

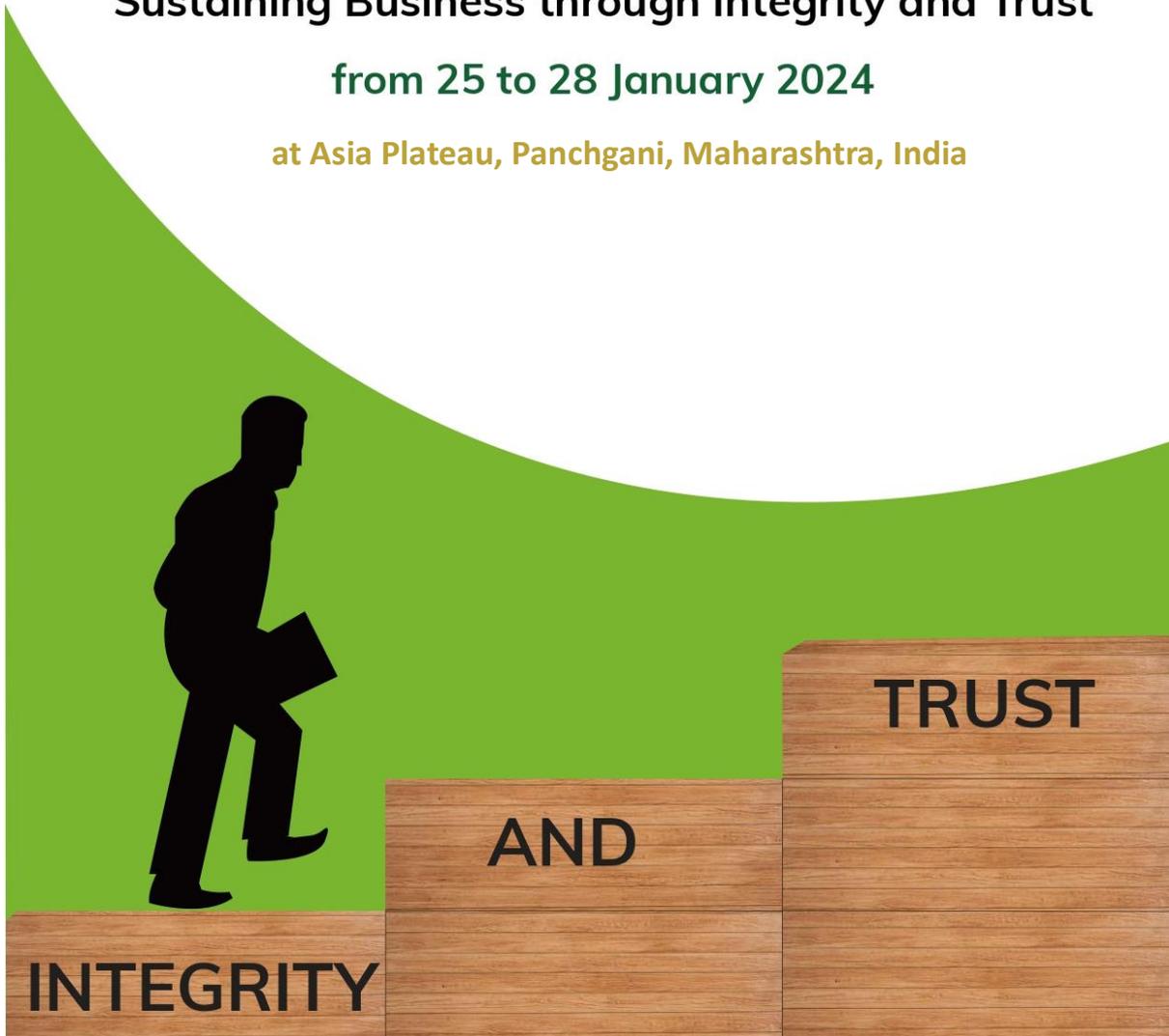


India
Initiatives of Change
for Business

A REPORT ON THE

9th Biennial International Conference on
Sustaining Business through Integrity and Trust
from 25 to 28 January 2024

at Asia Plateau, Panchgani, Maharashtra, India





Nestled in the Western Ghats, Asia Plateau is situated along the slopes of Panchgani’s famed tableland overlooking the Krishna valley. “A Beacon of Hope” is how a leading Indian newspaper once described this place. The open spaces and natural surroundings at this centre of Initiatives of Change, India, encourage unhurried and honest reflection.



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Initiatives of Change for Business



Sarosh Ghandy

“Remaining ethical in business is not easy and needs continuous encouragement, support and reinforcement. Being able to meet people who have succeeded in conducting their businesses ethically, hearing success stories and being able to interact with those who have faced and overcome similar problems are not only desirable but essential to give one the courage and the patience to face one’s own obstacles.” –Sarosh J. Ghandy, Chairperson, Initiatives of Change for Business (ICB), in an earlier message on ICB objectives.

A fraternity for entrepreneurs and key decision makers in business, ICB is an international fellowship for business persons and a comradeship of like-minded individuals who are committed to furthering ethical practices in their work. Such individuals are purposed in convincing others through their decisions and actions that ‘one can be ethical in one’s business dealings and still be successfully competitive’.

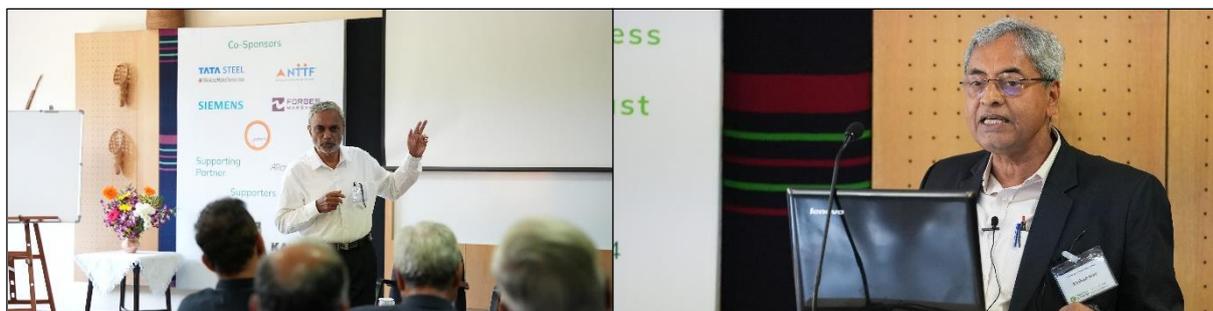
ICB Conference 2024	
Country	No. of People
Japan	12
UK	07
Kenya	05
Malaysia	04
Switzerland	03
France	02
Tibet	01
Germany	01
India	40
TOTAL	75

Prior to 2018, this programme was called Caux Initiatives for Business (CIB). CIB was conceived in 1972 at Caux in Switzerland, where the global centre of Initiatives of Change (IofC) is situated. IofC-India’s training facility, Asia Plateau, a 68-acre campus at Panchgani, has hosted biennial international conferences for entrepreneurs and captains of industry since 2003.

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ICB draws its ethos from IofC’s core philosophy which maintains that ‘any meaningful change in life needs to start with the self’. The practice of ‘Quiet Time’ can be applied in one’s life, once a day or at several different moments of the day or night.

ICB believes that it is the micro, small-scale and medium (MSME) entities that are most in need of support, help and resources in operating their businesses ethically. In parallel, ICB retains an interdependent connect with large and medium-scale business entrepreneurs for thought leadership.



Luis Gomes (left) from Goa and Mohan Nair from Pune explained ICB-India initiatives in a session

Building Trust, Integrity & Environmental Sustainability

“I’m here as an ordinary citizen to share my learnings,” declared Prof. R. Rajagopalan, while speaking at the opening session of the Ninth Biennial International Conference of ‘Initiatives of Change for Business’ (ICB) on January 25, 2024.

‘Sustaining Business through Integrity and Trust’ was the theme of this edition held at Asia Plateau (AP), Panchgani, Maharashtra, India.

“The profound part of the conference will begin tomorrow; I will present the ridiculous today,” the retired IIT (Indian Institute of Technology) professor quipped in his inimitable humorous style.

Interspersed with anecdotes, Dr Rajagopalan recalled the major milestones of his journey: landing in the Soviet Union as a mechanical engineer, a brief stint at IBM, three decades of teaching at IIT Kanpur and IIT Madras, and finding a purpose in life at the age of 55 through an environmental initiative at IIT-M.

What Can I Do?

“We live in extraordinary times,” stated the Bengaluru-based author of books on environment and ethics. “Multiple challenges are coming together.”

Interjected with Mullah Nasruddin’s satirical stories to lighten the mood, he dwelt on “what is ethics” and “what is right.” Using video clips and slides, he pointed out how 2023 was the warmest year on record, how extreme weather conditions were causing death and destruction and how the recent rains and floods ravaged his state of Tamil Nadu.

While listing a few problems that the planet faces, the speaker urged everyone to step back from the daily pressures of life to ponder on the following questions:

- What can businesses do for the environment?
- Should my business be known as an ethical one?
- Am I part of the problem or part of the solution?

“As a businessperson, you are in a VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity) world,” he continued. “Prepare by building Trust, Integrity and Environmental Sustainability (TIES) in your enterprise.”

Through a video clip, he described the work of Mr Ray Anderson, Chairperson of Interface, Inc., Georgia, US, who devised ‘Ecosense’, a vision for 2020. By 2009, the company’s people had galvanized around a shared higher purpose.

“Choose any of the many paths towards environmental sustainability and proceed,” he concluded.



R. Rajagopalan

“We cannot be environmentally sustainable without being ethical.”

—R. Rajagopalan



SIGHTS & SOUNDS

- ✓ *First-time visitors to the centre seemed inspired by the history of ICB and Asia Plateau, which was conveyed through a tour and two documentaries.*
- ✓ *The delegates were seen appreciating the artefacts at the meeting venue: the Northeast Room that depicts the rich heritage of the states of Northeast India.*
- ✓ *As the evening concluded and the weather turned colder, guests queued up for a cup of hot mint tea, while enjoying informal conversations.*
- ✓ *Despite the chill in the air, visitors were seen enjoying the downhill walk to their rooms on the pathway illuminated by the full moon.*

“If the planet is not safe, no business is safe,” responded Mr Bharat Avalani, CEO of Connecting the Dots, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, during the interaction that followed. Mr Daniel Wanjuki, CEO of Ecosave Consultants, Kitengela, Kenya, shared his experience of reducing plastic.

“When looking at economic sustainability, environmental sustainability takes a back seat,” rued Mr Vivek Asrani, MD of Kaymo Fastener Company, Mumbai, India, while wondering what a small or medium-sized company could do in such situations.

“We changed the paint shop because of the demand of a Japanese company,” responded an Indian manufacturer to a question whether a customer had compelled any organization to adopt environmental changes.

Mr Peter Vickers, Chair, Benjn. R. Vickers & Sons Ltd, Leeds, England, explained how his 200-year-old company developed environment-friendly lubricating oil to satisfy a customer.



Peter Vickers

Atmosphere of Bonhomie

Earlier, the conference Co-Chairs, Mr Vickers and Mr Asrani welcomed delegates. To the delight of the audience, the two revealed that they decided on joining this ICB conference by saying to each other: “I’ll come if you come.” Mr Asrani remembered several occasions when he turned to his ICB colleague for guidance. He also ‘apologized’ to Mr Hironori Yano for ‘robbing’ an idea that he has been utilizing in his company for years.

The tone for the evening was set by the impactful words of the song *Water for a Thirsty Land* rendered by a team led by Mr Leslie Nazareth, Freelance Musician and Ecologist from Mumbai, India. Mr Anup Pawar, Programme Manager, AP, provided an overview of the arrangements.



Anup Pawar

More than 70 men and women from across the world, including Japan, the United Kingdom, Kenya, Malaysia, Switzerland, France and Germany, arrived at the venue on Thursday for the four-day conference.



Soul Nurture

At the crack of dawn on January 26, delegates trooped to the garden outside the Rock View building at AP, where Mr Prabhakar Vartak guided them to a silent walk. As participants brought out their pens and little notebooks afterwards, he urged them to reflect on the following pointers:

- Silence is among the endangered species.
- Silence is the presence of everything with we being quiet.
- Nature speaks, but we do not listen to its story.
- Nature is a friend, philosopher and guide.
- There is more in nature than in books.



In what turned out to be a solemn beginning of the day, the minutes spent amid the centre's verdant surroundings inspired the 'walkers' to share the following observations:

- How deeply rooted the trees are!
- Seeing the fallen tree triggered a thought about fallen leaders.
- All these trees live in harmony; none of them cut each other.
- Creepers get support from trees; strong ones help the weak.
- Birds doing what they want; be yourself, enjoy the moment.
- Nature is in harmony.
- Was inspired to become a better version of myself!



SIGHTS & SOUNDS

- ✓ *As the Sun's rays emerged in the eastern horizon, visitors were seen exploring the flora and fauna of the green and serene campus.*



Amit Mukherjee

Connection, Correction, Direction

“We can do much more from the heart,” observed Dr Amit Mukherjee as delegates gathered in the Northeast Room after breakfast.

“Any decision taken from the *heart* will stay longer while any decision taken from the *mind* will not remain for long.

Doing *good* is what the mind teaches us and doing *great* is what the heart teaches us,” added the orthopaedic surgeon from Jamshedpur in eastern India.

Quoting Sri Aurobindo, he said, “Possession of anything in excess of your needs is debt against nature.” He took the participants through the “time triangle: profession or study, family and self” and steps towards effective governance.

- We all wear masks on different occasions but is there joy in wearing those masks?
- Did we all come in this world to eat, work and sleep or do we have a bigger purpose?
- What do we need to do to become better human beings?
- Should we just manage things, or should we become leaders for change?

After posing a series of questions, the facilitator urged the audience to adopt the path of *connection*, *correction* and *direction*.

“Managers manage with fear; leaders lead with love – they lead with example!”
—Amit Mukherjee

He quoted Swami Vivekananda and explained the concept of *Satchitananda*: *sat* – truth (each of us is an embodiment of truth), *chit* – wisdom (it is there is all of us), *ananda* (bliss) – if ‘I’ decide to be happy, nobody can change it. Dr Mukherjee underlined

the age-old values: honesty in all we do, compassion for all, purity of thought and action, and inclusiveness (*vasudhaiva kutumbakam* – the whole world is one family).

“We’re neither our body nor our mind, but inner consciousness,” he concluded. Dr Prabhakar Kamath, OD Consultant and Trainer, New Delhi, India, conducted an exercise involving silence and reflection. “We forgot gifts given to us,” a participant exclaimed, while another announced his intention to help migrant workers.

SIGHTS & SOUNDS

- ✓ At the outset, Dr Amit Mukherjee welcomed all present with a ‘namaskaar’ in the traditional Indian way and greeted the audience on Australia Day and India’s Republic Day.
- ✓ The session was preceded by flag hoisting outside the Foyer by Ms Lalita More, followed by the rendition of India’s national anthem, in the presence of people from different parts of India and the world.

“Human nature can be changed; that is the root of the answer. National economies can be changed; that is the fruit of the answer. World history can be changed; that is the destiny of our age.” —from the conference brochure

Building Bridges, Building Trust



T. V. Narendran

“Building trust is needed not just in happy times but in difficult environment, too, and it’s not easy,” said Mr T.V. Narendran in his keynote address at the inaugural session of ICB’s Ninth Biennial International Conference on January 26.

Referring to the Tata Code of Conduct, the Global CEO and MD of Tata Steel underlined the importance of well-defined rules and policies that extend even to vendors and partners. “They should have the confidence to complain,” he told the audience in the packed meeting room at AP. “Many vendors prefer to sell to us and employees join us because the value system aligns with them.”

“Trust brings business benefits, though that is not the goal.”

—T.V. Narendran

High performance should not come in the way of action against an employee who has been unethical, affirmed the former President of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

Mr Narendran explained how the company learnt from past mistakes and strived to build trust with the community when setting up base at a new place. “Before building walls, you build trust,” he said, referring to the setting up a new steel plant 400 km from Jamshedpur and acquiring farmers’ land in Punjab.



Delegates listen to the keynote address

Walking the Talk

“Stakeholders need to understand that you’ve their best interests in mind,” the chairperson of the governing boards of XLRI Jamshedpur and IIT Kharagpur said, while adding that one cannot sit on the success of the past and expect success in the future.

“A child is thrown up and you catch them. They trust you. We are born with trust but as we grow older, trust erodes,” Mr Narendran said. “Trust is built over multiple interactions,” he added.

Earlier, welcoming the speaker, Mr Siddharth Singh, Director, Asia Plateau, highlighted the Tata Group’s persistent support to the centre and to IofC.

“What you do is so loud that I can’t hear what you’re saying.”

Recounting his childhood years spent at Jamshedpur, he pointed out how many of the group’s initiatives have become a benchmark for other industries.



Siddharth Singh



Volume 3 of *eSpirit*, a collection of 14 articles on best global business practices, was unveiled on the occasion. Edited by Ishika Mukherjee, the book recollects the experiences of business leaders.

Extending a warm welcome to the guests, Mr Singh referred to the relentless pursuit of the centre, over 56 years, to help bring change in India, Asia and the world. He also clarified about the transitioning of the name from Moral Re-Armament (MRA) to Initiatives of Change (IofC).

At the outset, Dr Amit Mukherjee and his daughter, Ms Ishika Mukherjee, regaled the audience with the *Ode to the Ostrich* song-cum-skit, simultaneously prodding the participants to reflect on its profound message:

*With my head in the sand, I've nothing to fear./ I quite forget that danger is near./
I don't know so I don't care./ What I can't see just isn't there!*

Core Values

Mr Singh welcomed the Japanese delegation led by Hironori Yano, Chair, CRT, Japan, and Co-Host for the conference. "The theme is timely; as business, it's our responsibility to think how we can contribute," Yano San said. "It's time to talk about ethical leadership."

Quoting a Japanese proverb, "A virtue never stands alone; It always has neighbours," he added, "There is not so much we can do alone but together we can."

"Profit is return to the society," he told the audience, while affirming that CSR should not be an *accessory* but a *core value*.

*"The conference is about applied spirituality."
—Peter Vickers*

Mr Peter Vickers, Co-Chair, ICB, explained the theme: 'Sustaining Business through Integrity & Trust'. While introducing Mr Vickers, Mr Singh recognized the contributions of his family to Grampari, the rural and ecology centre at AP. Mr Vickers, in turn, introduced Mr Vivek Asrani, Co-Chair, ICB. Citing an example to relate the 'personal with the organisation' as the essence of the work at AP, Mr Asrani dwelt on 'the capital of compassion'. Mr K. Haridas, Co-Chair, ICB, gave the vote of thanks. The session concluded with a song that touched many a heart:

There's a voice in their heart./ If they willingly listen, they'll hear./ That voice with its wisdom and peace for each one of us./ Speaking directly and clear.



Hironori Yano

Trust & Integrity

Ms Margaret Cosens, Chair of Trustees, IofC UK, chaired the plenary session on the second day of the conference organized by Initiatives of Change for Business (ICB), an international fellowship of businesspersons.



Tomoyoshi Matsumura

Ms Cosens introduced Mr Tomoyoshi Matsumura, CEO, Ichimaru Ltd, Osaka, Japan, whose family has sustained businesses for 10 generations.

Speaking in Japanese (simultaneously interpreted into English), Mr Matsumura urged the participants to reflect on the following statements:

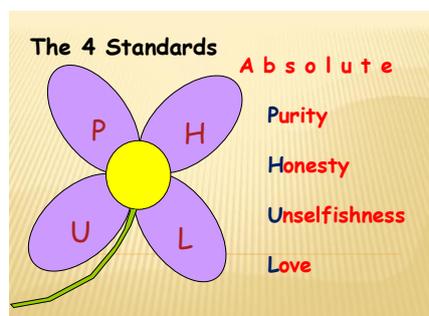
- Humans have the desire to be of service to others. This is 'altruism'.
- If we suppress our own 'self-interest', our altruism towards others will increase.
- Altruism is also important in the business world.
- The management philosophy, 'we are happy to be of service', expresses this.



Margaret Cosens

Business Ethics

"Honesty shapes the level of trust and integrity, and the daily time of silence reveals this practice," said Mr K. Haridas, Chairman, Business Ethics Institute of Malaysia (BEIM), and Co-Host of ICB.



He narrated the early encounters that shaped his convictions, personal and work experiences, and the current outreach through BEIM.

He reminisced his first visit to AP in 1969 when he was a student in Mumbai in western India.

"Listening in silence is a powerful time for personal formation," he averred, while saying that praying and listening are complementary.

To IofC's four moral standards (PHUL or purity, honesty, unselfishness and love), Mr Haridas added a fifth one: compassion.

He narrated his experiences of being honest with his parents and the Income-Tax department and of returning money to the railways for travelling without tickets.



Several delegates stepped forward to ask questions during the mid-morning session

The Kuala Lumpur-based business leader also recalled the emotional moment when his second daughter apologized at night for taking money from his wallet without informing him, a step that followed an honest sharing by the Somali Ambassador at a get-together at his home earlier that evening.

Drawing from his learnings of IofC, Mr Haridas made the following recommendations:

- Start with yourself; that gives the focus.
- Be open about failures.
- Taking action is important.
- An individual with conviction can do well.
- Experience is the highest form of knowledge.
- Tone from the top.
- How I walk the talk is important.
- Emotional bank account: invest first, then withdraw.
- Can we make a difference?



K. Haridas

Among those who participated in the interactive session were Mr Nor Azman Zainal, Group CEO, Syarikat Takaful Malaysia Keluarga Bhd, KL, Malaysia; Mr Hidetaka Shirozume, CEO, Adeka Corporation, Tokyo, Japan; and Ms Shinichi Yanagisawa, Executive Officer, Dry Bulk & Energy Business Co-ordination Group, Dry Bulk Marine Quality Control Group, Global Mineral Resources Group and Dry Bulk Operation Group, Nippon Yusen Kabushiki Kaisha, Japan.

*Walk a mile in another man's moccasins,
Walk a while in another man's shoes,
Before you leave him condemned forever,
Put on his boots,
There's nothing to lose.*

—stanza from a song that left an indelible impression during the plenary session



Walking the Talk of Business

“... we learned about successful businesses that make a positive impact on society by deciding to prioritize fairness, integrity, social responsibility and thus contribute to building a more just, peaceful and sustainable world. ... Together, we explored the main reasons why business ethics are important for companies, how to “walk the talk” and live ethical values in order to create trust with employees, consumers, suppliers and the communities. For budding business professionals, it was an inspiring and catalytic moment. ... In his keynote address, T. V. Narendran spoke about the importance of building trust between management and employees, challenges along the processes and the solutions his company have implemented to create a culture of trust. —excerpt from a blog by Mr Ignacio John Packer, Executive Director, Caux Initiatives of Change, Lausanne, Switzerland, who was accompanied to the conference by Ms Jacqueline Cote, Chair, IofC Switzerland



“Round tables are one of the most inspiring experiences” – with these words, Mr Vivek Asrani got the ball rolling for a frank discussion at the Asia Plateau Library in the afternoon on January 26

Bridging Divides, Melting Divisions

Two groups, two venues, two moderators, one song and one theme: ‘How to build trust with employees’. The parallel round table sessions held late in the afternoon engaged the decision-makers in honest conversations.

Among the questions that were raised:

- How do we make people listen?
- How to enhance employability?
- Should this be a two-way street?
- How important is seniority?
- How to get fear out of the team?
- How to get people out of the comfort zone?
- What stops us from trusting employees?
- What happens when an employee takes advantage?
- What to do when employees are cynical of employers?
- How to deal with attrition, disruption or insecurity?
- How do we deal with the fear of repercussion?
- How to deal with baggage that employees carry, baggage that I carry?
- How do we deal with the issue of trust with MNC supplying materials?
- What to do if there is absence of clear internal guidelines?
- How to deal with trust deficit among team members?
- What to do when employees say that they are not paid more, and the management says that the employees are not delivering more?





- What to do when employees consider their actions without considering the board's requirements?
- Are unions aligned with employees or have their own agendas?
- What to do when employees take money on the side?
- What is it that we stand for as a company?
- What do you do when you are pushed against the wall?

The solutions and suggestions that were offered:

- Make trust visible.
- I must build the trust.
- Follow IofC principles.
- "Sorry, I made a mistake" – apologise!
- Cater to the need of being listened to.
- Provide clarity on the evaluation process.
- Dos and don'ts should be clear.
- Get fear out – have zero tolerance to discrimination.
- Provide an open space.
- Respect people beyond discussion.
- Know people's families.
- Help people in dire circumstances.
- Look for human potential of those at the bottom of the pyramid.
- Trust is built through a value system and not through rules and regulation.
- Demonstrate that we make less profit and give more priority to an employee.
- With great trust comes empowerment; with empowerment comes responsibility.
- Provide 360-degree transparency.
- Know an employee's background.
- Employees need to be valued and respected.



Peter Vickers moderated the discussion organized at Australia Room in the Main Building

The simultaneous session in another part of the campus witnessed passionate participation and an active discussion that stretched beyond the stipulated hours. Mr Vickers categorized the issues into three groups:

1. How to manage employees so that they work for a longer time in the company.
2. How to reduce/fill the gap between the younger and the older generation.
3. How to inculcate trust in the company from outsiders.

Among the issues that were shared:

- When you are a leader at a young age, sometimes it is difficult to give directions to your team members as they don't trust you easily and think that you have less work experience.
- There was a gap with members of the staff, who will anyway receive salary on the first day of the month.
- Nobody trusted the management when I took over.
- A plant went nine metres down because of earthquake and everything went down in a hole.
- People have three offer letters!
- Women's participation in management is negligible.
- Work from home: Employers have trust issues.

Solutions & Suggestions

- Address trust issues first.
- Have empathy for all the employees.





- I treat my company's employees as I want to be treated myself.
- Counsel people by letting them know that new people are not a threat to the older people.
- Be inclusive and empower.
- Had quality time with workers in the manufacturing company.
- We have around 1,000 people with a flat organization.
- Tuesdays were with parents just as Tuesdays with Morrie.
- These steps had a ripple effect.
- Focus on employees' growth and career development; provide training.
- Create an environment where people can talk freely and easily by building informal relationships first.
- Employee engagement activities helped; no attrition in five years, but it is work in progress.
- Tried different ways: started an open forum; gave more free time to the younger staff members (reciprocity approach); volunteer instead of compliance; career development irrespective of whether one stays in the company or not.
- Contribute to a just, peaceful and sustainable world.





As participants returned to the Northeast Room after dinner, a performance that preceded the evening session took everyone by surprise

Truth & Nonviolence

On India's Republic Day, Mr Prabhakar Varthak's solo skit served as a reminder of Mahatma Gandhi's powerful message of truth and nonviolence.

In his inimitable style, the Pune-based trainer quoted Gandhi and a Japanese proverb to convey the importance of the customer to the audience comprising business leaders from various parts of India and the world.

"Let's convert enemies into friends by loving them; we should spread love among all living creatures," he asserted, while indicating that the stick symbolises support.

"Love all," he proclaimed, while sharing with the listeners the adage: "*vasudhaiva kutumbakam* – the world is one family!"





D. Prasanna shared his experiences of dealing with tough situations in an ethical manner

Can a Business Be Built Ethically?

“Integrity and ethics should be in both letter and spirit,” emphasized Mr D. Prasanna, Founder CEO of Wipro GE Medical Systems, at the post-dinner session on the second day of the international conference on the theme ‘Sustaining Business through Integrity and Trust’ at Asia Plateau, Panchgani, Maharashtra, India.

Referring to the hurdles that he and his team faced in the initial years of the medical technology joint venture, Mr Prasanna shared with delegates several anecdotes of navigating a host of challenges: high customs duty and rampant corruption, the technical hindrance in installing a powerful MRI, the transportation hurdles and the logistics nightmare on another occasion, the setting up of a temporary replacement machine free of cost at a government-run hospital, entering smaller cities and towns with scanners, and providing finance and training to smaller enterprises.

“We shut the easy options so that the team could think innovatively how to win bids,” he told the audience. “We asked ourselves: Can we do market segmentation by ethics? Can we choose companies with leaders who are ethical?”

The target was hospitals that had a transparent process for procurement.

The rewards came when customers started trusting these technical solutions. “If you cannot succeed without playing by the rules of current players, you have to create a new segment,” he said, while underlining the importance of innovation.

“Nothing is impossible technically” must be the attitude of the leadership, the Bengaluru-based author of *Innovate Locally to Play Globally* maintained.

To a question on the source of motivation, he responded that in Asia, it is easier to leverage national pride. Benchmarking as best in the country, best in the world, and winning awards can help overcome the dominance of established competitors, the former Executive Chairperson of Manipal Education & Medical Group added.

Earlier, while introducing the speaker, Mr Vivek Asrani shared a vignette with the audience about Mr Prasanna’s previous visit to the IofC centre – for a training programme five decades ago!



Gratitude & Forgiveness

As the Sun rose in the eastern sky on Saturday, it was time for a solemn interaction facilitated by Mr Prabhakar Vartak in the shade of the expansive *champak* tree that occupies a pride of place in the garden overlooking Panchgani's famed Tableland.

The cold weather (with temperature hovering around 12-degree Celsius) did not deter the enthusiastic participants, who readied their pens and notebooks when asked to reflect on the following pointers:

1. Count our blessings today (using the tool of 'balance sheet') to study our lives.
2. Consider your life as a company and you as the CEO of the company. Aim of a company is to earn profit; for life, profit is happiness or satisfaction.
3. Let us list the names of those whom we have helped.
4. Let us think of all the people who helped us in our life without any expectation.

Following moments of silence and jottings in the notebook, it was time for an outpouring of emotions:

- ✓ Joy is in giving.
- ✓ There are names with whom we are not in touch today.
- ✓ Usual entry is mother.
- ✓ Giving part is empty since I do not remember it.
- ✓ List one makes us happy.
- ✓ Page one is endless.
- ✓ Taken is more and given is less. Feeling of gratitude!
- ✓ Unknown people give you blood.
- ✓ Unusual entry: taxi driver refused to take money for some food items.
- ✓ Non-human: divine power, trees, dogs, car ...
- ✓ Learning from Covid: livelihood is affordable, lifestyle is not.





Can we see if we can *give* more in life? While posing this question, the facilitator quipped: “In a way that increases our assets!”

Moving on to the topic of forgiveness, he urged the participants to remember the “names of people whom we have hurt or harmed, and names of people who have caused us hurt or harm.”

A deluge of emotional sharing followed:

- ✓ Guilt!
- ✓ I had no names.
- ✓ Sometimes we are not sensitive.
- ✓ We become aware of our ego.
- ✓ You are putting a rock on your shoulder by thinking about them.
- ✓ We could have avoided. I unnecessarily wasted time.
- ✓ Sometimes we learn from people who hurt us.

Mr Vartak then pointed out how anger, guilt and ego block happiness. It is important to understand that we may have been wrong in our expectations, he added.

Using the analogy of NPA (non-productive assets or any loan unpaid beyond a period), he referred to the harm caused by storing hurts.

Forgive and seek forgiveness, he recommended. “Hurt people hurt people! Healed people heal people!” he concluded.

Follow Your Heart

As delegates assembled for another session, Dr Amit Mukherjee followed up on Mr Prabhakar Vartak’s words from earlier in the morning. “We have just two teachers here – nature and silence,” he observed, while asking the participants to reflect on the following points:

- Nature and silence!
- In silence – do purposeful meditation.
- Ingredients of joy are happiness, success and health.
- The mask syndrome: as a boss, as a family member, as a friend!



Amit Mukherjee



Gordon Robinson, former MD, Timken India Ltd, Kent, England, shared his views

- The challenges that we face: temptations, greed for more, lust for power and popularity over others.
- Do we have the passion to change all this?
- Do we have those leadership qualities?
- Leaders have qualities for which others respect them.
- Purity of purpose, honesty of character, unselfish behaviour, love for all.
- We start to live for others.
- Connection, correction, direction!
- All truth is within us.
- Do we look for joy in everything that we do?
- What is the purpose of my life? What do we live for?
- Give back to society.



Mayur Vora

Mr Mayur Vora, MD of Mapro Foods, Panchgani, mentioned the policy of no punishment for making a mistake. Sharing his experience, Mr Ponnuswamy Chandrashekar, Founder Director, Crescentia Strategists Inc., Mumbai, spoke about helping companies to transform and avoiding loss of jobs.



Prabhakar Kamath conducted an interactive exercise



Going beyond Compliance

For Mr Sunil Mathur, it was a homecoming of sorts. Having spent a significant part of his childhood at AP, where his parents were based, the Mumbai-based MD & CEO of Siemens Ltd, India, fondly recalled his long association with the IofC centre.

“We have to define values, and be clear on what do we believe,” he said. “The underlying system is critical.”

At the outset, Ms Rashida Baker Asrani, MD, Indo Italian Furniture Co. Pvt. Ltd, Mumbai, introduced Mr Mathur and Mr Vickers.

Building Trust, Creating Value

Citing a Deloitte survey, the India chief of the Germany-headquartered conglomerate stated that 94% of global boards consider 'trust' as the most important ingredient for proper functioning of their organisations.

Trust is becoming one of the most critical factors for receiving finance from banks, Mr Mathur added.

“Relationships can be maintained only through trust and integrity. People join a company based on brand value and often leave because of bad relationship with their managers. You feel comfortable losing control if you trust the people you work with,” he said.

“Tone from the top is critical. They may not understand what leaders do but they trust. Trust is earned every minute, every hour,” he added.

Pointing out that the world is going through unprecedented technological changes and digitalisation is changing the way we work and live, he stated that technology is central to what Siemens does.

“Change starts with each one of us.”
—Sunil Mathur

“Digitalisation is no longer about my department. It runs across all barriers; it breaks down silos,” he said, while adding, “Digitalisation means collaboration.”



Rashida Baker Asrani

“Use technology as a tool to build trust,” he suggested. “Technology with purpose that answers the needs of the society!”

Caring for the Planet

Referring to diversity, equity and inclusiveness, he stated that the company’s target is to have 30% of leadership positions filled by women. There is no compromise on integrity, ethics, diversity or decarbonisation, he declared, while adding that ethics and compliance go beyond rules and regulation. According to Mr Mathur, the target is ‘net zero’ by 2030 for all Siemens operations.

“I will always trust and sometimes rather be deceived than being non-trusting all the time,” Mr Vickers said, while adding that it is never too late to start on the path of trust and integrity until it becomes a bedrock.

“Trust is never gained, it is never one-sided, but it is a two-way street; one needs to work on building it constantly,” he continued, while listing the following key ingredients for building trust and integrity:

1. Being honest
2. Trusting others
3. People matter (showing them through actions)

During the interaction that followed, a delegate noted that large companies are talking about trust in their technology. “Trust and integrity” are mandatory for suppliers, another participant added.

When a participant enquired whether SMEs can really benefit from digitalisation, the panel responded with real-life use cases.

Mr Prasanna underlined the importance of customer’s trust.



Sunil Mathur



Peter Vickers

“This is a call to action for each of us to prioritise the 3Ps – planet, people and purpose – to strike a delicate balance between the three and be recognised as reliable institutions. This is as much about investing in procuring a social licence of sorts as it is about making more conscious choices – to focus on sustainable processes, materials and practices. This is not just about meeting regulatory requirements but also meeting societal expectations.” —Sanjeev Krishnan, Chairperson, PwC India (Excerpt from an article circulated during the ICB conference. Source: ET Prime, The Economic Times, December 2, 2023)



Tapan Parekh (left) moderated a session with Rajmohan Gandhi

Trust Building & Reconciliation

The mid-morning session on Saturday saw Mr Tapan Parekh, Founder, Dot Solutions, Mumbai, engaging in a scintillating conversation with Prof. Rajmohan Gandhi. While he adopted an interview format initially, a free-flowing interaction followed subsequently with the author, historian and former professor who has spent six decades of efforts towards trust-building and reconciliation and in battles against corruption and inequalities.

Drawing from his long association (since 1956) with IofC, Mr Gandhi, now 88, reminisced the people from different walks of life and backgrounds who contributed to the work and the centre, and the significant milestones related to IofC India and AP. He also referred to the 'March on Wheels' that was undertaken 60 years ago from Kanyakumari to Delhi.



“We should not be satisfied anymore with what we built here,” said the former Chairperson of IofC International, calling upon those present to initiate a real upgrade of the centre.

“I should listen more to my wife and women in the family and talk less,” is a common refrain among thousands of people who come to AP, he pointed out, while adding that the place has played a role in softening hierarchies, empowering and respecting women.

“I know my fellow humans much better than before” and “I’m not as knowledgeable as I thought I was” have been other usual expressions.

Many have resolved towards restitution with family members, relatives and colleagues, he said, adding that the place promotes deeper and more meaningful interactions. “The world has walked into my heart,” said a participant. In addition, more businesses have become harmonious and profitable.

“India is no longer the only home for its people. The world is the new home for Indian people,” he said. When asked about his grandfather Mohandas Gandhi’s visits to Panchgani, the biographer mentioned how Gandhi wrote important letters during India’s freedom movement from the hilly town in the Western Ghats.

“Leadership above all is service and not power, money or gold,” said the former member of the Rajya Sabha (upper house of Indian Parliament). In response to a question, he said that until the end of last century, everybody believed in democracy. And now in different parts of the world, supremacy instead of democracy is gaining importance. There is a strong desire of a strong leader among the supremacy groups.

He urged everyone to go through the ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’.



Zacharia Muturi Karimi





Peter Vickers and Amit Mukherjee facilitated the interaction in Australia Room

How Do You Build Trust with Customers?

Two groups, two venues, two moderators and one theme: ‘How to build trust with customers and suppliers’. While the parallel round table sessions held on Friday focused on *employees*, it was the turn of *customers and suppliers* on Saturday.

Among the points that were raised:

- In education and training, customer can be a student, teacher, or parent. There are huge responsibilities and dependency on us as they do not want to take the ownership of working hard for getting a job. Their understanding is that they are paying money and that is the end of their contribution.
- From an organisation that adheres to all the rules, customers expect lower prices compared with the ones that do not follow the rules and regulation.
- After making a deal, suddenly customers back off.
- Sometimes, customers are too demanding, and our staff members do not know how to handle them.
- When there is a problem, we can become a punching bag for the customer's higher management even when it is not our fault.
- There is lack of trust in the automotive industry and so there are unusual negotiations and delivery issues.
- There are several customers who want to save on taxes by paying in cash which causes us to lose orders. Also, in furniture business, everyone provides huge discounts just for the sake of attracting customers as it does not make any difference to their profits. Therefore, customers compare and expect such discounts everywhere.
- For doctors, patients are not able to trust them as it is more of a business nowadays and people are losing their trust in doctors.
- We face issues when customers do not pay us on time.



K. Haridas (left) with Antoine Jaulmes, Convenor, IofC Business & Economy Programme; former Director, Global LCV and R&D Platform, PSA Peugeot Citroen Groupe, Vélizy, France

Among the solutions that were offered:

- ✓ Be transparent.
- ✓ Provide shorter payment terms and observe if they pay on time.
- ✓ For doctors, I do not advise any unnecessary tests or medicines.
- ✓ We quote the right price always, not lower or higher, to build their trust.
- ✓ In education, vocational training for parents and teachers helps in guiding them about their contributions.
- ✓ For furniture business, we do not accept cash payments thus ending up losing a few customers rather than compromising on our values. We started to give decent discounts. Also, we are counselling customers through architects that no cash will be accepted by this company.

Meanwhile, the other group that assembled at the library witnessed vibrant discussion on the challenges faced in building trust with customers and suppliers:

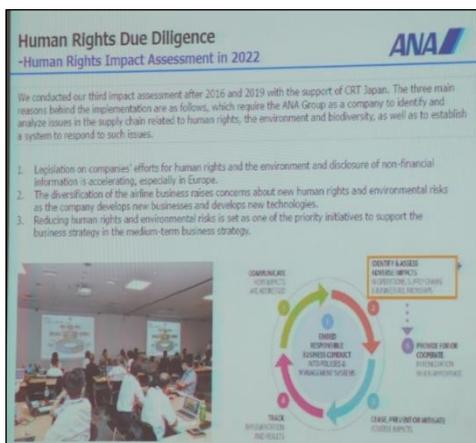
- Rigid software used by customers and distributors.
- Perception of win-lose!
- Too much emphasis on business growth and not relationship and sometimes the other way round.
- Agree with customers on credit term but use relationship to delay payment.
- Stretching of credit.
- Rural market picking up; how to manage the rural customer.
- Customer's supply chain and supply chain's supply chain!
- Supplier reducing board and not informing; hence issue with an MNC.
- We do innovation but PSUs are at the same level.
- Feedback mechanism has become lower. No acknowledgement by vendor of change in specifications.
- NGO customers are communities. Since there are different communities, how do we gain trust?



- People at the lower level may not have the same level of commitment.
- Packaging is a big issue from the supplier's side.
- The COO says there is a problem in the warehouse.
- ESG compliance without cost increase.
- A company develops dealers, but they also sell other products.
- Customers are the 'Board of Directors'; they may ask anything. Supplier is 'Assessors.'

Among the solutions that were offered:

- ✓ Customer works with supplier.
- ✓ They treated us better than we deserved, so I do more.
- ✓ Customer having empathy!
- ✓ If they are not happy with me, they need not pay.
- ✓ Clearly write the limitations of our system.
- ✓ Be clear of what we can do and what we cannot do.
- ✓ Continue service as a support even if the customer does not pay.
- ✓ Go directly to the ground level.
- ✓ Senior managers themselves go to meet suppliers rather than send SCM heads.
- ✓ When having a conversation, do not badmouth your customer.
- ✓ Treat suppliers with respect.
- ✓ People always buy people's trust than the company. After that the brand!
- ✓ Do not ask for a price reduction but for a cost reduction.



Yoko Kubo (right), Senior Director, Corporate Sustainability, ANA Holdings, Inc., spoke at a session that provided insights into the work of CRT (Caux Round Table) Japan in supporting Japanese companies to meet the new international laws and regulations on human rights and on corporate sustainability.



Since Thursday evening, Asia Plateau resembled a global village. A memorable show brought down the curtains on Saturday on the eve of the concluding session of the ICB conference. After a sumptuous dinner in the adjoining dining hall, around 80 people from different parts of India and abroad assembled in the Foyer for the Talent Nite. As ‘the sound of music’ echoed in the corridors, a series of performances enthralled all present.

World in the Centre

Ajatsatru’s fun routine got the spectators on their feet, broke inhibitions and acted as an ice breaker. The Gurgaon-based educator, facilitator, counsellor and mentor kept everyone busy for several minutes. The show was held together as emcee by Vadodara-based life coach and program coordinator Ripal Desai.





The team from Caux gifted a Swiss cuckoo clock to AP. It was handed over to the centre’s director, Siddharth Singh, after the enactment of a beautiful yarn by the Swiss guests.





From devotional and retro Hindi songs to Gujarati Garba to the Japanese dance to the Kenyan Tango to the British 'seasons' skit, it was fun and camaraderie all the way.





Inner Governance

As delegates assembled for another session after breakfast, the following lines from a song struck a chord:

Faith is simple as day and watchful as night
There is light enough to see
Light enough to see
The next step, the next step is right

Dr Amit Mukherjee termed some thoughts as NPA (non-performing assets) that add no meaning to our lives and can be sorted or cleared through a simple apology or by having a heart to forgive someone. The former Director of FPAI Hospital prescribed listening to the heart rather than the mind. "This helps us to become ethical leaders." Quoting the *Rig Veda*, he affirmed, "When we do the right thing with passion, all the forces of the Universe conspire to make it happen."

Dr Mukherjee shared his experience of being able to raise Rs 8 million for people stranded in an island in India that was devastated by floods. Moreover, he could help build a centre there that provides education, skill training and support to farming, thereby restoring the livelihood of around 6,000 residents. The land was provided by a tribal person despite the prevalent belief that a tribal man never gives his water, land or forest to anyone ever.

During an exercise conducted by Dr Prabhakar Kamath, a Japanese delegate announced that he wanted to set up 1,000 biogas plants in India.

Other declarations from participants included:

- I will plant a thousand trees.
- I will be humbler while interacting with my customers and colleagues.
- I pledge to do the right thing.

- I will be empathetic to all and spend 30 minutes daily to talk to myself.
- I will not just hear my wife but will *listen* to her.
- I will try to be pure in all my intentions.
- I will try to walk in other people's shoes and not be judgemental.
- As a refugee, I will work on building relationship between host and home communities.

According to Dr Kamath, "Possession of anything in excess of what we need is a theft against nature."







ICB Co-Chairs Peter Vickers and Vivek Asrani anchored the final session on Sunday

Where Do We Go from Here?

Glimpses of the concluding session

It was adieu time on Sunday. Amid emotional moments, it was the hour for concluding remarks from Co-Chairs Peter Vickers and Vivek Asrani and words of gratitude on behalf of the organisers by Mr Luis Gomes and Dr Amit Mukherjee.

Setting the tone, Mr Asrani said, “This final concluding session is really a time to reflect on what you have experienced, heard, said, thought about over the past few days.” He prodded the participants to think about a personal decision they had taken (which they will implement) and the one takeaway from the experience over the past few days. He then invited Mr Vickers to summarize his observations.

Reminding the audience about the three questions raised by Prof. Rajagopalan during the opening session, Mr Vickers recollected how the speaker had predicted that “trust, integrity and environmental sustainability would come together.”

“That was clearly illustrated during Sunil Mathur's talk ... not only having more rigorous internal control processes but also acceleration of commitment to net zero and all the sustainability programmes,” Mr Vickers explained.

Referring to Mr T. V. Narendran's words, Mr Vickers recalled how Mr Tata had said that “the community was not just a stakeholder, it was the purpose of our organization.” He quoted the keynote speaker to say that “the general public can build trust and have trust in the private sector but also that the private sector itself has trust in each other.”

“Yano San gave us a couple of wonderful quotes from Confucius I found that a terribly encouraging thought and equally encouraging that talent follows virtue and I think we're seeing that ...” Mr Vickers added.

“Matsumura San of Ichimaru talked about the company philosophy of happy to be of service to customers, to society and to employees – a very simple but very profound idea: happy to be of service!”

“Haridas talked about experience being the highest form of knowledge; that's certainly true for myself ... when you start with yourself you don't start by blaming others and that taking action is what transforms you. It's not just the ideas in your head or even something in your heart, it's when you actually practise it,” Mr Vickers observed.

Referring to the round table in small groups, he revealed that “in ours we had really lengthy, quite difficult, conversations about building trust with employees, but the session about building trust with customers went much more quickly. It seemed as though we had all found it easier to sort out problems with customers, if necessary, by letting them go than it was to sort out issues of trust with employees.”

Recalling the interactive session with Mr Rajmohan Gandhi, Mr Vickers highlighted the “three things that for him have most often happened here [at AP] over the years: people talk less and listen more ... the world walks into my heart; our vision, our sense of responsibility, our openness expands ... trust is created, restored and deepened.” He then placed the following questions before the audience:

1. Am I part of the problem or part of the solution?
2. What have I done with my life so far?
3. What shall I do with the rest of my life?

He then suggested a few minutes of quiet wherein the participants could reflect on everything that they had heard, not just what he said, hoping that it may prompt some memories on the things that have meant most from the last few days.





Following up on Mr Asrani's suggestion, he asked the participants to think about two points: "your personal decision and also what you'll take away in terms of your business or working life." He then outlined simple norms for sharing one's thoughts with neighbours seated in the hall.

The following were among the words shared by the participants:

- I do want to serve in some ways ... we'd love to come and work with Grampari, but I don't know ... because I'll be retiring in a year's time.
- Taking away the concept of quiet time.
- Following a sequence of connection, correction and then giving direction.
- Integrity will bring the trust in the team.
- Set the example, lead by example; so, not to just tell team do this do that but start doing this; team will automatically follow you.
- This message of integrity and trust needs to be spread.
- To be more conscious about my actions and also do things with more conviction.
- There are no shortcuts in life; that's my one comprehension.
- What I've really taken away is to think more with my heart and less with my head ... I've been an engineer all my life and I think it has sometimes perhaps limited me, because I've always done good things, but I'm fascinated by this movement from good things to great things
- I think my new year is just starting now; because I thought first of January I reset it my mind but never happened and then there were a lot of things happening as a baggage of last year. Today, I feel much lighter. I feel I'm going to start afresh after going from here, using the power of silence, me time, self-time, hearing people more, being more humble!

The facilitators invited the audience to other IofC programmes.

They provided an outline of the educators programme: "So, if you really think that investing in education is an important part of transferring these ideas to the younger people, then the educators are doing it already; be part of them. And you do not need to be an educator yourself to be part of that. I am part of that, I am not an educator myself. So, these are teachers, these are school management people, these are principals, vice-principals, and there is a group for the students also."

SIGHTS & SOUNDS

- ✓ *On Saturday, before sunset, several visitors walked to the premises of Grampari, the rural and ecological centre in the eastern periphery of the Asia Plateau campus. They were delighted to see the facilities, interact with trainees and volunteers, and buy home-made food items and handicrafts.*
- ✓ *Dining hall conversations among visitors and residents were an integral part of the proceedings.*
- ✓ *On Sunday morning, participants set in a circle at Daw Nyein Tha (Mami) Room for multi-faith prayers.*

Attending the 'Open House' was another option. "Anybody who feels committed, anybody who feels that they have a part in trying to imbibe these and transfer these, are welcome to come here ... these are normally shorter ... two days, three days."

"Grampari, the rural and ecology centre, has got basic facilities but the people there are very sincere in what they are doing. They do it with their heart. So, we invite all of you, any of you who have a particular interest in agriculture or in the rural aspect of your countries, please come and be a part of Grampari."

"The younger group today, inspired by these ideas, are travelling all over the country, trying to impart what they have learnt in their lives and how they can enrol others to do similar things in their own lives, starting from the villages, starting from institutions, starting from even government schools, colleges - everywhere that they are invited."

With this introduction, Mr Himanshu Bharat of Lucknow was invited to describe the work of 'Ek Naitik Bharat'.

Explaining the movement's objective, he said, "When we hate, it creates hates in other's hearts. So, we thought how we can strategically create love in our hearts. Our aim is to create a peaceful and lovable leadership with this idea of inner listening. We have covered eight or nine states and also more than 20,000 people."

Citing the work done in Vidisha district, he told the audience how the Ek Naitik Bharat team was creating 200 changemakers there. During the cycle yatra (tour), the problems are assessed. One significant

impact was when 400 households that were awaiting electricity for more than 10 years got electricity. And also got drinking water hand pumps.

Towards the end of the proceedings, Dr Mukherjee expressed gratitude to the organizers, participants, sponsors and all others who contributed towards the successful conduct of the conference.

At the outset, he thanked Mr Luis Gomes and his secretariat, including Ms Ishika Mukherjee, Ms Ripal Desai and Mr David Sharon, who "have been working day and night for so many days to tie up all the loose ends."

Turning to the audience, he said, "Without the delegates, without all of you, this would be purposeless ... you have taken time out from your work, from whatever you



Luis Gomes

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are doing, and you have decided to come here and share your time and your experience with all of us.” ... it is so easy to integrate and forget that we are separate. So, our home address may be different, but we are all part of one big family. So, thank you, all of you for being with us.”

The speaker thanked the co-sponsors (Tata Steel, Siemens, NTTF, Maini Group and Forbes Marshall), the supporting partner (ARaymond) and all the supporters (Datwyler, FIE, GRP, Kaymo Fastener and a well-wisher). He also thanked those who had contributed through advertisements in the *eSpirit* journal.

Applauding Mr Vickers and Mr Asrani, he said, “The co-chairs have hogged all the limelight, but what they have brought to the table is amazing, not only with the personal sharing of their experiences, but the way they have conceived the whole conference and made it happen in that way.”

He thanked all the volunteers working in the background, including Mr Ajatsatru and Mr S. Venkatesh, and complimented the entire Asia Plateau team, including those running the kitchen and coordinating the audio-visual facility.

In his concluding remarks, Mr Asrani reserved the biggest compliments for Mr Sarosh Ghandy, who could not be present in person. “None of this would have been possible without Sarosh's guidance – the phone calls he would make, the messages he would send, the planning he would be involved with!”



Go, go with an answer – the lines of the song sounded an apt conclusion of the conference
 [... Go, go with an answer/ Run faster than you've run/ Throw away your burdens, you won't need them any more./ Go with an answer./ Do things you've never done before ...]

“Getting to meet and interact with people who have succeeded in conducting their businesses ethically; hearing stories of success and failure and being able to engage with those who have faced and overcome similar challenges is not only desirable but essential to give one the courage and resilience to face one’s own obstacles in the life of a business.” —Sarosh Ghandy, Chairperson, ICB



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