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Q&A


Kalyan Banerjee
president, Rotary International

Kalyan Banerjee, president of Rotary International (RI) for 2011-2012, is the third Indian to become RI president in a span of 107 years. Banerjee was in Pune recently to meet city Rotarians.

Born in Kolkata, Banerjee is the director of United Phosphorus Limited and chairman of the company's Bangladesh subsidiary. A chemical engineer from IIT-Kharagpur, he is settled in Vapi, Gujarat, and has contributed significantly to its industrial development, besides infrastructure for health care and education. He spoke to Kiran Dahitule about his journey as a Rotarian and future plans as RI president.

Are there any special plans that you have chalked out for the coming Rotary year when you would be serving as the international president?

As the international president, I have not chalked out any fresh plans as yet. It is more important for me



Rotarians want to serve society

It is important for me to carry forward the work that is going on. One of the projects that I am overseeing right now is low-cost housing on a large scale. I would like to welcome clubs to approach me for any other good project that they wish to implement. If it is practical and good, I will surely support the cause

to carry forward the work that is going on. For example, the 'Pulse polio programme' is successfully going on across India. Last year, around 46 cases were reported in India, but in 2011 there has been just one case till date. We will continue this campaign for another three years.

We are also working with Coca-Cola on the Aids awareness programme in Africa. These are our major activities that I will be monitoring closely. Another project that I am overseeing right now is low-cost housing on a large scale. I would like to welcome clubs to approach me for any other good project that they wish to implement. If it is practical and good, I will surely support the cause.

What has been your Rotary journey like in the past 40 years?

I have been a member of the Rotary Club of Vapi since 1972 and later be-

came the district governor of the Rotary District 306. I have served Rotary International as director in Asia during 1995-97 and during 1997-98 as general coordinator of poverty and hunger alleviation task force, which launched the low-cost housing project. I have also been a trustee of The Rotary Foundation from 2001-2005.

How would you define Rotary after spending four decades with the organisation?

This is one of the world's largest charitable foundations focusing on education, service and peace. I have been a member of the International PolioPlus committee of Rotary International as well as of Rotary's 'Reach Out to Africa Initiative'. I have been involved in other activities in the community and elsewhere. These include membership of the American Chemical Society, Indian Institute of Chemical Engineers and membership of the Senate of the Visva-Bharati University. After being a part of all this, I feel Rotary is an organisation of people who want to be of help to society.

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>> Kalyan Banerjee

A bigger role

He feels honoured for being the third Indian to head the Rotary International club. Kalyan Banerjee will take forward the club's mission against polio

Zainab Kantawala

Kalyan Banerjee, recently elected president of Rotary International - one of the largest humanitarian service organisations in the world, was recently in the city. We caught up with him to know about his role and plans ahead for the organisation.

During his tenure as president till June 30, 2012, Banerjee will lead a global network of 1.2 billion business from more than 200 countries through volunteer service to help meet the needs of communities worldwide.

Banerjee is the only third president of the international organisation from India. "It's an honour to serve the world's premier service organisation, Rotary International - in its 105 year history. More than ever before, I believe, Rotary is ready to take its role as the world's leading non governmental organisation in working for progress, prosperity and peace," says Banerjee.

As president, he will oversee Rotary's top priority of eradicating polio, a crippling and potentially fatal disease that still threatens children in Africa and Asia. Since 1985, Rotary club members worldwide have contributed more than U.S\$ 1 billion and countless volunteers hours to the effort. Great progress has been made, and the incidence of paralytic polio infection has plunged worldwide from 350,000 cases in 1988 to fewer than 1300 in 2010.

Besides, Banerjee has also initiated developmental work for the upliftment of tribals in Gujarat. He has also launched several projects to better education, healthcare and sanitation and vocational training.

On the next major initiative after polio, Banerjee says, "Rotary clubs, apart from working to solve individual challenges in development in their communities, have been working on national and zonal initiatives on a multitude of areas including AIDS and blindness prevention, maternal and child health issues, hunger projects, environmental upgradation and other projects."

"India has almost accomplished the mission polio. We will take up the next initiative as soon polio is done, because we don't want to lose our focus," he concludes.

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'Rotary should be world's most preferred NGO'



KALYAN BANERJEE

A chemical engineer from IIT Kharagpur and an alumnus of Rabindranath Tagore's Vishwa Bharati, the new head of Rotary International, Kalyan Banerjee, has been a Rotarian since 1972. He became president of the Rotary Club of Vapi in 1975-76, governor of the Rotary District 306 in 80-81, international director of Rotary Zones 5 and 6 in Asia in 95-97, general coordinator of Rotary's Poverty and Hunger Alleviation Task Force in 97-98 which started Rotary's low cost housing programme, and finally served as trustee of the Rotary Foundation from 2001-2005. He spoke about Rotary's current and future plans to SHASHWAT GUPTA RAY.

Q You have been elected as the new president of the Rotary International (RI). You are also the third Indian and the first since more than two decades. How does it feel to be heading such a reputed global organisation as an individual and as an Indian?

I feel humbled, challenged to live up to the expectations. At the same time, I am determined to drive change.

Q You have been associated with the organisation for the last 40 years. Today you have reached the pinnacle of the organisation. How do you see your journey of these four decades in this organisation?

I have always lived and loved Rotary, enthralled by what it does and can do. So immersing myself in Rotary in my life has been an exciting and fulfilling experience.

Q What are the prime activities of a Rotarian and what are the challenges involved?

Being a good citizen, connecting with the community, working with and for others in ways that one likes. In today's world, ethics is a less-used concept and keeping it upright is a challenge. The demand on time is also a challenge.

Q As a Rotarian you must have been associated with numerous welfare programmes that have been funded by your organisation or from outside. What were the most memorable and challenging moments that you will not forget easily?

Building schools, hospitals, colleges in Vapi (in Gujarat) and running them over the years, meeting the challenges of finding resources have been both challenging and fulfilling.

Q 'Reach Within to Embrace Humanity' is the 2011-12 RI theme. Please elaborate on this.

At any time, at all times, faced



with issues, challenges or tasks, first reach within, search within yourself and find the best way to move on and ahead. Find your inner strength and resolve to do so, and then you can do anything and you will succeed.

Q When you do that, you effectively embrace the world, because you're making even one person happy or satisfied, is just that.

Q What would be your high priority areas in next one year in India and globally?

Both locally and globally, finishing off polio is the biggest priority. Then there is a need to encourage peace through development and co-operation - working with issues like safe water, literacy, hunger management.

Q We must connect Rotary better and stronger with today's generation. We should become the most

preferred NGO in the world for government, for other NGOs or for the corporate world.

Q With many countries, especially developing countries, witnessing internal strife, how easy or difficult will it be for the organisation to work in such regions?

Rotary has the reach to work in strife-torn regions because it exists there, run by local citizens. So, whether in Russia, or in the Middle East, or in eastern Europe, or Afghanistan, or anywhere, the connectivity with the most accomplished local citizens is a great way for Rotary to join hands and do whatever needs doing.

Q Rotary has been majorly focusing on eradication of polio. But then there are other diseases like HIV-AIDS and tuberculosis which account for high

mortalities in India and other developing nations. Don't you think time has come for RI to pay attention towards these areas as well?

Yes, indeed. We are already doing it locally and regionally. HIV/AIDS in Africa, water management in north India, Bangladesh, literacy in Thailand through dedicated rotary programs are making huge differences. Clubs and districts are encouraged to do this. But globally we need to finish polio before we take up anything else.

Q One gets only one year tenure as RI president. Do you think it is enough for you to execute all your plans for the year? How will you ensure your plans are executed even when you relinquish the office next year?

Polio eradication has been a continuing initiative in Rotary for over 25 years now. Providing peace scholarships - Rotary is the largest provider of scholarships, bigger than Ford Foundation or Rhodes Scholarships - in the world.

Our work continues over decades, regardless of who is the president. There are other similar thrusts as well and Rotary is building in continuity into its systems. For us leaders of change, leadership remains constant.

Q You have completed officially the entire journey of a Rotarian from a member to president of Rotary world-wide. What are your plans after your term is over?

I wish to continue to live the Rotary way as long as I live, serving communities and taking up whatever tasks come my way. The Rotary Foundation is Rotary's arm which is a trust which receives and spends money.

After the presidency, I again became trustee of the Rotary Foundation, which has an annual budget about 350 million US dollars. These four years of tenure at the Foundation will include chairing the Foundation for a year.

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Rotary International chief to tap youth power

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
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ROTARY International president Kalyan Banerjee who was in the city discussed a new project launched by the Rotary Distance Education Programme. The project, Engineering Future India, aims at providing Indian students with tools for turning their ideas and thoughts

into reality. The \$1 million project is said to be among the biggest handled by Rotary here.

It propagates the idea of activity-based learning and reaches out to many schools all over the country, giving them an opportunity to work with skilled mentors, Rotarians said.

Speaking on his new post and responsibilities that

come with it, Banerjee said his goal was to eradicate polio in India and aimed at providing aid to countries like Africa.

He spoke of involving more youngsters in projects of Rotary International.

Banerjee highlighted the generous nature of the Indian public, claiming it to be far more than that of any around the world.

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ROTARY FOCUSES ON SOCIAL WEBSITES TO NET YOUTHS

SHASHWAT GUPTA RAY
reporters@sakaaltimes.com

Pune: Rotary International (RI) is developing its own community networking site like Facebook and Twitter from Pune, aiming to involve the youth in a greater way for making them better citizens.

"This will help draw the youth towards Rotary. It will inform them about the organisation and how to become a member," president of RI 2011-12 Kalyan Banerjee told Sakal Times.

The next generation of Rotarians can connect on this exclusive site and post their views and comments related to Rotary's activities.

"Social networking sites have become the favorite place for the youth to connect. Since we are present globally, we need to increase our membership by infusing young blood, who can carry this tradition forward, serve the society and help in

bringing the change we are working for," Banerjee said.

It will also help the existing Rotarians across the world to communicate with each other on a common platform.

"The Rotary clubs across the world will be connected to each other. They can share their expertise and views several issues," he said.

This social networking site is being prepared from Pune, directly under the aegis of RI, headquartered in USA. The organisation named Rotary International Infotech Pvt Ltd handles the entire IT network of the Rotary globally.

"Everything here is managed by the Rotary headquarters in US. RI is offloading a lot of its work to reduce cost and workload. Rotary's entire e-processing can be done from here," former district governor RI District 3130, Dr Sudhir Rashingkar said.

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India can be polio-free in 3 years: Banerjee

Rotary International president's focus on erecting toilets to curb the disease

PRINCIPAL CORRESPONDENT
reporters@sakaaltimes.com

Pune: Rotary International will continue its war on polio for complete eradication from India and other countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan, Rotary International president Kalyan Banerjee said on Monday.

Couple of years back, 746 cases of polio were registered in India. Last year the figure came down to 42 and this year only one case had been registered, till date.

"India can be polio free in next three years. We have been working very hard across the country for several years to spread awareness. Apart from financial commitments and advocacy,



NEW VENTURES: (From left) US-based firm PTC VP Gregory Sisk, Rotary International president Kalyan Banerjee, president of Rotary Club Poona Midtown Amit Jadhav and district governor RID 3131 Mohan Palesha at the launch of the project, at MCCI office on Senapati Bapat Road on Monday.

Rotary volunteers assist in vaccine delivery, social mobilisation and logistic management. But more has to be done," he said.

In his bid to eradicate polio from India, the Rotary International president has planned to build public toilets as polio germs spread through human faeces.

"People defecating in the open is a major concern. Germs can be present in the human waste. When people defecate in open, these germs percolate into the ground water. Many rural people who consume this water, may ingest the germs and get infected," he said.

Public toilet builder, Stulabh has shown interest in the project.

Parag Jadhav