

FIRESIDE CHAT & COFFEE TIME DIARIES WITH

# MR. DEEPAK MATHUR

IEEE VICE PRESIDENT MGA



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## **FIRESIDE CHAT & COFFEE TIME DIARIES FEATURING MR. DEEPAK MATHUR, IEEE VICE PRESIDENT MGA**

Mr. Deepak Mathur is a distinguished leader within the IEEE community, currently serving as the Vice President of Member and Geographic Activities (MGA). His journey within IEEE has been marked by several pivotal roles, showcasing his commitment to advancing technology and fostering community engagement. Previously, Deepak held the position of Director for IEEE Region 10 from 2021 to 2022, following his tenure as Director-Elect from 2019 to 2020. He has also served as Chairperson of the IEEE India Council, leaving an indelible mark during his term in 2015-2016. Earlier in his career, Deepak Mathur contributed significantly as Chairman of the IEEE Gujarat section from 2006 to 2007, where he laid the groundwork for impactful initiatives in the region. Through his leadership and dedication, Deepak continues to shape the future of IEEE's global initiatives, emphasizing innovation, collaboration, and technological advancement.

### **1. What inspired you to pursue a career in engineering and become actively involved in IEEE?**

As a young child, I was very interested in mathematics, and when it came to deciding on a career, it played a very important role. Being good at science and engineering, I decided to pursue engineering. Of course, my parents also assisted me in choosing my career and I joined IIT Roorkee and selected the Electronics and Communication branch, which was quite promising at that time and still is today.

Regarding my involvement with IEEE, I was introduced to it by one of my colleagues. I became a member of IEEE because, even as students, we knew how much IEEE contributed to technical advancement and wanted to be a part of it. I remember going to the library to read different IEEE journals, which was quite interesting, though I was not really aware of the IEEE volunteer activities at that time.

### **2. Could you share some key highlights of your journey from being a member to holding leadership positions within IEEE?**

Before I talk about my journey, let me emphasize an important aspect of life: sincerity. Whatever one does, one needs to be sincere. Having said that, when I was introduced to a volunteer position in my section, the Gujarat section, I got the opportunity to work sincerely.

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Consequently, my section chair at that time noticed my dedicated volunteer approach and introduced me to one of the region committees. As I attended region committee meetings on his behalf, I saw the way professionals were participating, interacting, and networking and was amazed by it. It inspired me to continue as a volunteer. I served as the secretary of my section, and just three years later, I had the opportunity to serve as the chair. I also had the chance to serve in the India Council in several roles and was eventually elected to chair the council. I was also elected to be the vice president of the MGA and would like to thank each one of you for the faith and trust you had in me and that you elected me to the said position.

I have never looked back since I got my first volunteer position in my section and today, I am serving as the Vice President of MGA and a member of the IEEE Board. This, in a nutshell, is my journey. It was a roller coaster ride with several challenges and opportunities. We turned challenges into opportunities, resulting in many success stories. We also learned a lot in the process and I would convey that we ought to learn more from our failed efforts than from our successful ones.

I want to emphasize that even a small section volunteer like myself can rise to become a region director and eventually a Vice President. You all have the capability to reach that level too so do believe in yourself. To achieve this, you just need to be sincere and dedicated in your efforts.

### **3. As someone with extensive experience in IEEE governance, what do you believe are the most pressing challenges facing the organization today?**

First of all, I would like to tell you all that IEEE is a growing organization, and you should all be proud of that since the organization is thriving because of its dedicated volunteers. The fact that we are organizing and sponsoring more than 2,000 conferences and have over 6 million documents in our digital library demonstrates that IEEE is a growing organization. However, we do face challenges.

If I had to single out one major challenge for IEEE, it would be retaining our student members. There are two important aspects we need to focus on. Firstly, member engagement—whether you can utilize the member engagement programs of IEEE. Secondly, awareness of resources—whether you are truly aware of the resources provided by IEEE. IEEE offers a plethora of resources, and [ieee.org](http://ieee.org) is the right place to explore how these resources can benefit one's professional, technical, and career advancement.

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Our challenge lies in student retention, and it's crucial to be aware that IEEE provides numerous opportunities. These include various programs, activities, and leadership roles. Many of you are already in some form of leadership role provided by IEEE. IEEE offers you the chance to create opportunities and design your own programs, be it at the section level or the student branch level. For example, if you are passionate about embedded systems, which might not be part of your curriculum, you can use the IEEE platform to design and organize your program. This allows you to learn from it. Thus, IEEE provides many opportunities for your development, and it's up to you to take advantage of them.

**4. You have witnessed numerous opportunities being transformed into meaningful efforts and impacts. Drawing from your experience, could you provide suggestions on how we can make our programs more impactful and contribute to society as a whole, as a team?**

I want to emphasize that IEEE offers opportunities to create opportunities. Whether you are a student or a young professional, it's up to you to decide what kind of program you want from IEEE. It can be a platform to learn leadership skills. For example, if you believe leadership skills are needed among members, you can organize a leadership program. Similarly, if there's a need to learn about writing technical papers, IEEE provides a platform for that too. You can design the program and seek out speakers with the help of senior members in your section.

If you are passionate about serving humanity or underserved communities, IEEE has excellent programs where you can create initiatives at your organizational unit level. For instance, if you are part of a student branch or a section, you can always initiate such programs. However, the key is taking initiative and leading efforts, and IEEE will support you at every step.

**5. In your opinion, what are the most important initiatives that IEEE should focus on to remain relevant in the rapidly evolving landscape of technology?**

It's important to note that IEEE is a trusted source of information in the field of technology. Through the dedication of our volunteers and various conferences, we continually receive and update research papers in our technical library. With 39 technical societies contributing significantly to the advancement of technology, IEEE plays a pivotal role in this domain.



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Additionally, we are actively engaged in envisioning IEEE in 2050, collaborating with futurists to chart the course forward. We have a strategic plan in place up to 2025, and preparations are underway for its refresh next year, along with discussions for our 2030 strategic plan. Climate change is a key focus area, and our Future Directions Committee plays a vital role in identifying and establishing technologies as formal initiatives within IEEE. Thus, IEEE remains committed to advancing technology on multiple fronts, ensuring its continued leadership in the technological landscape.

## **6. As the Vice President of Member and Geographic Activities (MGA), what are your primary responsibilities and goals for this role?**

Let me begin by discussing MGA's goals, which are aligned with IEEE's mission and vision. Our main objectives are increased member engagement and membership growth. It's crucial to understand that our focus is not just on expanding membership numbers, but on ensuring that our members are actively engaged. Engagement is key—if members find our offerings relevant, growth naturally follows.

Another focus area for MGA is fostering relationships among members and collaborating with other IEEE organizational units, such as the Technical Activities Board and Educational Activities. We also collaborate closely with IEEE standards. MGA supports and encourages local units like sections, chapters, and student branches, aiming to enhance operational efficiency and effectiveness.

As the Vice President of Member and Geographic Activities and Chair of the Member and Geographic Activities Board, I am responsible for developing a long-range strategy for MGA. Over the next three years, our strategic priorities include enhancing member retention, especially ensuring active student members transition smoothly to young professionals. Many may not realize how IEEE can support them in their careers after graduation, and it's our responsibility as volunteers to educate them on IEEE's lifelong benefits.

Another critical focus is developing volunteers for succession planning. IEEE is a volunteer-led organization, and it's essential to prepare future leaders at all levels—from sections to regions. Diversity is also a priority; beyond gender diversity, we emphasize diverse perspectives and expertise in committees to ensure comprehensive representation and innovative ideas.

In 2024, we are concentrating on these three pillars: member retention, volunteer development, and diversity. It's important to note that diversity includes not only demographic diversity but also diversity of ideas and practices, essential for robust decision-making.

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Lastly, it's crucial to think globally and act locally in our initiatives. India, for instance, presents unique challenges and opportunities across its diverse sections. Customizing programs to local needs ensures relevance and effectiveness.

**7. Are there IEEE resources such as scholarships, mentorship opportunities, or connections with PhD scholars available for graduate student members who wish to pursue higher education abroad?**

The resources available to one may depend upon their field of study or interest. For instance, if you're pursuing signal processing, the Signal Processing Society offers scholarships, such as \$7,000 spread over three years for eligible student members. Various IEEE societies have similar schemes that benefit their members, but it's essential to explore and stay informed. Awareness of IEEE resources is crucial, whether you're a volunteer or not. So, you must take the initiative to research which technical societies are relevant to your field and what they offer in terms of scholarships and resources. It's up to you to discover these opportunities and make the most of them.

**8. Could you please provide information on the plans for 2024 by the MGA? How is the MGA board planning to leverage VoLT graduates?**

As we know, 2024 is still ongoing, and we are making many decisions and creating action plans. Committees like Membership Development, Geographic Unit Operations, and Information Management are actively engaged in this process. Special committees for Young Professionals (YP) and Women in Engineering (WiE) are also operational, with calls for nominations and proposals ongoing.

We are currently revisiting these committees to enhance member engagement, as discussed earlier. These efforts will culminate by the end of the year.

As for the latter question, when a VoLT graduate is about to graduate, notifications are sent to section chairs and regional leadership and it is up to their discretion to appoint them to any suitable leadership position. Alternatively, the graduates may also reach out to the section leadership with areas of interest where they can volunteer efficiently and effectively. Thus, there exists no direct appointment of VoLT graduates to any committee, though they do have an edge over other volunteers.

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**9. How do you see the role of IEEE in fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange among professionals from different geographic regions and technical fields?**

As you know, IEEE is organized into 10 regions, with each region having sections, which in turn have student branches, technical societies, chapters, and affinity groups. These organizational units at all levels provide ample opportunities for collaboration and knowledge exchange. They also give you the flexibility to organize your programs and conferences and to participate in various calls for proposals from regions.

For example, if you're part of a student branch, your section may already be engaged in such activities. Sections, chapters, and student branches are excellent platforms for networking and collaboration.

**10. Could you discuss some of the strategies you have implemented to promote diversity and inclusion in the IEEE, particularly in terms of membership and leadership opportunities?**

This might be a repeated answer but I want to emphasize the importance of diversity, not just in terms of gender but in broader aspects as well. Let me share an example that might offer a different perspective.

In 2021 and 2022, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many of our activities transitioned from offline to online. One significant event is the Students, Young Professionals, Women in Engineering, and Life Members (SYWL) Congress, organized by Region 10 every two years. Previously, it was held in Bali, then virtually, and most recently in Jeju, Korea.

If we don't pay attention to diversity, there's a risk that these kinds of events could repeatedly occur in similar or familiar locations. For example, without considering diversity, the SYWL Congress might consistently be held in South Asia or India due to several factors like ease of organization, competitive rates, and a large pool of volunteers.

However, by choosing to host the event in Jeju, Korea, we not only diversified the location but also provided an opportunity to develop volunteers in a different locality. This exposure allows local volunteers to learn how the SYWL Congress is organized and get motivated by participating in such a significant event.

Diversity is crucial and must be considered from various angles, including the geographic location of our events.

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**11. What are some key initiatives or programs that you've championed during your tenure as Director of Region 10, and what impact do you hope they will have?**

As Region 10 Director, I found the role incredibly fulfilling among all my volunteer leadership roles. I focused on delegating and empowering our volunteer leaders, and I'm proud to say that all my committee chairs rose to the challenge and performed excellently. This was particularly noteworthy given the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite the difficulties, our Young Professionals team, Students team, and Women in Engineering team excelled in their efforts. One key initiative we launched during this time was the "Region 10 Talk" program in 2021. We recognized that while we were organizing numerous programs, we were not leveraging our technical societies enough. Hence, the Region 10 Talk aimed to bring technical experts to our members by collaborating with technical society presidents, division directors, and a broad range of technical experts. This program continues to run and remains highly sought after and educational.

Another significant initiative was the introduction of a robotics competition. Despite Region 10's vibrancy and activity, we had been missing this crucial member engagement program. We launched the robotics competition, inviting all student branches to participate. Now in its third year, the competition has become a staple event. This year, it will be held alongside the SYWL Congress in Tokyo, following last year's successful event in Bangkok.

These two programs—Region 10 Talk and the robotics competition—stand out as significant initiatives that Region 10 started and continue to thrive, demonstrating our commitment to member engagement and technical excellence.

**12. What advice would you give to young professionals and students who are interested in getting involved in IEEE and aspiring to leadership positions within the organization?**

Let me share a story told to me by a student, which illustrates an important point. The student said that if you want to gain knowledge, merely standing in front of a library won't help. To acquire knowledge, you need to go inside the library, find the section relevant to your interests, select the right book, open it, and read it. Only then will you gain knowledge. Similarly, just becoming an IEEE member won't serve the purpose. IEEE offers a wealth of information, resources, and opportunities, but you must actively seek them out. You need to understand IEEE and leverage these resources to your advantage.



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I've made one point clear through this example, and now I want to emphasize another. IEEE is a wonderful organization that offers tremendous opportunities right from the day you join as a student member. As soon as you become a student member, you have the chance to take on leadership roles. You can become a member of your section, chapter, or student branch committee. This is a huge responsibility and a fantastic opportunity to grow. You can start as a secretary, then move on to become vice-chair, and eventually chair of your student branch.

If you are dedicated and recognized for your efforts, you can even represent your region as a student representative. You will be part of the regional committee, representing the student voice, which is a significant opportunity.

After you graduate and become a young professional, IEEE continues to offer growth opportunities. You can be part of the Young Professionals (YP) affinity group, taking on roles such as secretary, vice-chair, or chair. Your work can be recognized internationally for your volunteer efforts.

There are countless opportunities, but one word of caution: you need to have patience. This is a journey. IEEE volunteer roles, leadership roles, and activities are part of a lifelong journey, not a destination. It requires a long-term commitment. Starting from being a student member, you can continue this journey to becoming a life member. Along the way, you will have many roles and leadership opportunities.

For young professionals, if you are dedicated, committed, and recognized, you can serve on regional committees, be an ambassador for various IEEE programs, and even participate in IEEE Young Professional committees. In a nutshell, if you have patience, sincerity, and dedication, you are all set to rise from a small role as a student to potentially becoming the IEEE president. Challenges will come, but you must embrace them and keep moving forward.

### **13. We are hearing IEEE is going to re-align. We need to know from you about Region 10, is there any impact on Region 10?**

I believe all of us must understand the significant changes happening within IEEE. We are undertaking a major realignment of the regions, driven by the compelling need to manage the substantial growth of Region 10. The IEEE Constitution restricts us to a maximum of 10 regions unless amended, presenting a unique challenge in addressing this growth.

Region 10 has seen a remarkable increase in membership, making it the largest region. Conversely, some regions have only a fraction of Region 10's membership yet maintain the same level of representation on the board.

To address this imbalance, the IEEE Board has decided to merge Regions 1 and 2 in the USA into a single Region 2, effectively dissolving Region 1. Additionally, Region 10 will be split into two distinct regions: the new Region 10 will cover North Asia, including China, Japan, Korea, Macau, and Hong Kong, while the rest of South Asia and the Pacific will form Region 11. This realignment will take effect from January 1, 2028, and the process has already begun.

This restructuring brings a wealth of opportunities for all members. The split will result in two regional directors and two sets of regional committees, essentially doubling the leadership and volunteer roles available. It's essential for every member to prepare for and embrace these opportunities. Dedication, patience, and continued involvement in your sections and student branches will be key to progressing through IEEE's ranks. Leadership within IEEE is a journey, not a destination, and those who remain committed and patient will find themselves in positions of influence.

The poster features the IEEE logo at the top left, and logos for IEEE young professionals Education Society and IEEE Education Society at the top right. The main title is "Fireside Chat & Coffee Table Diaries". Below it, it says "With Mr. Deepak Mathur", who is identified as "IEEE Vice President MGA" and "Past Director (2021-2022) - IEEE Region 10". A circular inset shows the moderator, "Rajani Manchineela", with her title "Vice Chair, Professional Activities IEEE Education Society YP Ad Hoc Committee". The event date and time are "15th June 2024" at "08:00 PM IST" via "Google Meet". The website "ieee-edusociety.org" and social media handles are listed at the bottom.

The screenshot shows a Google Meet interface with two main video windows. The left window shows Mr. Deepak Mathur, and the right window shows Rajani Manchineela. Below the video windows is a grid of participant avatars, including Gaurav Pathak, SAI PRASHANT..., Abdul Halik M I, Sony's AI Notet..., Rajesh Yaddala..., Preethika Nallani, Diya Jose, 18 others, and IEEE Education... The bottom control bar shows the time as 20:05 and the meeting title "FireSide Chat & Coffee Time Diaries by Mr. Dee...".