clubs don't meet these conditions, they can either combine with their sponsor or other Rotary clubs to qualify for the GG." If Rotaractors can come up with "a good, sustainable and impactful project, the district governors can allocate DDFs (district funds) too," he said.

When RSAMDIO general secretary Kiran SHS asked, "how to reposition Rotaract

globally as an equal partner of Rotary," he replied, "many Rotaractors are already in regional RI Boards, and their numbers will continue to increase in the coming years." (RID 3192 DRR Janice Philip is assistant Rotary Public Image Coordinator of Zone-7)

Welcoming Babalola, the first Rotaractor-turned-Rotary President Elect, PDRR Kittu, flagged off three issues needing clarity and direction from the RI leadership. First, Rotaractors have scale, energy and execution skills, "but we need a structured pathway for transition into Rotary."



RIPE Olayinka Babalola at an interactive session with Rotaractors in Bengaluru. From L (seated): RSAMDIO past president PDRR Karthik Kittu, RID 3191 DGE Anil Gupta, RI Director K P Nagesh and RID 3192 DGE Ravishankar Dakoju.



PDRR Kittu in a chat with RIPE Babalola, RI Director Nagesh, DGEs Anil Gupta and Dakoju.

Second, Rotaract is ready for TRF-giving, and collaborate with Rotary in all possible manner; and third, “we also want to implement our RI directors’ 1:2:3 formula to boost Rotary’s growth in India.”

Replying to the issues raised, Babalola said, “Rotarians are inspired by the Rotaract clubs. At the same time, Rotarians should act as mentors for a smooth transition of the youth in the Rotary world.” The grooming of future Rotarians starts very early from being an Interactor, then taking part in RYLAs, joining a Rotaract club, and then moving onto Rotary Youth Exchange etc. He urged the Rotaractors to access the

Learning Centre on *My Rotary* portal for regular updates on the latest developments.

Mindset change

RI director K P Nagesh said, “we need a change of mindset from both Rotarians and Rotaractors to meet our Rotary objectives.” Rotaractors must work in tandem with their sponsoring clubs and Rotarians to build a strong Rotary world in the next five years, he said.

RID 3192 DGE Ravishankar Dakoju said India has the largest youth population in the world, “nearly 70 per cent of them are below 35. We are ready to partner with the Rotaract clubs, and get inspired by them.” DGE Anil

Gupta, RID 3191, expressed his readiness to loosen the DDF purse for Rotaract projects, “if they are viable and sustainable meeting the district norms. We can together apply for a GG if a Rotaract project falls under the TRF framework.”

RIPE Babalola launched *Yuva Udaan*, a web-based App platform, for grooming young Rotaractors into Rotary leaders across RI districts in India. DRRs Karthik Chikmath (3191), Janice Philip (3192), DRREs Anirudh Kulkarni (3191), Sanjay R (3192), and PDRR Naveen Senna (3190) were present at the chat session with the incoming President.

First AKS Rotaract clubs

For the Rotary year 2026–27, all Rotaract clubs across India will mobilise \$125,000 for TRF-giving. “DGE Dakoju has assured that he will match it up with another \$125,000, so that Indian Rotaract clubs will get AKS membership by the time of the 2027 RI Convention,” Kittu told *Rotary News*.

He has prepared a draft note titled, ‘How Rotaractors can become early contributors to TRF. Not by obligation, but by belief’ for circulation among Rotary clubs, GMLs and Rotary magazines across the world.

Pictures by Muthukumaran

A Chepauk roar, inside a room

Kiran Zehra

When RIPE Olayinka Babalola walked into the auditorium of MGR Janakiammal College in Chennai, the Rotaractors of RID 3234 were up on their feet, waving, clapping and whistling. “Babalola in the auditorium is no less than Dhoni in Chepauk Stadium,” said IPDRR Sasi Kumar and it did not feel like an exaggeration. “This is because he didn’t arrive as a distant global leader. He is one of us,” he added.

“It is a pleasure to be here, and I thank Vice President (elect) MMM (M Muruganandam) for organising this opportunity for you to meet me, a fellow Rotaractor. There is a saying in my country: if you have the right teacher, you cannot go wrong. You have MMM, someone who has been a Rotaractor himself, and with a mentor like that, you are on the right path,” noted Babalola.

Appreciating the work Rotaract is doing in the district, he said,

“I’ve seen your project videos, and your contribution to The Rotary Foundation is remarkable.” DRR Sathish Kumar later told *Rotary News* that the district Rotaractors have contributed \$86,389 by April 17 to TRF. Shifting the focus to what lies ahead, the RIPE asked, “Rotary in India is growing. Rotaract is growing. But is it growing enough?”

He pointed out that India currently has around 49,000 Rotaractors and accounts for nearly 30 per cent of the global Rotaract strength, “an achievement many would celebrate. But I am not impressed.” Referring to India’s population of 1.4 billion, he said, “even a small fraction of Indians in the 18–30 age group should translate into at least 2 lakh Rotaractors.”



IPDRR Sasikumar takes a selfie with RIPE Olayinka Babalola and RI Director M Muruganandam.

Answering a question from a Rotaractor: “Is Rotary really listening to its youth?” RI Director Muruganandam replied: “The scenario today is not like how it was 20 years ago. Today, Rotaractors are not just participants, they are being integrated into leadership. The system itself is evolving. The appointment of a Rotaractor as an Assistant Rotary Public Image Coordinator (RID 3192 DRR Janice Philip), a first in Rotary history, isn’t symbolic, it is structural. We know the power of youth... we would like to really cultivate, motivate and invite more Rotaractors into the Rotary world.”

Babalola added, “Rotary is beginning to listen. Since *Elevate Rotaract*, there has been a deliberate push to bring Rotaractors into Rotary’s decision-making spaces across levels, across geographies. Not as future leaders, but as present ones.”



RIPE Babalola and RID Muruganandam with RID 3233 DRR M Dineshkumar and Rotaract leaders at the Chennai Membership Summit.

*We know the power of youth...
we would like to really cultivate,
motivate and invite more
Rotaractors into the Rotary world.*

M Muruganandam
RI Director

Giving them a glimpse of his “interesting interview with the *Rotary News* Editor,” he said, “I have told your editor I want to hear more Rotaract stories. Because listening, in the end, isn’t about policies or positions. It’s about whose stories are told and who gets to tell them.”

DG Vinod Saraogi, PDG J Sridhar, DRR Sathish Kumar and DRRE Vignesh Chandran were present at the event. ■



From L: RID M Muruganandam, RIPE Babalola, PDG J Sridhar, DG Vinod Saraogi, DRR Sathish Kumar, DRRE Vignesh Chandran and PDRR Sasi Kumar.

Rotaract District 3234 raises \$88,724 for TRF

Jaishree

Rotaract District 3234 has contributed \$88,724 to TRF so far this Rotary year — a figure that DRR S Sathish Kumar describes as “the highest contribution by any Rotaract district worldwide.” RIPE Olayinka Babalola, during his recent visit to Chennai, appreciated the district team for the achievement.

At the start of the year, Sathish and his district council introduced the 1:2:3 concept. “Borrowing inspiration from RI directors M Muruganandam and

KP Nagesh, we adapted it for Rotaract,” he explains. “We encouraged every Rotaractor to bring in one new member, donate blood twice a year, and contribute \$3 to the Foundation. We’re not asking a few people to give more; we want more people to give.”

The approach paid off. Contributions grew steadily as participation widened across clubs. The district also redefined its culture of recognition. “Instead of spending on conventional gifts, we create handmade tokens — thoughtful, low-cost mementoes — and

channel the savings to TRF,” says Sathish. He extended this philosophy to his official visits as DRR. “I requested clubs not to spend on felicitation or gifts. Even a small amount of \$1 or \$2, when redirected, makes a meaningful contribution.” The district council plans to recognise the highest contributors at the end of the year.

A significant boost came from the Rotaract Club of Chennai Legends, an Annets-based club, which alone contributed over \$60,000. “They executed their plan exceptionally well, with

DRREs at the Rotaract Zone Institute held in Chennai.





DG Vinod Saraogi (third from L) and DRR S Sathish Kumar (fourth from L) at the vocational training centre in SIVET College, Chennai.

strong Major Donor participation,” he notes.

Beyond fundraising, RID 3234 has focused on sustainable impact. A notable initiative is the establishment of a vocational training centre at SIVET College in Chennai. Currently offering tailoring courses, the centre is set to expand into computer training, beautician courses, car driving, and other industry-relevant skills. Equipped with 10 sewing machines, supported by Rotaract clubs, the Rotary Clubs

of Gummidipoondi Industrial City and Chennai Harmony, and the CSR arm of KTV Health Food, the centre also employs dedicated training staff through the district Rotaract council.

In a first-of-its-kind effort, Rotaract clubs across the district were encouraged to conduct at least one RYLA for Rotaractors. The response has been remarkable: 43 programmes have already impacted over 1,800 participants. “Many aspire leadership roles but lack the necessary skills.

Through RYLA, we are grooming every Rotaractor to lead. The expert-led sessions are making a tangible difference,” says Sathish, noting that several participants have returned for multiple sessions.

The district has also strengthened its connect with Interact clubs by involving them in service projects and inviting select Interactors as observers to the district assembly. “This gives them a preview of Rotaract and helps them transit seamlessly into the movement,” he explains.

After nine years, RID 3234 hosted the Rotaract Zone Institute in Chennai from March 5–8, drawing District Rotaract Representative-elects from 33 of 35 districts across South Asia (Zones 4, 5, 6 and 7). RI Director M Muruganandam was present at the event. “For the first time, we introduced structured modules and workbook-based learning for incoming leaders. From club chartering to TRF fundraising and governance protocols, the programme was designed to equip leaders for meaningful and responsible service.” Past District Governors J Sridhar and NS Saravanan served as mentors for the intensive three-day workshop. ■



Rotaract participants at a RYLA.

A Rotaract corporate project like Polio?

V Muthukumar



RI Director KP Nagesh being honoured by host DRR Dineshkumar M at Rotasia 2026 in Chennai. Also seen are (from L) PDRR Prasanna Rajagopalan, RSAMDIO past president Karthik Kittu, event secretary DRRE Harivignesh M, Young Achiever Awardee Khaalid Ahamed, event chair PDRR Girish E and District Rotaract secretary Gokulakrishnan S.

One of the takeaways from the four-day Rotasia 2026, the 27th edition of South Asia Rotaract Conference, held at Esthell Village Resort near Mahabalipuram, a heritage town near Chennai, was the idea of ‘Why can’t Rotaract have one corporate project like Polio for Rotary across the world’ so that it galvanises Rotaractors on a single platform.

Quite happy after successfully hosting the South Asia conclave that saw the presence of 715 Rotaractors from across 33 RI districts from India, Sri Lanka, Dubai and Australia, RID 3233 DRR Dineshkumar M says the multiple sessions and brainstorming events “created a bond of friendship among Rotaractors in this part of the world.” The speakers deliberated on the core purpose of

Rotaract, “that is leadership development and service projects which were refined at the event.” But the main highlight was that “we have kicked off a new thought process on finding a corporate plank for global Rotaract, like say, Polio for Rotarians across the world,” says Dineshkumar.

Addressing the youth brigade of Rotary, RID 3192 DGE Ravishankar Dakoju, as chief guest, recalled his transformation from “a troubled sickly youth into a successful entrepreneur who creates wealth only to be shared with others as a sort of giving back to society.”

His donation of ₹500 crore to TRF was to honour his father’s legacy of selflessness who believed that children should be raised with values and a sense of gratitude towards Nature. Dakoju apologised to the youth for the

“environmental abuse of the planet by my peers and you are the true leaders of minimalism and sustainability.” He pledged to match the Rotaract districts’ fundraising efforts, dollar-for-dollar, thus expressing his strong commitment towards a greener and more equitable future.

On the second day of Rotasia, RI director KP Nagesh presented a ‘visionary roadmap’ for the future of Rotary’s youth wing, stating that “Rotaractors are the vital pulse of our movement.” With a perfect blend of energy and knowledge, Rotaract served as the primary source of global momentum for Rotary, he said. Nagesh dwelt on the 1:2:3 model of growth, a strategy jointly developed with his partner RI director M Muruganandam.

The session with Nagesh was moderated by PDRR Karthik Kittu from RID 3191.

Speakers delivered inspiring talks at the conclave, reinforcing Rotary's motto of *Service above Self*. Maatram Trust founder Sujith Kumar called upon the youth not to wait for the right time to do social service. "Any moment is good to reach out to the underprivileged students and children," he said. Dr Kannan Girish, psychiatrist and CEO, Livelife Education, in his talk on 'Youth wellness' said, "our attitude and mindset are the key factors that will help us to progress in life." He focused on emotional intelligence, and how to manage it to climb the ladder of success in life.

The Young Achiever Award was given to social worker Khaalid Ahamed, founder, Uravugal Trust that extends funeral rites to unclaimed bodies over the last 10 years in and around Chennai. Another Example to Youth Award was presented to Nirmal Raghavan, founder, Mega Foundation that had restored around 300 water bodies (lakes, ponds etc) in India, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Kenya.

My Idea for Rotaract

As many as five Rotaractors from across the country presented their views and ideas on a 'single mega project that global Rotaract can focus' on in the next few decades, like the way polio eradication has been for Rotary since the early 1980s.



From L: Rotasia chair PDRR Girish, secretary DRRE Harivignesh, Trustee Elect PRID AS Venkatesh and host DRR Dineshkumar.

They dealt with issues such as water body restoration, tree plantation and blood donation drive. Chaired by Rtr Varinder Singh Sahney, the session brought out the creative thoughts of Rotaractors to the large gathering.

One of the highlights of Rotasia meet was the Firewalk event moderated by Hafiz Khan, founder-CEO, Communitree, in which he talked about "the various phobias of life that hinder our progress, and demonstrated how to clear these 'mind obstacles' through a live firewalk on coal-fired pathway that brought whoops of excitement for Rotaractors," recalls the DRR.

Presiding over the valedictory session, TRF trustee-elect AS Venkatesh said RID

3233 was "the global powerhouse of Rotaract with the largest membership of 5,711 Rotaractors in 66 clubs. Your *josh* (energy) and passion are the ones that inspire the senior leadership of Rotary." He urged them to be ambassadors of peace and service.

DRRE Harivignesh was formally inducted as the incoming leader of RID 3233 for Rotary year 2026–27, and he unveiled his annual theme, VIBE — vision, innovate, believe and evolve. DG D Devendran and DGE Shriram Duvvuri praised the Rotaract district for becoming the largest in the world. "Transform the friendship and ideas generated in Rotasia into real-world impact," said Duvvuri. A delegate dashboard, along with a live website, ensured hassle-free registration and engagement of all the participants.

After the bifurcation of RID 3232 into RIDs 3233 and 3234 two years ago, this was the first time Rotasia was conducted in Chennai, which has hosted their premier Rotaract event three times earlier. "We have blended a number of experiential activities with high-tech facilities, thus proving our Rotaract district is a trendsetter for the global youth movement. The South Asia conclave created a huge brand visibility for us across the world," adds DRR Dineshkumar. While PDRR Girish E was the event chair, DRRE Harivignesh was the event secretary. ■



From L: Rotasia secretary DRRE Harivignesh, RID 3233 Rotaract Committee Chair CM Kishore, DG D Devendran, host DRR Dineshkumar and RID 3192 DGE Ravishankar Dakoju.

Building healthier, safer communities in RID 3182

Jaishree

Jagruta, a year-long service initiative of the Rotaract Club of Muniyal Group of Institutions, RI District 3182, is driving six impactful programmes centred on awareness, empowerment and community well-being. The project reaches schoolchildren and underserved communities across coastal Karnataka through consistent engagement.

A key focus area is mental health awareness in schools, delivered under expert guidance. At Parakala High School, Dr Rashmi Kalkura, assistant professor, Department of Kayachikitsa, Muniyal Ayurveda College, conducted an interactive session for around 90 students aged 14–15. Addressing the often-unspoken pressures of academics and adolescence, the session encouraged open conversations

on stress, emotions and coping strategies. “Students today are navigating intense expectations. Equipping them early with tools to manage stress can shape healthier, more confident individuals,” says club president Shivani Yeotikar, a final-year medical student at the Muniyal Institute of Ayurveda Medical Sciences, Manipal.

Physical health awareness forms another pillar of *Jagruta*. In Vidyanagar, Patla, Dr Vidya Ballal, an ayurvedic physician, led a session for 70 students covering hygiene, nutrition and preventive healthcare. The programme also addresses menstrual hygiene and common concerns such as anaemia, eye issues and dental health. Together, these health initiatives benefit around 80 children every month.

The club has also been actively improving learning environments in nearby rural schools by identifying and addressing minor infrastructure needs. At a government school in Patla, a vibrant wall painting inspired by traditional Warli art has transformed the campus, creating a more engaging and culturally rooted space for students. On the same day, a plantation drive in Vidyanagar saw 25 saplings planted, reinforcing environmental responsibility — an integral part of *Project Jagruta*.

Environmental action extends to the coast, where members regularly undertake waterbody rejuvenation and beach clean-up drives. Recent efforts at Malpe and Udupi beaches highlight the club’s commitment to preserving local ecosystems.

Members of RAC Muniyal Group of Institutions at the Malpe beach after a coastal clean-up drive.





A sapling plantation drive.

Community outreach remains a monthly priority. Rotaractors frequently visit anganwadis and children’s homes to engage with young inmates. During a recent visit to an anganwadi in Patla, around 40 children participated in interactive sessions on health and hygiene. Through

games, creative activities, and the distribution of drawing books and crayons, important messages were conveyed in a joyful and relatable manner.

The Rotaract Club of Brahmavara has been championing road safety awareness. Their programme, conducted across multiple schools,

has reached nearly 200 students. Led by an RTO officer and supported by project in-charge Shrihari Kerekoige, the sessions covered traffic rules, road signs and responsible behaviour.

In February, DRR MR Nivas, along with the district Rotaract committee, called for a district-wide CPR and

first aid training initiative. “We aimed to reach at least 3,182 people, and we’ve surpassed that goal,” he says. Rotaract clubs, particularly those in medical institutions, collaborated to train both Rotaractors and the wider public in emergency response, with a special focus on public transport drivers. ■



A Warli art wall painting done by Rotaractors at a government school.

Rotary's eighth Peace Center inaugurated at Symbiosis, Pune

Rasheeda Bhagat



TRF Trustee Chair Holger Knaack and Prof S B Mujumdar, founder and chancellor of Symbiosis International University, Pune, light a lamp as (from L) RI President Francesco Arezzo, his wife Anna, Suzanne Knaack, Vidya Yeravdekar, the University's Pro-chancellor and Trustee Bharat Pandya look on.

Most of the conflicts that our world is facing today are the result of fear and failure to understand the other side. Many people speak about “peace as if it is only the absence of war, but peace is much more than that. Peace is the presence of trust, understanding, justice. It is the daily work of building bridges and helping people live free from poverty, hate and prejudice, because these things create conflict and destroy peace,” said RI President Francesco Arezzo. He was participating in the inaugural ceremony of Rotary’s eighth Peace Center in the world, and first in South Asia. This centre is located at the sprawling 400-plus acre campus of the Symbiosis International University (SIU) in Pune, Maharashtra.

Peace cannot exist without freedom, and respect for the dignity of every human being. But we live in a strange time, when people have more freedom than ever, but too often this freedom “serves only their ego. We forget our duty to care for humanity. We live close to other people, but we feel far from them and are lonely in a crowd. When you are lonely in a crowd, fear grows. In many parts of the world, people fear an uncertain future. They fear losing their identity and fear strangers who have been shown as evil and dangerous.”

The saddest part, Arezzo said, was that both sides related “the same

What is on offer

The newest Rotary Peace Center established at the Symbiosis International University in Pune will provide a fully-funded one-year PG diploma programme in Peace and Development Studies to its scholars. Rotary’s peace programmes are designed and targeted at mid-career professionals working in various fields in government and private sectors that deal with welfare, development, law and order, judicial systems, and so on. The Pune centre will give an oppor-

tunity to professionals within Asia and Asian communities.

Applications for this PG diploma programme at SIU will be open from Feb 1 – May 15, 2026. Visit rotary.org/peace-fellowships to learn more about the Rotary Peace Fellowship programmes and how to apply.

Currently, Rotary awards up to 170 fully-funded fellowships for dedicated peace and development leaders from around the world to study at one of its eight peace centres across the world.

story” — fear on both sides became a weapon. But fear cannot be defeated by running away, or aggression. Giving the example of a child who fears darkness or hearing sounds at night, he said these fears are resolved not through armed guards but information. Knowledge was the first step toward peace. And this was the purpose of a Rotary Peace Center, “which helps to replace fear with understanding and turn confusion into clarity. It teaches skills that reduce conflict and support cooperation, trains people to listen well, build trust and solve disputes without violence.”

Arezzo said that while good intentions did matter, they weren’t enough,

and peace didn’t happen by accident. “Peacebuilding needs skill, practice and people who are trained to work in hard places, with calm minds and steady hearts. A peace centre also builds a strong network. People trained at this peace centre will not be alone. They will stay connected to others who do this work in many countries and many cultures. Peace is fragile when it is carried by one person, but peace is stronger when it is carried together.”

That is why Rotary invests in peace centres, in order to “build peace, not only for today, but for the long future.” His theme for this year — *Unite for Good* — was more than a



President Arezzo and Anna, Trustee Chair Knaack and Suzanne. PRID Mahesh Kotbagi, DG Santosh and Tanuuja Marathe with Rotaractors.

slogan. “It is a challenge to build peace in ourselves, in our communities and in our world. To unite for good doesn’t mean we are all the same, or we erase our differences. It means we refuse to treat differences as enemies, and we choose to work together, even, and particularly, when it is not easy.”

The RI President said that while a university is “a place of learning, it is also a place of listening. It is a place that makes room for questions, debate and truth, because peace needs that kind of space. Today, we opened this new Rotary Peace Center, and we renew a simple belief that peace can be built on purpose, not quickly, not perfectly, but on purpose, through learning, training and partnership.”

Rotary was an organisation built on friendship, knowing, understanding and caring about other people. “When we build friendships across borders, we build peace.” Peacebuilding also required self-reflection; if we want peace in the world, “we must face our fear of the other. The other person, the

other culture, the other way of life. We must resist the arms of modern life that makes us isolated and closed.”

Peace came from small steps, “taken together toward mutual respect and understanding. Peace was essentially knowledge, awareness of our duties and wise defence of our rights and the rights of others. It was a shared path, which could be long and hard, but it could be walked, if we walk it together.”

By inaugurating its eighth Peace Center, Rotary was opening “a door to learning, partnership and service. It was building a lasting place where peace is not only “discussed, but learned, practised, and carried into the world.”

Addressing the meet, TRF Trustee Chair Holger Knaack said Rotary Peace Centers were a source of pride for Rotary and an investment into the future “built on justice, understanding, and problem solving.”

TRF, supported by its generous donors, existed to help Rotarians “turn compassion into action, and this centre

would be a new home for peacebuilding in Pune and in the heart and careers of the people who will study and grow here.” The Foundation enabled Rotarians to turn their “best ideas into reality, at scale, with strong stewardship and with long-lasting impact. We invest in projects and programmes that protect health, expand opportunities, and strengthen communities. And we do this because we believe that dignity and hope should not be a rare privilege, but normal conditions for human life.”

That was also why peace was a cornerstone of Rotary’s mission. Its peace centres have trained more than **1,800 peace fellows** to become effective catalysts for peace through careers in government, education, and international organisations like UN agencies. “This is why today is so meaningful in these difficult times. A new peace centre means a new source of knowledge, a new network of trained leaders, a new place where Rotary’s values can take roots in the minds and action of people who will carry them beyond this campus.”

Knaack said that a Rotary Peace Center was only as strong as the insti-



Trustee Chair Knaack, Suzanne, RI President Arezzo, Anna, Trustee Pandya and Madhavi, PRIDs Mahesh Kotbagi and Aniruddha Roychowdhury, DG Santosh Marathe, PDG Manjoo Phadke with Prof Mujumdar and Vidya Yeravdekar after installing a Peace Pole at the University.



From L: TRF Trustee Pandya, Prof Mujumdar, Trustee Chair Knaack, RI President Arezzo and Vidya Yeravdekar.

tutions that host it. “That is why we are so grateful to Symbiosis University, which has a clear commitment to education, service and building understanding across communities. These values are so close to Rotary values which are built on friendship and service, just as Symbiosis is built on learning and connections. Together we are a very powerful combination. We do not see this as a simple agreement. We see this as a long partnership, one that we will value, protect and grow.”

The Trustee Chair also thanked the TRF trustee from India, Bharat Pandya, for connecting Rotary with Symbiosis and helping identify such a strong partner. Such partnerships don’t happen by luck and require a lot of work. He also thanked members of RI Districts 3141 and 3131 for taking the responsibility of being hosts to the peace fellows who will come to this centre. Hosting, he said, was not just about logistics; it is making them welcome and supporting them. It is making sure that people who arrive from many places feel they belong here and

that they can succeed here. “Your role will help shape their experience and it will help shape the future of this peace centre. And TRF will stand with you in this work.”

He assured the aspirants that behind every peace fellow is a network of support, faculty, mentors, Rotarians, community partners and donors. “That is how Rotary works. We build a system of support around the world and people who want to serve.”

Thanking the generous donors of TRF, who made such Peace Centers possible, Knaack promised the donors that their gifts will be used “with care, transparency and with real impact. When we say we are committed to peace, we also mean we are committed to the hard work that peace requires over many, many years. This is just a beginning... of new learning and friendship for new peacebuilders who will go into the world better prepared to reduce conflicts and build trust.”

The Trustee Chair added that Rotary’s mission was to create lasting change, and peace was at the centre of that mission. This new Rotary Peace Center would “help change lives; one fellow, one community and one partnership at a time.”

Founder and Chancellor of SIU Prof S B Mujumdar said he constantly heard accolades about how he has created a wonderful university. He was born in a small village in Kolhapur district of Maharashtra. “There were no lights or towers, no phones, TV or radio. I completed my primary and secondary education from two small government schools. And the beauty of those schools was that the children of poor and rich, children of parents of various castes and religions studied together.”

After completing his education, he joined the Fergusson College, Pune, in 1963, and later started Symbiosis. Along the way he faced many challenges and had “very sad and bitter experiences.” Once, he asked a student from Ghana what do you want to do with your life? “He said I would like to run away from your city as soon as possible. I said why? He said, early in the morning when I go to the bathroom, your Indian students either close their eyes or turn their heads. Because they believe that seeing anything black early in the morning is a bad omen. When I travel in a local bus, Indian

girls prefer to stand rather than sit beside me.”

After hearing similar experiences from many students from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Vietnam, Thailand and Sri Lanka, he was both distressed and disappointed, and wondered what kind of impressions these students would carry home about Pune, or India and our culture. So he started a small centre in a 10x12 room and being a teacher of botany, the word *Symbiosis* came naturally to him. Realising that though their colour and culture might be different, their blood was red, just like ours, he thought if “we provide a home, away from home to these foreign students by giving them courtesy, good treatment, they will be our cultural ambassadors in the world.” And that is how Symbiosis International Cultural Centre was

established, so that cultural education would go hand-in-hand with whatever stream of education they chose.

A grateful Prof Mujumdar said that “when Symbiosis was passing through teething troubles, it was Rotary which came to my rescue, and gave us ₹1 lakh to start a Symbiosis Educational Centre. Our collaboration began from 1973, and continued in different ways.”

There were also frequent exchanges between Rotary clubs and Symbiosis International students. “This is a small, simple way of contributing to global understanding, which will perhaps lead to world peace.”

In 2002, the institution got the status of a university and now it has off-campus centres in Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Noida, Nagpur, Nashik and Mumbai, and more recently Dubai. India has 1,053 universities, and over 50,000 colleges. But at Symbiosis, the accent is on internationalisation; it has students from **85 countries** and all states of India. “They play together, read, sing together and they often quarrel together.”

He is often asked about his future goal, which is to create global citizens.

He hoped the “Rotary peace centre will send a global message to global

students that peace is the only craving of humanity. Wars and battles are no solutions for human problems.”

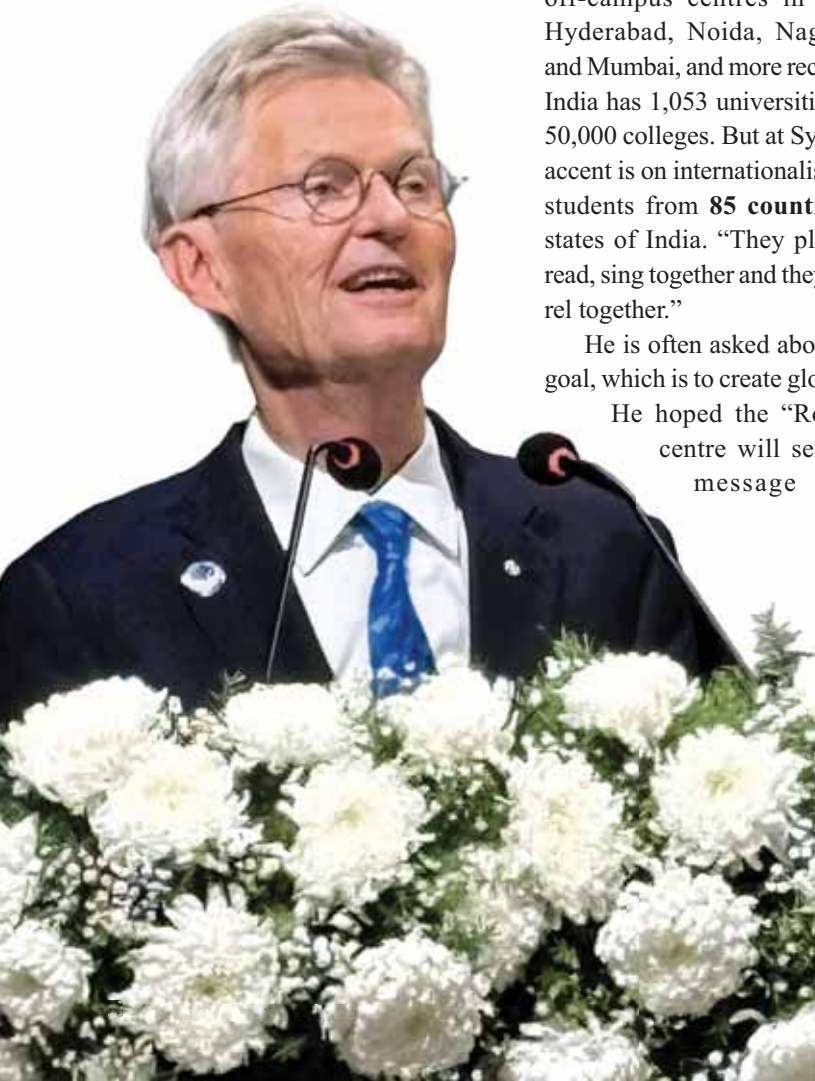
He assured the assembled Rotarians that this Peace Center would flourish and prosper and the fellows who passed out from it “will be the messengers of peace across the world.”

TRF trustee Bharat Pandya said the fact that out of the 42 RI districts in India, 23 were represented at the inaugural of this Peace Center was a testimony to how much importance Rotarians gave to peace.

In today’s world, global conflict has created a huge crisis. There are 17 million-plus refugees and displaced persons in the world. In 2024, it was estimated that the economic impact of conflicts, displaced people and refugees to the world is \$19.97 trillion.

Economic toll was only a part of this huge crisis; Rotary not only talked about peace but worked in all areas related to peace, such as health, economic and community development, water and sanitation, disease prevention and environmental protection, to create conditions which help peace to flourish.

Another important step was its peace centres and peace scholars. By empowering young emerging leaders and opinion makers and equipping them with the skills for conflict resolution and sustainable development, Rotary is helping to create an impact both at the local and global levels. “Arch Klumph once said that if you build temples, churches and mosques, they will crumble into ruins. If you build monuments, time will deface them. But if you work with the minds of people and imbue in them a sense of compassion, integrity, responsibility, cooperation and understanding, then you are doing something that is



imperishable and that will last for centuries to come.”

That was the objective of Rotary in building its peace centres. Pandya thanked SIU and its leaders for hosting this peace centre, and Rotarians from districts 3141 and 3131 for sowing this important seed for peace to flourish in our conflicted world.

Pro Chancellor of SIU Dr Vidya Yeravdekar said the inaugural of the new peace centre also marked the 55th Foundation Day of SIU. She had learnt there were several applications from across the world for the establishment of the Peace Center, and after a rigorous selection process, SIU was chosen. Perhaps the RI committee’s interaction with both Prof Mujumdar and the international students had helped clinch the deal. “Thank you, Rotary, for showing so much faith and trust in this university,” she said.

She assured Rotarians that the core values of their organisation and the guiding principles of SIU, particularly its motto *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*



Trustee Chair Knaack, Prof Mujumdar and RI President Arezzo inaugurate the Rotary Peace Center at the Symbiosis University.

(the whole world is one family), were in total sync. She was confident that the Rotary peace fellows who will get admitted to this centre in 2027, will be “well-equipped with adequate skills and knowledge that would help them to promote world peace.”

Sudakshina Sen, centre head for the Rotary Peace Center, said its establishment at Symbiosis was all the more significant as both the organisations

shared core values of service to society, respect for diversity, and commitment to education.

This centre will cater to the greater Asia region, “integrating an interdisciplinary approach with experiential learning. The diploma programme will be offered in a blended learning format to empower mid-level professionals working in different spheres of peace and development, to advance their engagement in sustainable and actionable outcomes for social change in Asia,” she added.

Past RI director Mahesh Kotbagi recalled the long relationship the Rotarians in Pune had with SIU, particularly in healthcare, where Rotary had helped the hospital in Symbiosis with both funds and equipment, particularly in establishing the dialysis centre with 35 machines where free service was given to poor patients. He announced that the number of dialysis units would be increased from 35 to 50, and DG Vinod Saraogi, RID 3234, who was present at the meet, had given an instant commitment that he would take care of the funding.



Pictures by Rasheeda Bhagat

Rotaract legal aid camps in Delhi

V Muthukumaran

With the aim to create awareness on free legal aid available for women, children, and the right to access health-care and ensure mental wellbeing, Rotaract District 3011 conducted three Lex (Law in Latin) Aid camps across Delhi and NCR areas in February. Rtr Mahi Azad, zonal Rotaract representative from Zone Soul and a member of RAC Delhi Genesis, as project chair led from the front, and coordinated with resource persons for the legal sessions at different places in the capital region.

A Law student Shreya Vasdev addressed a gathering of 85–90 children (age group 5–20) at the



Rotaractors with children at one of the legal aid sessions in an impoverished locality in Delhi.



Above: A young girl being educated on her legal rights.

Left: A Rotaractor with children at the legal aid awareness camp.

Below: Chocolates being distributed to children.



JLN cluster in Delhi. She urged the less privileged children to avail government schemes and legal support, if they have problems related to schooling and education. Also, Shreya gave

the children valuable tips and suggestions on where to access legal aid for them to get school education which is mandated by the government laws and the Constitution.

In the second legal aid camp, Rtr Rimjhim Singh, a domain expert, gave a talk to over 150 women and children at Govindpuri slum, south-east Delhi, on their rights to personal safety and livelihood protection. She spoke on the right to equality, and how they can access free legal aid to have a sustainable livelihood that will ensure their dignity and social independence.

At the third camp, Rtr Muskan Poddar engaged with 90 people at the Woodland DDA Park, Tagore Garden, Delhi, on the patient's rights to access timely medical care, and the legal safeguards related to mental health issues. "Around 35 Rotaractors from 10 clubs took part in the legal awareness camps and coordinated with the resource persons for hassle-free conduct of the sessions in different localities," said Mahi

Dr Aparna Gupta, a retina specialist, gave a lecture at a webinar to mark Prevention of Blindness Week, being observed in the first week of April. "The online session was dedicated to foster empathy and dialogue around blindness and visual impairment issues, and around 250 Rotaractors took part in the webinar," she said. Two visually-challenged persons — Ajay Minocha and Reshma Talwar — recalled their success stories, and how they overcame life's challenges in the course of their journey towards recognition and fame.

A graduate from IIM-Indore, Minocha was the first blind person to receive the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) designation in India, while Reshma was the recipient of Helen Keller Award in 2024, and a TEDx speaker.

Pursuing MCom at Shri Ram College of Commerce, Delhi, Mahi has been a Rotaractor for three years. She is also studying for chartered accountancy and doing her intern at Accenture, an IT major. "I will definitely join a Rotary club once settled in life as I love their cause, that is *Service above Self*," she smiles. ■

RID 3120 promotes skills and strength

Jaishree

When RI District 3120 launched *Adhaar* in January, it was a deliberate push to turn potential into livelihood. Focused on skill development, vocational exposure and women's empowerment, the initiative quickly found traction across clubs.

"We arranged factory visits for our Rotaractors. A plastics recycling unit in Varanasi gave them a real-world understanding of sustainable industry practices," says DRR Mahi Bhan. The project translated learning into opportunity. Women's empowerment workshops covered tailoring, handicrafts, personal grooming and



computer skills, while distribution drives in *sewa bastis* enabled self-employment. “Some clubs provided sewing machines; others distributed beads, threads and craft essentials. The idea was simple — help women to start earning,” she adds.

Running parallel is *Project Shakti*, a district-wide effort anchored in the theme ‘From Awareness to Action, From Fear to Freedom.’ Through self-defence programmes conducted in schools, colleges and institutions, Rotaractors are building confidence and resilience among both men and women. The goal is clear: “safer, stronger and more self-reliant communities.”

DRR Mahi Bhan with delegates from across India at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya after the Satkar Summit held in Lucknow.



DRR Mahi with Rotaractors planting a sapling as part of the project *Prakriti Bandhan*.

With 49 Rotaract clubs — 40 of them actively engaged in service — the district’s energy is evident in its diversity of initiatives. One standout example is the Rotaract Club of Panini Kanya Vidyalaya in Varanasi, chartered earlier this year. Sponsored by the Rotary Club of Banaras Shine, the club comprises 15 young girls from a gurukul-style institution rooted in Arya Vedic traditions.

“While these students are nurtured in a deeply traditional

environment, we are consciously working to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity. Through this club, we want to expose them to leadership traits and encourage their participation in community service initiatives,” she says.

The institution itself made headlines in February 2026, setting a Eurasia World Record by creating 5,555 unique paintings of ‘Om’. During her visit, Mahi also installed a sanitary napkin vending machine on campus, part of a larger district



A sewing machine being presented to a woman as part of *Project Shakti*.

effort that has covered 30 schools so far.

In another initiative titled ‘Paint your imagination,’ RID 3120, along with the Deeva Foundation, conducted an art competition for 250 schoolchildren at the Shastri Ghat in Varanasi. While younger participants

explored environmental themes, senior students reflected on Unity in Diversity, capturing India’s cultural harmony through art.

Under *Prakriti Bandhan*, the district’s environment committee led by its chair Kushagra Mishra, executed a mega plantation drive.

Its key initiatives included ‘Green Gifting drives’ where herbal plants were distributed to the public at many locations with a message to them to nourish the plants; ‘Roots in Schools’ which helped create medicinal and herbal gardens in schools with the involvement of students; and ‘One Home, One Plant’ where Rotaractors were urged to plant at least a plant at their homes. “This project saw overwhelming participation.”

The *Satkar Summit* in Lucknow brought together over 180 Rotaractors from 22 states and 28 districts for a three-day cultural and business exchange. Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Brijesh Pathak’s visit added to the significance of the event. “We wanted delegates to experience both opportunity and heritage — from business exchanges to darshan at the Ram temple in Ayodhya. It made the summit truly memorable,” says Mahi.

On National Youth Day (Jan 12), the district channelled its intellectual energy through *Rotaract Sansad*, an online elocution and talk series. “Experts from defence, medicine and law shared insight that broadened our perspectives. It was an enlightening experience for all participants,” says coordinator Kamadeshwar Singh. ■



Participants at the *Paint your imagination* competition at the Shastri Ghat in Varanasi.

Families affected by the recent floods in Solapur received relief supplies as part of phase-2 of a donation drive led by RAC Karad City, RID 3132, volunteers and other supporting organisations.

The donations, collected from members and well-wishers, were sent to Solapur, coordinated by Rtr Basavraj Kulkarni, a member of RAC Samarthyaa Solapur. Volunteers transported other relief materials to Wadegavhan, one of the areas severely affected by the floods.

Teams from RG Shinde College in Paranda assisted in identifying vulnerable families and distributing supplies.

The relief kits included medicines, sanitary pads, ready-to-make cereals intended for children and senior citizens, and items that volunteers identified as immediate necessities in the affected communities.

Prathamesh Kamble, president of RAC Karad City, said local newspaper coverage of the initiative helped raise awareness about the continuing needs of flood-affected families and encouraged more people to contribute to relief efforts.

The drive was carried out with support from several volunteers, donors and Rotary groups, including

Rotaractors carry out flood relief

Team Rotary News



Rotaractors at a school distributing ready-to-make cereals to students.

the Rotary Club of Karad, which assisted with coordination and logistics during the campaign.

Kamble said that the club continued the relief and community support efforts in affected regions for nearly

two months. “Solapur district was the worst affected with 14 deaths. Over 1,500 houses and agricultural land were destroyed. Farmers were the worst affected by the floods and we wanted to make sure that help reached them.” ■



Government school students along with Rotary and Rotaract club members after receiving the nourishment kits.



Bringing back childhood

Team Rotary News

People of all ages filled the Senior Citizen Park in Amreli as the RAC Amreli Gir, RID 3060 and the RAC Amreli Gir organised *Dhamal Gali — Back to Bachpan* (fun street — back to childhood), an event centred on reviving traditional Indian childhood games and encouraging community interaction.

More than 500 participants took part in games “that were once commonly played in neighbourhood streets and school grounds, turning the park into a lively space for families, children and senior citizens. The activities encouraged participants to step away from screens and reconnect through simple outdoor games that many associated with their

childhood,” says Ronak Bhalodia, project coordinator.

The event was organised at the Senior Citizen Park “with a focus on creating a shared space for different generations. Older participants revisited games they had grown up playing, while the younger generation was introduced to activities and games less common in urban life,” he says.

He also adds that the initiative aimed to preserve traditional recreational culture while promoting physical activity, social engagement and community bonding. “Our event also highlighted how public spaces can be used to bring people together through low-cost, inclusive activities that appeal across age groups.” ■





Children playing ludo at the event.

Below: Rotaractors at the event.



Left: A chess competition.

Below: Participants playing the tug of war game.



Rotaract libraries in Bengaluru schools

V Muthukumar



In a mega outreach programme, six Rotaract clubs of RID 3192 (Bengaluru) are setting up libraries in government schools under *Project Padho Bharath* (Read India) in and around the city in a phased manner. The literacy project was the brainchild of PRIP Shekhar Mehta who wanted to spread the reading habit among schoolchildren as part of his TEACH programmes across the country.

Depending on the school and the number of students enrolled, “we decide on the library size — it may range from a small one room filled with diverse books to a mobile book lending unit shifting locations within the campus,” said Venkateswara Rao Paritala, director, Community Service, RID 3192. Around 65 Rotaractors took up a massive book collection drive from schools, colleges, residential colonies and public libraries. “We collected over 8,000 books across genres, as our Rotaract teams knocked at the doors of individual houses, societies, educational institutes, and visited libraries too to amass a huge

bank of tomes, hardcovers and paperbacks,” he explained.

They have already set up two libraries at the Farooqhiya English High School, RT Nagar, and Government Higher Primary School, BR Hills in rural Bengaluru, “which would benefit 350 students of both the schools. RACs Bangalore, Raj Mahal Vilas and BMS Yehalanka are into the nitty-gritty of identifying the beneficiary schools, and the process of setting up libraries with the coordination of teaching faculty. “We are mentored by the Rotary Club of Bangalore West as their members guide us through different phases of *Project Padho Bharath* which is just eight-month-old now,” said Paritala. “In the coming months, we will install libraries in eight government high and higher secondary schools benefitting 2,000 students. The funds required for setting up libraries are met through internal mobilisation by our Rotaract clubs.”

A polio walkathon in November last year saw 200 Rotaractors and Rotarians marching with electric candles in their hands from the Vidhana

Soudha, the legislative complex, to the Rotary House of Friend on Lavelle Road to create awareness on Rotary’s global campaign against the disease. It was a 3km End Polio Now rally that put the spotlight on “the need to completely eradicate the crippling disease, and we spread the message through placards, banners and raising slogans.”

The district clubs tied up with a primary health centre at Narayanpura, a city suburb, in December to give polio drops to over 6,000 infants through door-to-door campaign, and at two PolioPlus booths at the PHC and KR Puram Metro Station. “Around 100 Rotaractors went around to give oral drops to infants in the neighbourhoods, and also volunteer at the two polio booths, that lifted the public image of Rotary, in the one-day immunisation drive.”

Anti-plastic drive

In Kannada, *Parishe Ge Banni, Kai Cheela Thanni* is a popular slogan inviting people to ‘come to the fair with cloth bag in hand.’ And to sensitise the public and shopkeepers on the need to avoid plastic bags that harm



Left: Rotaractors arrange books for a government school library.

Above: Paper and cloth bags are being made for distribution.

Below: Schoolchildren during a session at *Project Padho Bharath*.



the environment, a four-day Rotaract campaign distributed 7,000 cloth bags and two lakh paper bags across busy markets and retail malls.

Not less than 50 Rotaractors from RACs Bangalore North West, Bangalore West, MES Institute of Management and MES College were involved in the collection of old newspapers and magazines in a two-day drive. After which they formed groups to make paper bags out of the newsprint, while a Rotary club funded the purchase of cloth bags. “We collected the plastic bags from consumers, roadside shops and retailers, and replaced it with our eco-friendly bags. Further, we urged the public and shop owners to use only cloth bags and adopt an eco-friendly lifestyle for a healthy planet,” explained Paritala.

Looking back at his six-year-old stint in Rotaract, the 23-year-old cyber security expert working in an IT company said, “my home club, RAC Bangalore RT Nagar helps me to reach out to the people in need. I enjoy doing service to less privileged.” Stating that Rotaract has given him confidence to face life’s challenges, he added “I wanted to continue my journey as there is no age limit for Rotaractors.”

While he is happy being in Rotaract, he said, “I may join a Rotary club after 4–5 years. But as of now, I enjoy what I am doing here.” ■

Healing minds, Spreading smiles

Jaishree

For Rotaractors of RID 3011, service this year included reaching the minds, touching emotions and creating human connections.

At the heart of this effort was *Zindagi Unfiltered*, a four-day mental health conclave presented by the district and led by ZRR Harnoor Kaur, with the Rotaract Club of SGTB Khalsa College as host. Designed as a safe, non-judgemental space, the online conclave brought together Rotaractors for honest conversations and quiet introspection.

From sessions like Safe Space — Conversations That Heal to Dear Me and Soul Awakening, the event encouraged participants to pause and look inward. Yoga, mindful breathing, counselling and journaling formed the backbone of the programme, guided by mental health experts.

One of the most talked-about elements was the ‘human library,’ a concept gaining traction globally, where participants ‘borrow’ real people as living books and have honest, unscripted conversations with them. “It addresses people’s prejudices by helping them talk to those they would not normally

meet,” says Kaur. Imagine sitting across from someone whose life experience is entirely unlike your own — a recovering addict, a person living with a disability, a survivor — and simply listening. No agenda. No judgement. Just understanding. “When you sit across someone and listen to their story, barriers dissolve in a way no lecture can achieve.”

Coinciding with Children’s Day, *Project Muskurahat*, led by ZRR Divyanshu Katiyar saw 87 Rotaractors across seven clubs and seven locations come together



Members of RAC Ingenious Minds with schoolchildren as part of *Project Mukurahat*.

Left: An art competition as part of *Project Muskurahat*.



Food being distributed as part of *Project Ahaar Daan*.



to spend the day with children at orphanages and care centres. “Each club designed its own activity. The idea was not just to distribute things, but to create moments the children would remember,” says Katiyar. Alongside games, children received clothes, stationery, snacks, and chocolates. In each location, between 50 and 100 children participated, their excitement turning ordinary spaces into vibrant playgrounds.

Complementing the project was *Ahaar Daan*, a three-day zonal initiative led by ZRR Mahi Azad and organised by the Rotaract Club of DPSRU. Marking Children’s Day with compassion, the drive combined food distribution with health check-up, dental camps, games and celebrations across multiple locations. ■

A mega Rotaract Run in RID 3203

V Muthukumaran

A first-ever Rotaract marathon was conducted at Udumalpet, a small town in Tirupur district of Tamil Nadu, by the Rotaract Club of Udumalpet Yuvas, RID 3203, on the eve of Rotary's 121st anniversary on Feb 23. *Project Hope 3203* had twin events on Feb 22–23 with 5km and 10km marathons that saw over 400 runners including college students, public and children taking part to spread awareness on drug abuse. This was followed by a mega community pledge on suicide prevention the next day.

Recalling the success of the twin-event under a single banner, club president Janaki PL said, “the marathon created awareness on the substance abuse by the youth. Before the run, we distributed a specially designed t-shirts with *Hope 3203* logo embossed on it, along with the tagline: *Run for a Drug-free Tomorrow*. At the end, certificates and medals were given to all the participants who were also served refreshments.” Addressing the runners at the end of the marathon, she urged them “to work and create a safe future for the next generation.”

Rotary's motto of *Service above Self* was also emphasised by Janaki who said, “every drop of sweat and toil is a symbolic commitment for a

healthier generation tomorrow.” In his speech, DRR T Selvavignesh pointed out “true win is all about creating awareness on drug abuse and mobilising the youth for a good social cause.” Also, Rotaractors have to engage the civic leaders and amplify their social causes for better impact in their communities, said the DRR.

On the second day, Feb 23, in a massive show of unity and solidarity, “1,290 people including college students and the public took a pledge on suicide prevention and life protection under the second leg of *Project Hope 3203*.” Both the events were held at the Sri GVG Visalakshi College for Women, Udumalpet,

Police inspector Ram Prabhu flagged off the marathon, and the top four winners in the boys and girls categories were given cash prizes, along with medals. The joint pledge by a thousand people on the college campus has entered the India Book of Records for ‘maximum participants taking a suicide prevention and life protection pledge simultaneously at a single location.’

The club is planning for the second edition of *Hope 3203* in May with twin focus on suicide prevention and awareness on POCSO and POSH laws





Clockwise from left: College students and the public take a pledge on suicide prevention and life protection; College girls determined to finish their run; Police inspector Ram Prabhu flags off the marathon on drug abuse awareness; At the start of the marathon.

against child abuse and sexual harassment. “The May event will have both a marathon and a group pledge with the involvement of around 3,000 people in a single day,” said Janaki.



Eyecare camp

In the first week of May, they will conduct a two-day roving eye check-up camp across 19 tribal habitats around Udumalpet with the support of 5–7 doctors from the Aravind Eye Hospital, Coimbatore. “All our members will take part in the medical camp and coordinate with the doctors and paramedics for a trouble-free screening of rural patients,” she said.

While they hold two board and two general body meetings a month to review their work and initiatives done so far, and “chart out our future programmes, all the service projects are being sponsored by Deeppan Academy, Coimbatore,” she explained.

As a five-year-old Rotaractor, Janaki aspires to become a DRR in the next three years, “after which I will join my parent RC Udumalpet Tejas.” She looks after her family’s auditing firm being run by her mother. The 16-year-old Rotaract club has 22 members drawn from diverse professions and trade. ■



Promoting menstrual hygiene and fighting cancer

Kiran Zehra

RAC Chandigarh Midtown, RID 3080, conducted two major service initiatives in April focused on menstrual hygiene awareness and paediatric cancer support.

The club led *Suraksha Kawach*, a month-long campaign across the

Chandigarh-Mohali-Panchkula Tricity region to distribute 10,000 sanitary pads in government schools, urban slums and underserved communities. The initiative was carried out in partnership with Noparvah Premium Sanitary Pads and

supported by the Rotary Club of Chandigarh Midtown.

More than 120 Rotaractors volunteered over 400 hours for the campaign, conducting awareness sessions for schoolgirls, door-to-door outreach in slum areas including Bapu Dham Colony, Mauli Jagran and Indra Colony, and distribution through anganwadi centres. Female Rotaractors and ASHA workers led sessions on menstrual hygiene and health awareness. “The involvement of female Rotaractors and ASHA workers highlighted that the initiative focused not only on distributing sanitary pads but also on menstrual health education and awareness. Their participation helped create a more comfortable environment for girls and women to discuss menstruation openly, while the presence



of ASHA workers added community trust and public health credibility to the outreach efforts,” says Aman Garg, the past president of the club.

The campaign concluded with a rally at the Sukhna Lake, where participants carried messages promoting menstrual health awareness and dignity for women and girls.

Garg says the initiative aimed to address the lack of access to hygienic menstrual products among adolescent girls and women in underserved communities. The club plans to make *Suraksha Kawach* an annual project and expand its reach in the coming years.

Separately, the club organised the fifth edition of its fundraiser, *Bowl Out Cancer 5.0*, on April 23 and 24 at Fun City CP67,



Women receiving sanitary napkins from the Rotaractors.



Rotaractors after distributing sanitary pads to girls.



Rotaractors with the winner of the *Bowl Out Cancer 5.0* competition.

a gaming mall. The event drew more than 200 participants and raised over ₹3 lakh for the treatment of two children with cancer.

“All proceeds from the event will support two paediatric cancer patients receiving treatment at the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research. The beneficiaries were

identified and verified in coordination with doctors at the institute,” adds Garg.

The fundraiser, now in its fifth year, has become “one of the club’s flagship service projects aimed at supporting children undergoing cancer treatment while also creating awareness about paediatric cancer care.” ■

A cultural hall at Belgaum school

V Muthukumaran

For the first time in Rotaract District 3170, a CSR-funded project, a cultural hall at a government-aided school, was inaugurated in Belgaum, thanks to the efforts of Rotaractors at RAC Belgaum South.

It was a milestone event for the club as “we built an auditorium at the Shri Kalmeshwar High School, part of VBSS group of institutions, at Savgaon village, near Belgaum, at a cost of ₹18 lakh, mostly funded by Shanti Fomach, our CSR partner. The hall will be used for both academic and cultural activities of the school,” said Mahesh Shinde, immediate past president of the club. The entire first floor of the school building housing the cultural hall (over

2,500 sqft) was built by the Rotaractors with the help of CSR fund and other donors.

While the company has put in ₹8 lakh, the school mobilised ₹2 lakh, and the balance amount was made up by a mix of member contributions and private donors. Speaking at the inaugural of the building, DRR Harsh Shinde pointed out that “Rotaract clubs are expanding fast at the level of Rotary clubs in RID 3170 in terms of membership growth and service projects.”

He complimented the club “which is known for doing mega projects and events. The club members can take pride in doing the first-ever CSR-funded project in the Rotaract district, and I am sure that more such corporate

funded projects are being lined up by the club.”

Shantilal Porwal, MD, Shanti Fomach recalled that they came forward to “sponsor for a worthy cause, a school cultural hall, as we were attracted by the enthusiasm of the Rotaractors.” He assured that his company is ready to fund similar long-term, permanent projects of the club in the near future. IPDRR Nikhil Chindak and builder Ram Jamnani were the other main sponsors of the building. “Community gatherings and non-school events can also be held at the hall on a regular basis after permission from the school authorities,” said Shinde. Two gender-segregated washrooms were attached to the cultural hall. Project chair Shweta Ghatagasti ensured that the hall was constructed in time, and coordinated for the smooth conduct of the inaugural event at the school.

School libraries

In another initiative for government schools, over 10 libraries were set up in the last two years, each reading hub filled with over 1,000 books of various genres and titles. “DRR N Ketan Shinde is the project chair for school libraries, each costing ₹1.5 lakh. He is also one of the main donors for the project.”

A smart board (₹80,000) was installed at the Kalmesh High



Rotaractors, school authorities, company officials, and donors at the inauguration of the cultural hall at the Shri Kalmeshwar High School, Savgaon, near Belgaum.



Shri Kalmeshwar High School in Savgaon near Belgaum.

School to provide a digital learning experience for students under *Project Utsava*. Under this project, “we pool in money on birthdays and personal anniversaries of our members, instead of a cake-cutting ceremony, to donate stationery items, books and install learning facilities at government schools,” says the IPP. Till now, school bags and stationery kits were distributed to 400 children at the primary section of 10 government and aided schools in Belgaum.

The 33-year-old community-based Rotaract club has 40 members drawn from various professions, and their general body meets weekly to “review

We pool in money on
birthdays and personal
anniversaries, instead of a
cake-cutting ceremony, to
donate stationery items, books
and install learning facilities
at government schools.

Mahesh Shinde

IPP, RAC Belgaum South

our past work and chart out the future schedule of programmes.” According to club president Manvendra Jadeja, “we have raised the bar of academic standards at the Kalmesh High School with the setting up of a cultural hall which will be useful for students to display their academic, cultural and other extra-curricular skills.”

For IPP Shinde, who has become a dual member by joining RC Belgaum Royals in March, “now I have a great opportunity to extend by social outreach having become a Rotarian too.” He looks after his family business of fuel retailing, and has been a Rotaractor for three years. ■



Rotaractors at the inauguration of the cultural hall.

Rotaractors turn entrepreneurs

Jaishree

A bustling corner of Bandra came alive this February as Rotaract District 3141 unveiled The Bombay Bazaar, a first-of-its-kind district flea market. Held from February 10–12 at Eat Around The Corner, Bandra West, the initiative by the District PR and Marketing team transformed a simple venue into a vibrant marketplace of ideas and creativity.

Designed to encourage Rotaractors to step into the world of entrepreneurship, the event offered members a chance to showcase their products, test their business ideas, and engage directly with customers. From fashion-forward streetwear to hand-crafted art, from skin-care essentials to quirky home decor, the diversity of offerings reflected both innovation and individuality.

“We wanted to create something that truly captured the spirit of Mumbai — fast-paced, creative and full of opportunity. The Bombay Bazaar was our way of giving Rotaractors a real-world stage to experiment, learn and grow,” Kruthika Sheth, a member of the organising team.

With 31 stalls and a range of event partners,

the marketplace was carefully curated to ensure a dynamic visitor experience. Thoughtful stall mapping encouraged exploration, while interactive workshops and engagement zones added depth to the event.

The three-day event unfolded with a seamless blend of commerce and entertainment. The opening day set the tone with a traditional *Shubhaarambh* ceremony followed by a soulful live singing performance. Day two saw steady footfall and high engagement, with vendors reporting strong interest and smooth operations. The final day brought the curtains down on a high note, with another live performance and an Open Mic session where Rotaractors took centre stage, sharing music, poetry and stories.

“The response was overwhelming, with over



A Rotaractor's stall at the Bombay Bazaar.

1,350 attendees walking through the lively lanes of the bazaar,” she said. The experience taught the

young participants how to present their brand, interact with customers and understand the market. ■



An Open Mic session.

A cleanliness drive

Team Rotary News

RACTMA Pai, RID 3182, organised a cleaning drive across its college campus and nearby public areas in association with the Rotary Club of Manipal, bringing together students and Rotarians for a community service focused on environmental responsibility.

The drive saw active participation from club members, who worked in teams to clean different sections of the campus, pathways, and areas surrounding the institution. Rotarians from the Rotary Club of Manipal joined the activity, interacting with students and encouraging them throughout the programme.

“Apart from improving the cleanliness of the surroundings, the

By involving both Rotaractors and Rotarians, the drive created an opportunity for collaboration between students and senior community leaders through hands-on service.

initiative also aimed to create awareness about the importance of maintaining shared public spaces,” says Bharath Poojary, a club member. Such activities help students understand that cleanliness is not

limited to institutions alone, but is also connected to public health, discipline, and civic responsibility, she says. “By involving both Rotaractors and Rotarians, the drive created an opportunity for collaboration between students and senior community leaders through hands-on service.”

The club recently organised a CPR training programme at the TMA Pai College auditorium in collaboration with RAC Muniyal Group of Institutions and RC Manipal. The session, conducted by Dr Harshitha Rao, focused on creating awareness about emergency response and teaching participants essential life-saving CPR techniques. ■



Rotaractors after carrying out the cleanliness drive at various locations in Manipal.

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