



aman ki asha

AN INITIATIVE OF THE JANG GROUP AND THE

A GIFT OF LIFE AND A HEART-TO-HEART EXPERIENCE

Umar Mushtaq, the son of Mushtaq Muhammad, a plant operator from Swabi, Khyber Pakhtoon Khwa (KPK), was diagnosed with congenital heart disorder when he was four months old. From then on, there were multiple visits to doctors, who initially confined the problem through medication.

However, at age six, Umar had to be operated upon, by a cardiologist in Islamabad, says his mother, Faiza Mushtaq. The social security of the factory that Umar worked at took care of the expenses. Unfortunately the operation could not set the disorder right completely. The parents brought Umar to Children Hospital in Lahore where doctors told them that the operation Umar now required was too complicated and advised them to take him to India. There was no way they could bear the expenses involved.

Fortunately, Mushtaq heard about Rotary Authority in Pakistan's Gift of Life (GOL) programme that had enabled many children to enjoy a new lease of life after receiving gratis heart surgeries at home and abroad. In December, 2010 Mushtaq approached Jamil Qamar, President of Rotary Club of Peshawar Khyber who forwarded the case to District Governor DG Shehzad Ahmed heading the Rotary District (RD) 3272 Pakistan and Afghanistan. DG Shehzad contacted his

Rotarian Sajid Baseer Shaikh narrates the heartwarming story of Indo-Pak cooperation that saved the life of an 8-year-old boy



Starting a new life: Eight-year old Umar Mushtaq (right) in intensive care and above, with his mother after the ventilators were removed, at Mission Hospital; (below) with his parents, and Rotarians Ashok Agarwal and Subir Roy (standing). Photos by the writer

West Bengal) responded, offering free-of-cost heart surgery under his District's Heart to Heart (H2H) Programme. The co-ordinators of the H2H and GOL programmes, Co-chairman Gaurang Desai and myself respectively, got working to organise the hospital admission, passport and visa logistics.

We sent medical reports to coordinator H2H programme who forwarded them to Dr. Satyajit Bose, Chairman and Senior Consultant Cardio Thoracic Surgeon of The Mission Hospital, Durgapur, West Bengal. Dr.

Umar, whose case was complicated and risky. His invitation letter reached us in the last week of December, 2010, after which the family had to first obtain their passports and then apply for the visa.

The passport formalities were completed by first week of March, 2011 and the family applied for Indian visas which they received the same day. The Council General, Visa Section, Indian High Commission, Islamabad is to be lauded for his courtesy in always completing the formalities of the interviews

in one day.

I got the family's seats booked on the luxury bus that plies between Lahore and New Delhi. The H2H representative in New Delhi K. G. Biju got the train seats booked in advance for their onward journey to Durgapur.

DG Shehzad and I saw Umar and his parents off for New Delhi on the morning of March 14. They reached there that evening. K. G. Biju re-

upon after a very complicated procedure, and asked all involved to pray for post-operation recovery.

Umar could not be taken off the ventilators for longer than usual due to his critical condition. The day-and-night efforts of the doctors finally enabled them to remove the ventilators on April 7. Unfortunately, a few days later, Umar's lungs filled with water and he had to undergo another minor operation. But his ordeal was not yet over.

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The next day in the night the family boarded Kolkata-bound Sealdah Rajdhani Express, India's best and fastest train. They got off en-route at Durgapur where the hospital staff received them and drove them to the hospital.

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On March 22, DG Agarwal informed us that Umar had been successfully operated

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Umar and his parents have since returned to Pakistan with beaming faces, and a treasure of memories: the support and affectionate care of the hospital staff and Indian Rotarians; These handful of Rotarians from the Muslim, Hindu and Christian communities did not know each other prior to

Umar's operation, but came close together as they worked together to keep a soul alive, and provide support to his parents.

Rotarians believe that human beings are one and the same and to do service, there are no boundaries and barriers. Long live Indo-Pak Rotary.

We look forward to seeing many more such ventures, that may contribute towards developing understanding, goodwill and peace and mitigating the frosty relations created by hard-liners on both sides.

We are all profusely gratified to DG Ashok Agarwal's arranging for Umar's gratis heart surgery; to the Counsel General of the Indian High Commission, Islamabad for facilitating visas quickly; to past Rotary President Gaurang Desai's administrative skills and incisive monitoring, timely information and logistic support; to Dr. Satyajit Bose for undertaking a risky and complicated open heart surgery and providing the destitute family with air travel from Kolkata to New Delhi, enabling them to bypass the rigours of another train journey; to Sayanti Das, the face of 'The Mission Hospital' for her extra-ordinary attention to the family in the hospital; to Rotarian Subir Roy of Rotary Club of Durgapur who maintained a close liaison with the Mission Hospital and arranged for the blood required for the surgery; to the Rotarians who visited the family regularly in hospital — President Ramesh Janandania of Rotary Club Durgapur, Rotarian Satyanarayan Agarwal of Rotary Club of Tagore Land and many others.

The writer is Chairman District Gift of Life Programme, Rotary District 3272 (Pakistan & Afghanistan)

Say it with flowers

Peace blooms as the Karachi-based practitioners of a Japanese art of flower arrangement join hands with colleagues in Mumbai

People-to-people exchanges between India and Pakistan are a 'soft' way to contribute towards peace and understanding at many levels. One such exchange recently was the two-week tour in April of the Karachi Sogetsu Study Group to Mumbai, at the invitation of the Bombay Sogetsu School. The tour, which included a workshop and exhibition that delegates from both cities participated in, was organised under the banner of Aman ki Asha, the joint peace initiative of Jang Group and The Times of India.

The Karachi group consisted of eight practitioners of Sogetsu Ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arrangement. Led by Nafisa Tapal, President and Founder of the Sogetsu Group in Pakistan, their experience ranges from one year to over twenty-five years.

Mumbai Sogetsu teachers participated in the themed Sogetsu exhibition for Aman ki Asha, and tested participants to achieve a higher level of teacher-certification. The teachers had worked on a theme dedicated to Pakistan, using flowers to form the Pakistani flag - a gesture that the Pakistanis found "truly heart-warming". There were also flower arrange-

These gestures meant a lot especially given that the venue — Mumbai, where people feel particularly traumatised by the ghastly events of Nov 26, 2008. The Pakistani contingent visited the 'iconic' Taj

Hotel, and "felt bad that the incident had occurred," as Nafisa Tapal put it. However their hosts were very gracious and clearly did not hold ordinary Pakistanis responsible.

"I have visited India many times," she added. "Every time I experience the same hospitality and love. Since our two countries have so much in common, like culture, cuisine, music and so on, we felt quite at home there."

The Indians are also extremely interested in visiting Pakistan and seeing the culture and the lifestyle of Pakistanis, especially those who were born in cities that are now in Pakistan.

Nafisa Tapal agrees that a regular exchange of professionals will help both sides to learn about the other and over-

