



YEARS

DataLEADS' JOURNEY AT 10

FROM LOCAL BEGINNINGS TO GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

**TEN
YEARS,
ONE
MISSION,
MANY
VOICES**



Entrepreneurship And Leadership

AI & Technology

26	40	56	72
Arun Maira	Prof. Balaram Ravindran	Yuen-Ying Chan	Govindraj Ethiraj
28	42	58	74
Sasa Vucinic	Prof. Deepak Garg	Dr. Peter Hefele	Sudhakar Reddy Udumula
30	44	60	76
Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw	Prof. Mayank Vatsa, PhD	Pana Janviroj	Surya Gangadharan
32	46	62	78
Madan Padaki	Ludovic Blecher	Sunanda Rao Erdem	Nisha Bhamhani
34	48	64	80
Dominique Ben Dhaou	Abhishek Mohan Gupta	Ritu Kapur	Prof. Anubhuti Yadav
36	50	66	82
Anisha Padukone	Sheena Bhalla	Glenn Chong	Pratyush Ranjan
	52	68	84
	Dr. Umesh Arya	Guna Raj Luitel	Kanchan Kaur
			86
			Dr. Shilpi Jha

Collaboration

Information Resilience

Global Health

Community Building

90	104
Tina D Purnat	Eoghan Sweeney
92	106
Dr. Karan Thakur	Jayant Mammen Mathew
94	108
Paula Fray	Rajesh Upadhyay
96	110
Dr. Saleem Ur Rehman	Avijit Dutt
98	112
Satyajit Sarkar	Dr. DP Singh
100	114
Dr Cait McMahon	Subhra Priyadarshini
	116
	Dr. Simon Chauchard

04	Making of DataLEADS
08	DataLEADS' Journey: From Local Beginnings to Global Leadership
10	Team DataLEADS
16	Our Partners in Purpose

DATA
LEADS
CONTRIBUTORS

MAKING OF DataLEADS



SYED NAZAKAT

Founder & CEO, DataLEADS



DR. SABBA MEHMOOD

Co-Founder & Director, DataLEADS

We live in a world drowning in information. For the first time in human history, the world produces more information and data than any individual can meaningfully consume. This rising tide of information brings with it profound challenges but also new opportunities. It was against this shifting landscape, back in 2015, that DataLEADS sprang into existence—quietly, as an experiment to make sense of the world increasingly defined by data.

The signals had long been in the air. As a journalist trained to chase patterns and a doctor trained to analyse patterns, we found ourselves witnessing the digital transformation happening around the world. India, too, was on the cusp of transformation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had just taken office in 2014, and one of his first national campaigns was Digital India—a sweeping promise to leapfrog the nation into a digital future. We foresaw a future where there would be abundant data and new opportunities.

A physician and a reporter; two unlikely co-founders bound by a shared belief that data was more than numbers—it was meaning, power, and possibility. The question that fascinated us—quietly

but persistently—was: How do we make sense of this data? More importantly, how do we use it to empower people?".

That curiosity led to a conversation with Sabba—one that would mark the beginning of our journey. In the basement of a quiet suburban neighbourhood in Delhi, we began to weave a dream. When we founded DataLEADS in 2015, many of our students became our first team members. Their energy shaped what we would become: a dynamic organisation with global ambitions and a deeply local conscience.

Our first data boot camp took place in Srinagar, where we brought doctors, journalists, and data scientists into the same room and asked a radical question: what if doctors and storytellers could look at the world through the same evidence-based lens? In that dimly lit hall, a movement began to take shape.

The movement spread quickly. Data boot camps multiplied across Asia—Hong Kong, Malaysia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Taiwan, The Maldives, Bhutan and Singapore. From those humble beginnings, DataLEADS grew into something larger—a



The urgency of our work has never been greater. As AI rewrites the rules of our work and world, the challenge is no longer just collecting or reporting data—it's about helping people navigate it, understand it, and use it effectively and responsibly."

mothership: part interdisciplinary platform, part incubator, part global health information hub, part pan-Asia newsroom, part innovative lab, part training academy, and part think tank.

The road was never smooth. What sustained us, however, was a clear sense of direction—and the response we received along the way. People began to see and understand the value of what we were building. Step by step, conversation by conversation, breakthrough by breakthrough—we moved forward. And every time we did, progress showed up.

Over time, we embraced change, invested in new areas and developed approaches that transformed us into an enterprise of consequence. Along the way, we collaborated with government bodies; leading media houses; global organisations such as the UN, WHO, Google, Deutsche Welle, and GlaxoSmithKline; and renowned institutions including IIT Jodhpur, IIT Madras, and AVPN in Singapore—the largest network of social investors in Asia—together with many other remarkable partners.

We went on to build data-visualisation platforms,

digital media solutions, online verification, digital literacy and data training networks. We went on to establish a pan-Asia newsroom, lead India's largest newsroom collaboration, and create a health information platform. We also advised governments on AI and digital safety, while designing early-warning frameworks to help strengthen cybersecurity.

From two people in Delhi to a vibrant team spread across Asia, we've come a long way. None of it would have been possible without the incredible people of DataLEADS—the ones who show up every single day, not just with skill, but with heart, conviction, and passion for building a better future. We are proud, and deeply humbled, to be shaping the future alongside them.

The urgency of our work has never been greater. As AI rewrites the rules of our work and world, the challenge is no longer just collecting or reporting data—it's about helping people navigate it, understand it, and use it effectively and responsibly. At the heart of our work is a simple belief: when information is understood, when it is trusted, it becomes more than data. It becomes empowerment.



A DECADE OF TRUST, PARTNERSHIPS, AND SHARED GROWTH

SURBHI PANDIT NANGIA
Group Vice President, DataLEADS

When I first joined DataLEADS and stepped into the role of Partnerships and Outreach, I could scarcely have foreseen the profound impact this journey would have in reshaping me. What began as a professional responsibility soon became far more meaningful — an odyssey of learning, of building communities, and of growing alongside some of the most supportive people and partners I have come across. Reflecting upon this decade, what stands out most vividly is not just the accomplishments or milestones, but the cherished bonds we fostered along the way.

Our vision was simple yet ambitious: to empower people with information, technology, and skills that build trust and drive impact. What brought this vision to life were the partners who shared our values and believed in the path we stepped on. With their support, we ventured into new domains — from health information platforms and healthcare, to climate reporting, AI readiness, financial safety, and digital trust. Each partnership opened fresh doors to geographies, audiences, and innovative ways of crafting solutions.

What has made this journey truly remarkable is how our partners shaped us. They pushed us to think bigger, to innovate, and to always keep community interest at the centre of our work. Every collaboration has been a two-way street — we gave, we learned, and hand in hand, we grew together.

Profound deliberations with partners enriched our vision, and sometimes, the conversations sparking our biggest initiatives began casually — over dinner, with ideas jotted on a napkin — growing into some of our most impactful projects.

This coffee table book is not just about DataLEADS — it is about all of you, our partners, who walked with us, taught us, and trusted us. Your reflections here remind us this has always been a mutual endeavour and a shared journey.

As we celebrate 10 years, my heart is full of gratitude. Looking ahead, I feel certain the next decade will be just as rewarding, for the enduring spirit of partnership shall continue, as ever, to be our guiding star.



A DECADE OF EMPOWERMENT, COMMUNITY-BUILDING AND PATH-BREAKING INITIATIVES

VARADARAJAN ANANTHAKRISHNAN
Senior Director (Trust & Safety), DataLEADS

A decade of empowerment, community-building, strong alliances, and path-breaking initiatives. These are not just words — they define some of our biggest milestones. Looking back, our journey has been remarkable, especially when reflecting on the communities we empowered and the lives we touched.

It has been a pioneering journey of many firsts!

When I joined DataLEADS in 2018, I came from over three decades in broadcast newsrooms. Back then, digital safety and online verification were barely familiar concepts. So, when Syed Nazakat put me on a flight to Hyderabad for an online verification and fact-checking training programme, I didn't realize it would be a game changer. I took to digital safety like a fish to water and, in time, was given the driver's seat to train diverse learners — from media communities in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and across India. Being part of these training sessions was a privilege.

As we worked to build resilient and informed communities, our media literacy programmes

took us to remote regions where misinformation clouded digital spaces. I loved being part of the team that designed curricula on media literacy, online verification, and digital safety with critical thinking at its core. Then came the global healthcare workers' course — a training kit to help professionals navigate health infodemics. In just a year, we were driving a movement reshaping how information was consumed, and I had the best seat on this journey.

We chose a path less travelled, one that anticipated challenges and helped communities prepare. Along the way, we built platforms and networks enabling many across Asia to gain from training and skill development. What emerged was not a grand design, but a gradual weaving of people and practices — a modest, sustainable ecosystem that thrives today.

Throughout, we had a vision and found partners who shared it. The future may seem challenging, but it holds immense promise. With shared resolve and steady effort, I am confident the road ahead will not only be navigable, but filled with fresh opportunities for growth and impact.

DataLEADS' JOURNEY: FROM LOCAL BEGINNINGS TO GLOBAL LEADERSHIP



28 SEPTEMBER 2015

Founded in a basement in suburban Delhi by **Syed Nazakat** and **Dr. Sabba Mehmood** to empower open data-driven storytelling and harness technology for public good.



14 NOVEMBER 2015

Hosted its **first data boot camp** at the Government Medical College in Srinagar, bringing together doctors, technologists, and journalists.

2015

2016

24 NOVEMBER 2016

Received the prestigious **British Medical Journal Award**—widely regarded as the “Oscar of medicine”—for its commitment to transparency and integrity in public health reporting.



2017

JANUARY 2017

Collaborated with Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Germany to begin RECAP: A series of data stories related to climate and energy discussions in Asia

Expanded the **Data Boot Camp initiative** to Malaysia,

Thailand, Hong Kong, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, The Maldives, Mongolia, Taiwan and other Asian countries, building a pan-Asia data reporting network.

17 MAY 2018

Transitioned into a private limited company, **One World DataLEADS**, broadening its vision to drive innovation and public interest technology at a global scale.

OCTOBER 2018

Received the **Membership Puzzle Award**, launched by New York University and *De Correspondent*, in recognition of pioneering role in global experiments in journalism membership models.

30 JULY, 2018

In collaboration with **Google**, DataLEADS developed and led one of the world's largest **online verification training networks**, empowering newsrooms and journalists across India.

2018



FEBRUARY 2017

Collaborated with **Asia News Network (ANN)**, a conglomerate of 24 Asian newsrooms to amplify Asian stories



7 JULY 2022

Launched the **Global Infodemic Management Course for Healthcare Workers** in partnership with GlaxoSmithKline to bolster infodemic resilience globally.



6 DECEMBER, 2022

Hosted **Global Data Dialogue Summit** in Dubai, a flagship event to promote data as a global public good and foster cross-sector collaboration.

2020



MARCH, 2020

Launched a media literacy programme in collaboration with hundreds of Indian organisations, universities and CR stations, grounded in research conducted with the **Stanford History Education Group**.

15 JUNE 2020

Launched **First Check**, a collaborative initiative to combat health misinformation. Today, it includes over **50 volunteer members**—doctors, technologists, data scientists, and journalists—from **24 countries**.



DECEMBER 2020

Established the **Infodemic Response Network**, partnering with global institutions including WHO to counter COVID-19 misinformation and promote fact-based communication strategies.



2 MAY, 2025

Launched DataLEADS Academy to create a platform for innovative and experimental learning, featuring the **AI for Digital Readiness and Advancement (ADiRA) program**.



DataLEADS GLOBAL

2025

2024



25 NOVEMBER, 2024

In collaboration with CIJ, Goldsmiths, University of London, designed a training programme to raise the standard of environmental reporting in South Asia.

1 MARCH, 2024

Facilitated a Google-supported consortium of news and media organisations to detect online misinformation, including deepfakes, and build a shared repository to help publishers tackle harmful content at scale.

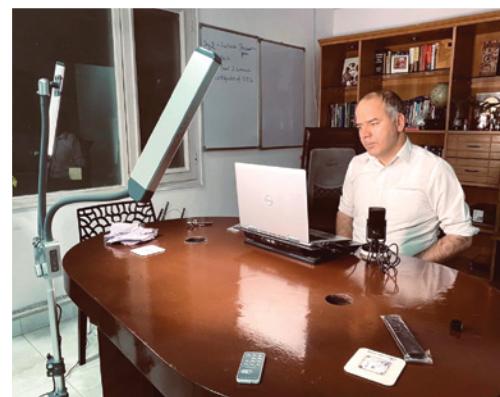


FEBRUARY 5, 2024

Launched **Asian Dispatch**, a pan-Asia digital journalism newsroom and network to amplify Asian voices often overlooked or misrepresented by mainstream Western media.

TEAM DataLEADS





TEAM DataLEADS



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570 34.5 806	34.3 1,421	64.5 488
379 53.3 454	53.7 750	54.6 403
210 11.5 135	24.8 1,131	57.4 34
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TEAM DataLEADS





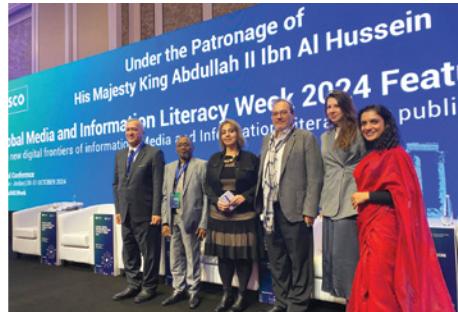
OUR PARTNERS IN PURPOSE



GLOBAL INFODEMIC MANAGEMENT COURSE FOR HEALTHCARE WORKERS

Leading luminaries from the field of medicine, science and media helped shape the curriculum and the training initiative

A promotional image for the Global Infodemic Management Course for Healthcare Workers. It features six headshots of speakers: Paula Fry, Dr. Gangoanep Kamo, Dr. Alka Lal, Dr. Chris Zielinski, Dr. Anna Blakney, and Dr. Gemma Bowsher. Below each headshot is a brief bio and their names. The text "An initiative of DataLEADS supported by GSK" is at the bottom, along with the DataLEADS and GSK logos.



OUR PARTNERS IN PURPOSE





10 YEARS, ONE MISSION, MANY VOICES

21



OUR PARTNERS IN PURPOSE





The Decade

IGNITE.
INSPIRE.
IMPACT.

of DataLEADS

Individuals who supported,
inspired, and believed in DataLEADS
on this incredible 10-year journey.

ENTREPRE
& LE

NEURSHIP ADERSHIP

PURPOSE BEFORE
PROFIT—THAT'S WHERE
TRUE LEADERSHIP BEGINS



ARUN MAIRA

Thought leader, former Member of India's Planning Commission, ex-Chairman of Boston Consulting Group (India), and Tata Group leader. An influential author on leadership, social change, and transforming systems, he serves on the boards of multiple educational institutions in India and abroad. He is also a member of the National Council of the Confederation of Indian Industry, chairs its Leadership Summit, advises the UN Global Compact, and is a trustee of Aspen India, driving impact across business, education, and social sectors.

FROM A CHANCE MEETING TO A SHARED MISSION: REFLECTIONS ON A DECADE WITH DataLEADS

I met Syed Nazakat and Sabba by chance—strangers sitting on adjacent tables in a restaurant in Rajasthan. We introduced ourselves and asked each other what was engaging us most in our lives. We realised we had similar views about the state of the world and how it may be improved.

The world is drowning in big data; and social media, which should bring strangers closer, is dividing people, even neighbors, into 'people like us' and 'people not like us', who are unable, even unwilling, to see others' points of view. Syed Nazakat had travelled to cover wars and conflicts around the world, as a journalist, and had seen people, who had lived together for centuries, falling apart.

Human beings have been reduced to statistics in big data systems. They are mere numbers in economists' equations. Nature has become a commodity to feed the economic machine to increase business profits and grow GDP. Youth are disempowered by modern education systems, which teach them to see the world through only the narrow lens of the subjects they specialise in, and to learn professional skills to find gainful employment. The system compels them to just do and to compete, not to question Why? Syed and Sabba, who is a doctor, are on a mission to empower young people to make a difference in their own lives and the lives of others around them. They are creating networks of young change-makers who are learning to listen to others and catalyse change for the common good in their communities.

Since that conversation I have been enrolled in Syed Nazakat's mission. I relish dialogues with diverse people, through whose eyes I can understand better the forces that are shaping our shared world. I am inspired by young people who care for others, and who, with very little wealth and power, become 'fireflies' of light and hope in the lives of others. They must learn to be broad systems thinkers, not specialists, to understand the forces shaping the world. They must also learn how to nudge change despite having little power themselves. We learn together when we discuss their aspirations and their challenges.

I have been following the growth of DataLEADS' expanding network in India and abroad. I am grateful to Syed Nazakat for including me in some inspiring conversations whenever it is feasible.

I wish him and Dr. Sabba the very best in his endeavors to give dignity to and to make the world better for the least privileged people in the world.



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SASA VUCINIC

Saša Vučinić is the co-founder of North Base Media VC, and co-founder and former CEO and Managing Director of the Media Development Loan Fund. His work supports media entrepreneurs in strengthening independent media where it is most threatened through financial, managerial, and technological assistance.

THE MAKING OF DataLEADS: THREE PAGES THAT SPARKED A JOURNEY

In August 2017, my dear friend Ying Chan visited me in Seoul, where I was living at the time. I was thrilled to reconnect with her, but she surprised me with an email beforehand: "You have to meet this guy. He's brilliant, has an incredible idea for a company, and might need advice on how to build it." That "guy" was Syed Nazakat.

Our first meeting remains unforgettable. Syed handed me a three-page Word document titled "Health Analytics Asia." To put it kindly, it was far from a real business plan—more like the rough bones of an idea. The second page even had headlines in different colors, as if design could make up for incompleteness. Yet I've kept that document, because I sensed its true value. What looked like a sketch of a plan was actually the seed of something visionary. I still joke about auctioning it one day when DataLEADS becomes a unicorn.

What struck me most was not the document itself, but Syed's clarity of vision and relentless determination. His idea felt pioneering, his energy magnetic. Despite the paper's shortcomings, I found myself drawn into the orbit of his conviction—a force that has kept me attached to the journey ever since.

After that first encounter in Seoul, Syed and I have crossed paths many times, in different places and under varied circumstances. Conversations with him are always restless and full of possibility: strategies for growing responsibly in a chaotic world, dreams of scaling platforms, discussions of big and small data, debates on artificial intelligence, and evaluations of investors and offers. Syed's curiosity is boundless, and his belief in the mission unwavering.

Over the years, I've also had the honor of meeting his team—bright, committed, and inspired by the same vision that first captivated me. Watching DataLEADS grow has been a remarkable experience. Though the company has evolved, the heart of the idea remains intact: combining people, technology, and purpose to create something impactful and transformative.


From a three-page sketch in Seoul to a force recognised far beyond Asia, DataLEADS' journey affirms a timeless truth: vision, when matched with determination, can move mountains.

Today, I am more convinced than ever that Syed and the team at DataLEADS embody what is possible when a powerful idea meets the right people willing to nurture it. From a three-page sketch in Seoul to a force recognised far beyond Asia, their journey affirms a timeless truth: vision, when matched with determination, can move mountains.



KIRAN MAZUMDAR-SHAW

Kiran is the Chairperson and Managing Director of Biocon, a pioneering biotech enterprise she founded that has transformed the biopharmaceutical landscape in India and globally. A visionary entrepreneur and global thought leader in biotechnology and healthcare, she has been recognised with India's prestigious Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri awards and has been named among TIME's 100 Most Influential People in the World.

EMPOWERING A DATA-LITERATE INDIA: A DECADE WITH DataLEADS

In the beginning, DataLEADS was just the four team members — no brand, no platform, and no influence. Just a firm belief: that data could spark conversations, fuel storytelling, drive impact and business, and more importantly, unlock a new kind of future in India.

Our journey started in small, spirited settings—at Government Medical College in Srinagar and AIIMS Patna—before we set our sights on Bangalore, India's Silicon City. The challenge ahead was clear: how to convene a meaningful data boot camp, and more urgently, who could lead the discussion.

That's when Anand Varadaraj, founder of the Bengaluru International Short Film Festival, suggested we reach out to Prakash Belwadi, the renowned Bollywood actor, director, and screenwriter. Over cups of tea that stretched into the late evening, Prakash helped us sketch the outline for what would become our first data boot camp in Bangalore—shaping the agenda, tone, ambition, and spirit.

But we needed more. We needed someone who could lift our fledgling dream and make it feel significant. Someone who could say, "This work matters." And one name kept coming to mind: Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, Founder of Biocon, a global biotech leader. In our eyes, Kiran embodied everything we aspired to be—visionary, courageous, and an innovative mind who could see the future.

We approached Kiran, and her response was one of grace and warmth. She didn't just accept the invitation; she embraced it. At the boot camp, she spoke of data's central role in India's future—a validation of the very ideas we were trying to bring to life. She was only scheduled to speak and leave, but she stayed—through the entire session, quietly listening, taking notes. When she finally stood up to leave, she came over, smiled, and said, "I like your name—DataLEADS. It's futuristic." In that small moment, it felt like our imagined future had already found its first believer.

Kiran's story has always been more than a business success. She built Biocon from a garage with 10,000 in 1978, transforming it into a global force in healthcare. But what truly stayed with us was her quiet persistence—the hard, honest work of building, learning, and embracing challenges. Kiran didn't just build a company—she built a path for others to follow. She showed us the future doesn't arrive; you have to make it.

She showed us how.


We approached Kiran, and her response was one of grace and warmth. She didn't just accept the invitation; she embraced it. When she finally stood up to leave, she came over, smiled, and said, "I like your name—DataLEADS. It's futuristic."

(This tribute is written by DataLEADS to honour Ms. Shaw's contribution)



MADAN PADAKI

President of TiE Bangalore, serial entrepreneur, and co-founder of MeritTrac, Head Held High Foundation, 1Bridge, and the Global Alliance for Mass Entrepreneurship (GAME). He drives inclusive rural digital commerce, youth empowerment, and a nationwide mass entrepreneurship movement.

CHAMPIONING ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION ACROSS INDIA

My association with DataLEADS began through one of those serendipitous connections that often shape meaningful partnerships. Arun Maira, a distinguished industry and thought leader, introduced me to DataLEADS, setting the foundation for what would become a deeply rewarding relationship. That initial connection sparked conversations that led to memorable meetings in both Srinagar and Bangalore, where I witnessed firsthand the passion and vision driving DataLEADS' mission.

What drew me to DataLEADS was the organisation's commitment to nurturing talent in a region brimming with potential yet often overlooked by mainstream entrepreneurship initiatives. The entrepreneurship workshop I conducted in Srinagar with DataLEADS stands out as one of my most enriching experiences. What struck me most profoundly was the raw passion and determination of the local entrepreneurs.

Despite facing unique challenges—from connectivity issues to market access limitations—these young innovators demonstrated an entrepreneurial spirit that was both inspiring and humbling. I found myself learning as much from them as they did from the workshop, particularly about resilience, adaptability, and the power of community-driven solutions.

One of the most fulfilling aspects of our collaboration has been facilitating strategic connections. Introducing DataLEADS to my partner at GAME, Ravi Venkatesan, former Chairman of Microsoft India, proved transformative—he has since become not just a mentor but a genuine friend to the organisation. These partnerships exemplify how meaningful mentorship extends beyond individual guidance to opening doors and creating ecosystems of support.

DataLEADS' focus on strengthening media entrepreneurship aligns perfectly with my vision of India's entrepreneurship-driven future. In an era where information and storytelling shape public discourse, empowering entrepreneurs becomes crucial for building inclusive narratives and economic opportunities. The organisation's approach of combining traditional entrepreneurship principles with digital innovation creates a model that can be replicated across India's diverse landscape.

My experiences with DataLEADS reinforces my belief that India's entrepreneurial future depends on nurturing talent across all regions and sectors, ensuring that innovation and opportunity reach every corner of our diverse nation.



In an era where information and storytelling shape public discourse, empowering entrepreneurs becomes crucial for building inclusive narratives and economic opportunities."



DOMINIQUE BEN DHAOU

Founder and Managing Director of PointNorth International, Switzerland and a distinguished human resources leader with over 30 years of global experience.

An award-winning professional, she has been recognised as Best HR Professional (2016) and Best Leader of the Year (2018). Dominique specialises in career reinvention, executive mentoring, and talent transformation, helping leaders and organisations navigate change, build high-performing teams, and unlock their full potential across diverse industries worldwide.

EMPOWERING WOMEN LEADERS: A JOURNEY FROM BERLIN TO GOA

It all began on a sunny day in Berlin... Syed Nazakat and I—both board members of The New Humanitarian—were walking back from dinner, reflecting on the transformative power of women's leadership.

That conversation sparked an idea: what if we created a program to support incredible women on their path to leadership? We were both deeply convinced—and still are today, more than ever—that empowering women is essential to the progress of societies and economies everywhere.

A few months later, I landed in India to co-create with DataLEADS and facilitate the very first cohort of SheLEADS: a leadership bootcamp held in Goa with 12 extraordinary women from across industries and regions. The program was designed to inspire, shift mindsets, and build a hopeful, inclusive future—for individuals, teams, and organisations. Beyond the tools and frameworks we explored, SheLEADS became a space for connection, self-discovery, reflection, and joy. It was about leading from within in order to positively influence the world around us.

The memories from that first bootcamp remain vivid in my heart. I still recall the sparkling moments—when self-doubt gave way to confidence, when laughter flowed freely, and when emotions reminded us that vulnerability is a strength. It was a privilege to witness these women grow, support one another, and become a resilient community.

That experience also introduced me to the incredible team at DataLEADS—a group of passionate professionals united by a shared purpose. Every person I met radiated integrity, dedication, and an unwavering belief in the power of data, journalism, and education to serve the public good. What struck me most was how humanity and professionalism are woven into everything they do. Every promise made is a promise kept. Every word, carefully chosen and backed by intent.

Partnering with DataLEADS brought me much more than wonderful memories in Goa. It reaffirmed my conviction that with passion, perseverance, kindness, and courage, we can truly create change. Their commitment to strengthening the information ecosystem, training and inspiring leaders, and standing up for journalism that serves the public interest is more important now than ever.



Partnering with DataLEADS brought me much more than wonderful memories in Goa. It reaffirmed my conviction that with passion, perseverance, kindness, and courage, we can truly create change.

As DataLEADS celebrates its 10th anniversary, I'm filled with gratitude—for the trust, the collaboration, and the shared vision of a better future. Here's to many more years of impact, innovation, and purpose-driven leadership.



ANISHA PADUKONE

CEO of the LiveLoveLaugh Foundation, where she spearheads mental health advocacy, program development, and policy outreach across India. A former member of the World Economic Forum's Global Future Council for Mental Health, she combines her expertise in mental health with a global perspective. Before dedicating herself to mental health, Anisha was a professional golfer, representing India in international competitions.

A JOURNEY TOWARDS REDISCOVERY: LESSONS FROM SheLEADS

My experience with DataLEADS and the SheLEADS conference in Goa was nothing short of transformative. As someone deeply committed to the cause of mental health, it was energising to be surrounded by a diverse group of women leaders from across India — each bringing a unique voice and lived experience to the conversation. Goa's setting perfectly facilitated open dialogue and introspection.

I had the opportunity to speak about my own journey — one that has been shaped as much by unexpected turns as it has by intentional choices. Not many know that my foray into competitive golf was largely by chance. What started as accompanying my father to try out an 'old man's sport' gradually became a serious pursuit. The discipline, focus, and resilience I developed on the golf course have stayed with me and now inform my work off the field. Golf taught me how to be present, how to cope with pressure, and how to keep going after a bad day — lessons that have been invaluable in my leadership journey and especially in the mental health space.

Today, as CEO of The Live Love Laugh Foundation, my vision for mental health advocacy is rooted in creating access, dignity, and most importantly hope for every individual — regardless of socio-economic background. Our work across rural India and urban communities constantly reinforces the idea that mental health is not a luxury, it's a fundamental human right. I believe in moving beyond awareness to action to create ecosystems where individuals feel seen, heard, and supported. Leadership, in this context, isn't just about taking charge. It's about building collective courage to challenge stigma and transform systems.

SheLEADS, to me, exemplifies what can happen when women come together not only to lead but to listen, learn, and support one another. It was powerful to witness women across sectors finding common ground and co-imagining solutions. I believe initiatives like this must continue to grow, not just as conferences, but as sustained communities of support and learning. By mentoring emerging leaders, spotlighting unheard stories, and creating inclusive platforms, SheLEADS has the potential to shift the narrative on what leadership looks like and who it includes.

Being part of this journey reminded me that leadership is not a destination but a practice, one that is enriched when anchored in purpose, empathy, and collaboration.



SheLEADS, to me, exemplifies what can happen when women come together not only to lead but to listen, learn, and support one another. It was powerful to witness women across sectors finding common ground and co-imagining solutions."

TECHN

AI & TECHNOLOGY

TECHNOLOGY SHOULD
SERVE PEOPLE, NOT JUST
IMPRESS THEM



PROF. BALARAM RAVINDRAN

Prof. B. Ravindran heads the Department of Data Science and Artificial Intelligence at IIT Madras. He is one of the leading global scientists on AI, sits on a number of international AI councils and also advises the government of India on AI and cybersecurity, defense applications, and regulatory frameworks, and has also chaired the National Task Force on AI and cybersecurity.

AI FOR SOCIAL GOOD AND VIKSIT BHARAT

We first met Prof. Balaraman Ravindran at IIT Madras in early 2023, in the corridors of the Robert Bosch Centre for Data Science and AI—a place alive with whiteboards dense with equations and the low hum of computers and machines. From the outset, it was clear that he was not simply a scientist advancing the frontiers of artificial intelligence, but a voice insistent that technology must serve a public purpose and carry a sense of responsibility.

Prof Ravindran has been a leading global voice in shaping the AI ecosystem: founding the Wadhwani School of Data Science and AI, the Robert Bosch Centre, and the Centre for Responsible AI (CeRAI). His work has earned him global recognition, including a place as a Fellow of the Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence, one of the world's leading scientific societies founded in 1979. He advises the government on AI and cybersecurity, defense applications, and regulatory frameworks, and is also a member of the RBI's committee to develop a Framework for Responsible and Ethical Enablement of Artificial Intelligence (FREE-AI) in the financial sector.

Our conversations with him often turned toward leveraging AI for Social Good. At IIT Madras, he spoke of the need for an India-specific Data Commons—an open framework to make statistical knowledge more accessible and useful. He invited us to join CeRAI's consultation meeting to examine AI-driven synthetic media. This collaboration grew over time. He participated in our Global Data Dialogue in Dubai, where he spoke about how India's AI ecosystem is flourishing through strong national policy support, innovation, and talent-building. More recently CeRAI's invited DataLEADS to contribute to the AI incident management framework for India.

Prof. Ravindran's guidance also enriched India's biggest newsroom collaboration under the Project Shakti supported by Google as the Synthetic Media & Deepfake Advisory Council member. For us at DataLEADS, these exchanges sharpen a shared vision: to demystify AI, to make its opportunities legible, and to confront its threats—deepfakes and corrosive misuse.

Looking ahead, the story of AI is still being written. Whenever we seek guidance in this evolving field, we turn to Prof. Ravindran. His work, and our collaborations with him, remind us of what a responsible AI future could look like: one where technology reshapes learning and personalizes human experience, yet keeps safety and trust at its core. It is a vision of AI as a tool for empowerment and the collective well-being of society.


Whenever we seek guidance in this evolving field, we turn to Prof. Ravindran. His work, and our collaborations with him, remind us of what a responsible AI future could look like.

(This tribute is written by DataLEADS to honour Prof Ravindran's work and contribution towards making AI a social good)



PROF. DEEPAK GARG

Prof. Deepak Garg, is the Founder Director of leadingindia.ai and Vice Chancellor of SR, University, Telangana a distinguished professor in Computer Science and AI. Formerly Director at NVIDIA-BU AI Research Center and Dean at Bennett University, an ABET Commissioner, certified in Video Analytics.

MY JOURNEY WITH DataLEADS: PREPARING SOCIETY FOR THE AI ERA

My association with DataLEADS as an expert advisor across multiple programmes over the years has been a meaningful and fulfilling experience. From contributing to a working group that developed policy recommendations on emerging AI technologies to helping guide a consortium of news organisations in fostering a cleaner information ecosystem, and now supporting an initiative on AI readiness, I have witnessed how the organisation consistently stays ahead of the curve through its proactive and forward-looking work.

These endeavours to combine creativity, research, and community engagement to drive purposeful impact are central to the organisation's mission of empowering the masses. Over the years, it has trained thousands of professionals, equipping them with the tools and critical skills needed to counter misinformation and thrive in a fast-changing digital world.

DataLEADS' work is a testament to the fact that by empowering individuals, we create resilient communities prepared for the future. From digital-safety initiatives to AI literacy programmes, the organisation is committed to building bridges of learning that will stand the test of time, ensuring everyone has the tools to thrive in a data-driven society.

The unfolding AI revolution is not merely a technological wave; it's a fundamental reshaping of our global landscape. It is a transformative force with the potential to redefine how we live, work, and learn. In education, AI is personalising learning experiences and democratising access to knowledge. In research, it is accelerating discovery, enabling us to tackle complex challenges from climate change to public health with unprecedented speed. AI is already deeply integrated into our daily technology, from intelligent assistants to predictive analytics, making our lives more efficient. However, this progress comes with a responsibility.

Organisations like DataLEADS play a crucial role as the ethical guardians and educators, ensuring AI is developed and deployed responsibly. They are vital in fostering the human skills and dialogue necessary to build a future where AI serves as a public good, benefiting all of humanity.



DataLEADS is committed to building bridges of learning that will stand the test of time, ensuring everyone has the tools to thrive in a data-driven society.



PROF. MAYANK VATSA, PhD

Professor of Computer Science at IIT Jodhpur and Project Director of India's National Mission on Cyber-Physical Systems hub, IEEE/IAPR/AAIA Fellow, Swarnajayanti Fellow, and leading researcher in biometrics, computer vision, machine learning, and responsible AI. He has also participated in several Indian government initiatives including UIDAI (Aadhaar), designing biometrics standards for e-Gov applications, Responsible AI, and DigiYatra.

ROLE OF COLLABORATION IN BUILDING AN AI-READY SOCIETY

My association with DataLEADS began during a discussion convened by the Centre for Responsible AI at IIT Madras, where Syed Nazakat, I, and several others discussed the growing challenges of deepfakes and misinformation in the evolving landscape of synthetic media.

Following this interaction, Syed Nazakat's invitation to contribute to Project Shakti was an important moment, marking the start of an impactful partnership. Over the years, my collaboration with DataLEADS has consistently been characterised by shared learning, mutual respect, and collective efforts to combat misinformation.

Our guiding principle has always been that technology should have practical utility beyond mere academic publications. Supported by Google, the Shakti Programme resonated deeply with this philosophy, providing an opportunity to apply our research practically. Our IAB lab at IIT Jodhpur chose to support Project Shakti because it aligns perfectly with our mission to ensure our technological advancements in deepfake detection contribute meaningfully to society.

Our key learning from developing the deepfake detection tool is that technology inherently possesses dual potential – beneficial as well as harmful – and deepfake technology exemplifies this duality vividly. Striking the balance between innovation and ethical responsibility now lies at the core of our research and development mission, and DataLEADS shares these values with us.

DataLEADS brings a uniquely powerful perspective by emphasising education and awareness to empower individuals to critically evaluate media authenticity. Their approach to training diverse communities significantly strengthens the global information ecosystem. This strategy aligns closely with our vision of using technological advancements to serve societal needs.

I deeply value DataLEADS' effort to foster digital literacy, enabling individuals to question, verify, and respond. It is gratifying to partner with an organisation that not only addresses the immediate technological challenges but also contributes to long-term societal resilience against misinformation.

As we stand on the cusp of an AI-driven transformation, the future of work and the workforce will be undoubtedly transformative. Rather than merely adopting AI, our goal should be to lead globally in creating innovative AI solutions that set standards for ethical and responsible usage.

Cultivating collaboration among young, talented minds and investing in education and skill-building tailored to AI will be essential. Preparing for this future involves fostering a culture of continuous learning, research, innovation, and ethical responsibility, empowering the workforce to thrive in an AI-driven world.



I deeply value DataLEADS' effort to foster digital literacy, enabling individuals to question, verify, and respond. It is gratifying to partner with an organisation that not only addresses the immediate technological challenge."



LUDOVIC BLECHER

Ludovic is a Paris based media executive, tech entrepreneur and global adviser for news organisations. He recently joined WitheBeard as a partner, a MENA based tech company which produces a very feature-complete Content Management System and sits on the board of L'Orient-Le Jour. He worked 8 years at Google as the Head of Innovation and funding strategy for the news-ecosystem. He's a former member of the French National Digital Council and a fellow at the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard.

STRENGTHENING JOURNALISM'S FUTURE: INNOVATION, TRUST, AND INDEPENDENCE

Let me be upfront: I'm not a fan of sponsored content, and promoting for-profit activities isn't something I typically do. The exception comes when a mission and integrity align with my vision: empowering journalism to ensure it remains a central pillar for those seeking the complexity needed to understand our evolving world. No democracy or informed decision-making can exist without independent journalism.

When I first met Syed Nazakat, Founder & CEO of DataLEADS, at the Perugia International Journalism Festival, I was still working at Google. As one of the founding members of the Google News Initiative, I was struck by our shared commitment: stimulating innovation and helping develop new strategies for a more sustainable future for both news organisations and freelancers.

Both Syed and I come from editorial backgrounds, and I can say we still consider ourselves journalists at heart. For us, running a business and collaborating with big tech, NGOs, and many others serves only one goal: nurturing dialogue and leveraging tools to preserve the future of journalism.

The challenges ahead are massive. Among these, I see TRUST as the central issue. Despite extensive efforts to combat misinformation and expand fact-checking activities in recent years, more and more people are avoiding news. The situation is worsening with AI. More than ever, investing in journalism, expertise, and differentiating your content value proposition will be the path to rebuilding credibility step by step. For this to happen, newsrooms and journalists will need training and support to navigate the massive change management required—both in terms of mindset and in building audience engagement capabilities. DataLEADS is well positioned to remain a key player in this space. Publishers will also need tools, which is where my tech company, WhiteBeard, comes in. And I hope we can initiate a closer partnership in those areas.

Having spent many years at the intersection of journalism and technology, I've been struck by the waste of energy and money that goes into assembling a functional and affordable tech stack to elevate both relationships with readers and business models. This is what we're tackling at WhiteBeard with our unique approach: an all-in-one tech stack built by and for journalists.

I'm not just talking here about a content management system, but also analytics tools, comprehensive reader revenue mechanisms, email and newsletter builders, an AI layer to assist with various tasks and give more space for in-depth journalistic production, and advanced segmentation tools to diversify revenue streams—which is ultimately the only way to protect newsroom independence.


More than ever, investing in journalism, expertise, and differentiating your content value proposition will be the path to rebuilding credibility step by step."

As DataLEADS celebrates its 10th anniversary I'm proud of our past collaboration and even more excited by what will come next. Happy birthday and onwards!



ABHISHEK MOHAN GUPTA

Pro-Chancellor of Jagran Lakecity University, Executive Vice Chairman of Jagran Social Welfare Society, education and sports entrepreneur, owner of Lakecity FC and Bhopal Leopards, BW Education 40 Under 40 honoree. He also leads as Chairman of the FICCI Young Leaders Forum, Madhya Pradesh, driving innovation and impact across the region.

STRENGTHENING DATA AND MEDIA EDUCATION IN CENTRAL INDIA

Our association with DataLEADS has been a meaningful and inspiring journey, marked by a shared commitment to advancing media education, and preparing the next generation of journalists for an AI-driven world. At Jagran Lakecity University, we have always believed in cultivating global perspectives and practical skills in our students, and our engagement with DataLEADS has significantly contributed to this vision. Our first interaction with DataLEADS came through its pioneering work in the media ecosystem in India and across Asia. Their clarity of purpose—bridging data, media, and technology—aligned perfectly with Jagran Lakecity University's aim of delivering forward-looking media education. This led to our formal partnership through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), the setting up of a unique and central India's only Centre of Data and New Media and more concretely, to hosting some truly impactful programmes together.

Among these, the Global Data Dialogue in Dubai, student-led Factshala program and a series of Media and Data Boot Camps stand out as formative experiences for our faculty and students alike. These sessions were not just about tools or techniques; they opened our eyes to the vital importance of data-driven storytelling and the ethical use of emerging technologies.

Today, as we find ourselves at the intersection of global media education and AI readiness, the need to equip students with not only technical skills but also ethical frameworks becomes paramount. The influence of generative AI, deepfakes, and algorithmic bias on journalism and communication makes the role of educators more complex—and more urgent—than ever. DataLEADS has been a trailblazer in this space, not only acknowledging these shifts but actively guiding educators and journalists to respond with knowledge and integrity.

We are fully aware of the potential that our MoU carries for the betterment of the society and remain excited about deepening this collaboration. The groundwork laid thus far makes us optimistic about developing more sustained engagements—perhaps co-developing curriculum modules, joint research, or even setting up regional media literacy hubs. The possibilities are immense.

Initiatives like those led by DataLEADS are crucial in making this transformation possible. The challenge lies in keeping pace with rapid technological change while staying rooted in journalistic principles.

On behalf of everyone at Jagran Lakecity University, I extend our deepest gratitude to DataLEADS for their trust and partnership. This story of collaboration is still unfolding, and we are excited for the chapters yet to come.



Initiatives like those led by DataLEADS are crucial in making this transformation possible. The challenge lies in keeping pace with rapid technological change while staying rooted in journalistic principles."



SHEENA BHALLA

Media and innovation strategist, founder of Module Xero, and former Data & Innovation Strategy Lead at Google News Initiative (APAC). She has led newsroom transformation across Asia, driving initiatives in subscriptions, design, data, and DEI, shaping the media landscape in the region.

ALIGNING STARS: A STORY OF TRUST AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

My journey with DataLEADS has been one of those rare intersections—where shared purpose, friendship, and energising work meet. From my early days at Google, where I led regional innovation and data programs under the Google News Initiative, to later designing their first offsite in Goa, I've had the privilege of watching DataLEADS evolve into a powerhouse of purpose-led journalism and information ecosystem strengthening.

When the opportunity arose to collaborate through Module Xero, it didn't feel like a new beginning. It felt like a continuation of a shared mission.

I've come to know Syed Nazakat, Dr. Sabba, and Surbhi not just as partners but as thoughtful changemakers—anchored in values, committed to truth, and relentless in their pursuit of impact. At Module Xero, we seek out organisations with integrity of mission. And in DataLEADS, we found a team deeply aligned with our belief that authentic information is central to human empowerment.

In 2023, we co-designed and facilitated a 3-day strategic workshop for their leadership team to define a North Star for Strategic Partnerships and Business Development. What unfolded was a powerful space of courageous reflection. These were not easy conversations—about balancing public good with sustainability, about growth without dilution. But the team leaned in fully.

One moment stands out: during an exercise on Limiting Beliefs, several participants found themselves in raw, emotional territory. And yet, what emerged was a room held together by honesty, compassion, and deep mutual trust. That level of vulnerability—and the emotional intelligence to meet it—is rare. It reflected a culture that prioritises depth, dignity, and authenticity.

For me, the experience was deeply affirming. At Module Xero, we believe strategy must be grounded in values, not just metrics. Working with the DataLEADS team reminded me of what's possible when mission-led teams are given the space and tools to pause, align, and build intentionally.

At the end of the workshop, one team member shared, "I haven't shared this with my family. Thank you for allowing me to articulate this truth." That's the kind of work I live for.

To partner with an organisation so deeply committed to training, inspiring, and protecting journalism in the public interest is not just a professional privilege—it's an honour.



Working with the DataLEADS team reminded me of what's possible when mission-led teams are given the space and tools to pause, align, and build intentionally.



PROF. UMESH ARYA

Umesh Arya is a faculty member at Guru Jambheshwar University with 20 years' experience. He specialises in communication studies, ICT applications, and social media data analysis. His expertise includes communication studies, ICT applications, and social media data analysis. He has published widely, delivered lectures globally, and developed innovative educational tools like "TecVac" and "DigiToll."

UNEXPECTED JOURNEYS, TRANSFORMATIVE LESSONS

The desire to explore the unknown has always been a powerful force in my life. My decision to join the GNI India Training Network was no exception. They say life rarely gives us what we desire; instead, it surprises us with what we never imagined. This phrase perfectly reflects my experience of applying for the first GNI Training of Trainers (TOT) on Misinformation, in September 2018.

Imagination and faith became my guiding pillars, propelling me into the company of some of the finest minds in the media-tech world. Moving away from the routine of conventional classroom lectures, I found myself a part of an experiment that encouraged real-world collaboration and learning. This approach resonated with my students, colleagues, and university authorities alike, while giving me profound personal satisfaction. The trust placed in me by DataLEADS motivated me to extend these learnings across India, from Manipur and Ahmedabad to Mumbai, Chennai, Lucknow, and Jaipur.

True learning, I discovered, often happens outside classrooms. It happens through interactions with people from different regions, cultures, and professions. What I once considered "secondary" learning gradually became central to my personal and professional growth, enriching both my teaching and research. My university recognised these contributions, offering me valuable concessions and support to enhance students' skills through my newly acquired training.

ADIRA, a timely digital intervention, represents another significant step on this journey along the AI superhighway. Amara's Law states: "We tend to overestimate the effect of technology in the short run and underestimate it in the long run." ADIRA addresses this gap by emphasising not just the technical, but also the philosophical aspects of AI—an area increasingly vital today.


The trust placed in me by DataLEADS motivated me to extend these learnings across India, from Manipur and Ahmedabad to Mumbai, Chennai, Lucknow, and Jaipur.

I firmly believe that embracing emerging technologies helps us stay relevant, collaborate with innovators, reinvent traditional ecosystems, and enhance our self-worth. Artificial Intelligence, in particular, is transforming how we craft, deliver, and consume information. By automating repetitive, pattern-based tasks, AI enables us to focus on more meaningful work, research, and creativity. Looking ahead, I am determined to leverage AI as an early mover—using it not only for professional advancement but also for sustainable, meaningful growth across all aspects of human life.

COLLABO

ORATION

MAKING PARTNERS TO
CREATE A CHANGE



YUEN-YING CHAN

Award-winning journalist, founded the University of Hong Kong's Journalism and Media Studies Centre in 1999 and created Hong Kong's first professional postgraduate journalism programme. A Nieman Fellow, George Polk Award recipient, and International Press Freedom Awardee, she has taught at Columbia University and serves on multiple media boards worldwide. Chan is recognised for her contributions to journalism education, entrepreneurship and nurturing the next generation of journalists in Asia and beyond.

A TALE OF RESILIENCE AND IMAGINATION

"Syed Nazakat, We are going to Seoul. I want you to meet my good friend Sasa—he's a media startup guru."

A week later, Syed Nazakat flew in from Laos, where he had been on a work tour, straight to Seoul. There, the three of us—Syed Nazakat, Sasa Vucinic (founder of the global media investment firm North Base Media), and I—gathered to talk shop. That was August 27, 2017. We brainstormed over Syed Nazakat's latest idea, Health Analytics, a mobile-first and data-driven storytelling platform that would be incubated by DataLEADS, his Delhi-based media group.

Syed Nazakat and I belong to a tribe of restless Asian journalists - obsessed with our craft, and driven to connect to reimagine journalism's future. We are doers and dreamers.

We first met at the 2015 GIJN conference in Lillehammer, Norway. A year later, we teamed up with other regional newsrooms to produce Asia's first Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on data journalism, anchored by the Hong Kong University journalism school I founded. In a month, the course drew more than 4,000 registrations from 100-plus countries. We had struck a raw nerve. Data driven journalism was becoming a required skill for journalists. Two years later, from October 26 to 27, 2017, I helped Syed Nazakat host a Data Boot Camp at the university —part of DataLEADS' Pan-Asia initiative aimed at advancing data-driven reporting and research across the region.

Some ideas flourished; others didn't.

Watching Syed Nazakat's work from afar had been a master class in resilience and ingenuity. He is not only a journalist, but also a pioneer and entrepreneur.

Long before AI dominated the headlines, he pitched at the Seoul meeting that Health Analytics "will be ultimately infused with machine learning to reach new audiences and to build financial returns."

While many independent media defaulted to non-profit models, Syed Nazakat chose to run his media enterprises as commercial entities to confront the test of the market. When many journalists are content with talking to each other, Syed Nazakat reaches out to governments, corporations, tech companies and professional organisations to build partnerships and collaborations.

That meeting in Seoul was just one of many instances when we seized a fleeting moment, leaned into possibility, and watched an idea take shape almost as quickly as it was spoken. A decade on, DataLEADS stands as living proof that, with bold vision and imaginative execution, journalism can grow and expand, even in the most challenging times.



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DR. PETER HEFELE

*Policy Director at the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies (Brussels),
economist and expert in economic policy, international development
cooperation, and energy/climate policy, with extensive leadership experience
in Asia, including China and India. He worked as Director of the China Office of
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Shanghai. From March 2015 till April 2019 he
was Director of the Regional Project "Energy Security and Climate Change"
(RECAP), based in Hong Kong SAR / PR China.*

CONNECTING ASIA AND EUROPE: COMMON INTERESTS AND RESPONSIBILITY

My relationship with Syed Nazakat and DataLEADS goes back to the middle of the last decade, when I was establishing a regional programme on energy and climate change for the Indo-Pacific at the Konrad-Adenauer Foundation (KAS) in Hong Kong. Syed was among my first partners in the region, helping us build an impressive network of like-minded, engaged partners from academia, enterprises, and non-governmental institutions.

From the beginning, it was clear that DataLEADS was more than just a partner organisation. This cooperation came with a shared vision for fostering collaboration, knowledge exchange, and empowerment. Europe's ambitious efforts in sustainable transformation can only succeed in partnership with other regions. The future depends on our willingness to walk this path together. While progress in global climate negotiations, such as COP, remains slow, individuals and communities have already taken bold initiatives in their local and regional environments. This is where DataLEADS' work – fact-based training, capacity building, and empowering people with knowledge – makes a real difference.

In a world of misinformation and "alternative truths," the importance of high-standard research and professional communication cannot be overstated. In times of shrinking attention spans, visual communication has become a powerful tool to reach diverse audiences. The high-quality products jointly created by KAS and DataLEADS on energy and climate developments are among our most impactful outputs, widely used in political consulting and training courses across Asia and Europe.

The successful expansion of DataLEADS across the Indo-Pacific demonstrates the tremendous demand for reliable information. It has fostered a vibrant network of like-minded initiatives, offering Europeans valuable anchoring points and sounding boards to challenge our often Eurocentric perspectives.

Over the past decade, I have been deeply impressed by Syed and his team's entrepreneurial spirit, dedication, and unwavering commitment to topics of common interest – from climate change to public health. Their work embodies the very essence of bridging Asia and Europe in a time of fragmentation, unilateralism, and polarisation.

As DataLEADS celebrates its 10th anniversary, I look forward to seeing this remarkable journey continue. I wish Syed and the entire DataLEADS team continued success in their mission to give a voice to those who are too often unheard in global politics.


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PANA JANVIROJ

Concurrent Executive Director of the Institute for Strategic Policy, and Editor of Asia News Network. Co-founded ANN with seven members in 2000, when he was Editor of Thailand's leading English newspaper The Nation. ANN now has 20 members in 19 Asian countries.

HOW DataLEADS POWERED A DIGITAL LEAP FOR ASIAN NEWSROOMS

My association with Syed Nazakat goes back to when he was a young journalist working in Bangkok more than a decade ago. After many years of reporting, Syed Nazakat realised his calling was the intersection of media and entrepreneurship – and rightly so! Today DataLEADS stands as a formidable player in changing the information landscape in Asia and beyond. It is a fine representation of the vision that Syed Nazakat had- a media organisation that encourages trust in journalism through training, research, writing and responsible use of technology.

It was sometime in 2016 when I visited the DataLEADS office. Realising the shared values, we began collaborating through the Asia News Network (ANN), a consortium of 20 national media houses like *The Nation in Thailand*, *Straits Times in Singapore*, *Korea Herald in South Korea*, *China Daily in China*, *Dawn in Pakistan*, *The Kathmandu Post in Nepal* and *The Statesman in India* among others.

At a time when ANN was modernising its operations, with Syed Nazakat in India, we found a perfect partner who understood the significance of this initiative and steered it efficiently. The mission at hand for ANN was to connect Asia and make information sharing easy, accessible and affordable for newsrooms.

DataLEADS took on this responsibility, and it quickly became evident that this was more than a technology fix—it was a bridge across borders. The responsiveness of the small yet dynamic team across time zones, understanding of cultural nuance, and appreciation for the pulse of Asia-wide collaboration proved invaluable. They understood not just the mechanics of information exchange, but the deeper philosophy that binds Asian media: shared challenges, interdependence, and the need for cross-border solidarity. Asia was becoming more connected—and DataLEADS was helping accelerate that reality.

Since then, I have watched with admiration as DataLEADS grew from a small, determined start-up into a dynamic organisation with team members across India and Asia and a portfolio that spans public interest reporting to information literacy to artificial intelligence, digital rights, and transnational journalism. Their growth has not just been in size, but in relevance.

In an era defined by noise, speed, and misinformation, the role of institutions like DataLEADS in creating balanced, credible, and cross-cultural information flows is not just welcomed—it is essential.

I wish Syed Nazakat and the DataLEADS team continued strength and inspiration. The work they are doing is not just regional—it is universal.



In an era defined by noise, speed, and misinformation, the role of institutions like DataLEADS in creating balanced, credible, and cross-cultural information flows is not just welcomed—it is essential.



SUNANDA RAO ERDEM

Founder & CEO of Seraphim Communications, with decades of experience in leading international media and communications organisations, including her tenure as Diplomatic Editor at Nai Dunai and South Asia Editor at Deutsche Welle, Germany.

REIMAGINING STORYTELLING THROUGH DATA AND TECHNOLOGY

When I think back to the early days of DataLEADS, I can't help but smile and marvel. Syed Nazakat and I go back a long way, to our days as journalists covering international affairs, defence, and diplomacy. Whether reporting from Europe, the United States, or as the sole Indian journalist covering Guantanamo Bay, Syed Nazakat brought depth, courage, and clarity to every story.

So, it was with a mix of surprise and admiration that I first heard about his plan to start a company focused on data. I remember wondering why someone so deeply embedded in the pulse of journalism would choose to leave it behind for something that, at first glance, seemed so detached from the newsroom.

But that's where Syed Nazakat's foresight became crystal clear. Long before data and AI became buzzwords, he had already grasped their immense potential to inform, empower, and transform. Today, each time I walk into the DataLEADS office I'm reminded of the perseverance, grit, and clarity of purpose that has brought it here. It's no longer just a start-up. It's a movement rooted in truth, driven by impact, and anchored in values.

As a communications professional and a friend, I've also had the joy of being part of some key milestones—from supporting early team building to participating in the inaugural SheLEADS programme in Goa, a truly unforgettable leadership experience for women entrepreneurs.

More recently, our paths crossed again in a powerful way: Seraphim, DataLEADS, and the Goethe-Institut of Germany came together to design a cross-border journalism fellowship between India and Germany, focused on rebuilding trust in media. It's a project that resonates deeply with both of us and reflects DataLEADS' unique ability to connect dots between purpose and partnerships.

What I admire most about Syed Nazakat is not just his vision, but his ability to act with integrity and intent—doing the right thing, at the right time, and for the right reasons. He's not just a data man. He's a bridge-builder between ideas and action, between journalism and innovation, and between causes and communities.

It has been an honour to walk alongside him on parts of this journey and to witness how one man's belief in the power of data, truth, and collaboration can create ripples far beyond what we first imagined.

Congratulations, Syed Nazakat, and the DataLEADS team on 10 extraordinary years. The best is yet to come.



It has been an honour to walk alongside him on parts of this journey and to witness how one man's belief in the power of data, truth, and collaboration can create ripples far beyond what we first imagined.



RITU KAPUR

Co-founder and CEO of Quint Digital Limited, former broadcast journalist with Network18, CNN-IBN and History TV18, and advisory board member at Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (Oxford University), World Editors Forum, WAN-IFRA, and the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN).

EMBRACING NEW FRONTIERS WITH DataLEADS

Working with DataLEADS has always meant stepping into a space of constant learning and reinvention. In a digital news environment that shifts at dizzying speed, the only way to keep pace—and stay relevant—is to upskill, adapt, and reimagine how we engage with information.

DataLEADS does exactly that—building new conversations, nurturing capacity, and creating an ecosystem where individuals and organisations are empowered to take on misinformation with insight and integrity.

The Shakti Collective initiative, in particular, has been a powerful and inspiring idea—bringing together the specialised rigour of fact-checking organisations and the unmatched reach of legacy media. Supported by Google, it was no small feat to encourage competing newsrooms to collaborate, but in doing so, Shakti demonstrated the extraordinary impact of collective action. It was a privilege to work with the teams at DataLEADS and the Google News Initiative on a project that was as collaborative as it was ambitious.

DataLEADS' openness to feedback, willingness to fine-tune, and deep respect for editorial integrity made it one of the most effective fact-checking campaigns during the Indian elections—when facts are most under threat.

Being appointed the first English-language Ambassador for the FactShala Ambassador Programme was a true honour. Working with DataLEADS, The Poynter Institute, and MediaWise to script and shape media literacy content for the Indian viewer—especially one navigating a 'glance' culture—was both a challenge and a joy. Despite over two decades in broadcast journalism, it was the team at DataLEADS that encouraged me to face the camera for the first time ever.

In an age where misinformation threatens democracy and trust, the work DataLEADS is doing is not just necessary—it is foundational. They continue to lead from the front in the fight for information integrity in India, and I'm proud to have walked alongside them.



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GLENN CHONG

Senior Regional Programme Manager of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung's Asian Media Programme, based in Singapore. Focuses on political communication, digital policy, and press freedom, supporting media initiatives and engaging journalists, academics, and policymakers to strengthen democratic discourse across the region.

A DECADE OF QUIET IMPACT: REFLECTIONS ON A PARTNERSHIP WITH DataLEADS

The power of an idea lies not just in its novelty but in its ability to endure and inspire across contexts and continents. Over the past decade, DataLEADS has quietly built a platform that does precisely that, giving voice to data, equipping communities with insight, and nurturing the kind of journalistic leadership that our societies so desperately need.

Our partnership began with a shared conviction: that access to information must be accompanied by the skills to interpret it, question it, and apply it for the common good. In an age where misinformation travels faster than truth, and where public trust in institutions can be as fragile as it is essential, DataLEADS emerged as a calm, credible force, training journalists, empowering citizens, and enabling fact-based discourse in the world's largest democracy and beyond.

In DataLEADS, Konrad Adenauer Foundation found a partner that not only aligned with our goals but also consistently translated them into action with integrity, humility, and impact. Whether through their bootcamps, data journalism summits, or regional media networks, DataLEADS has never sought the limelight, and yet their work has illuminated pathways for so many.

I have come to admire Syed Nazakat's quiet determination. His vision is not loud, but it is unwavering. Under his leadership, DataLEADS has cultivated a culture that respects complexity without being paralysed by it, and one that believes change is most durable when rooted in local voices and lived realities.

As Asia grapples with a rapidly shifting media landscape, rising digital threats, and growing polarisation, organisations like DataLEADS serve as vital nodes for connection and calibration. They remind us that facts matter, that training matters, and that democracy, at its core, is a shared responsibility.

It has been a privilege to witness DataLEADS grow from an ambitious idea into a regional force for good. Our collaboration over the years has been defined not just by shared objectives but by mutual respect, learning, and trust. I have every confidence that the next ten years will see DataLEADS expand its impact, deepen its networks, and continue to shape the next generation of journalists, analysts, and civic actors across Asia.

On behalf of all of us at Konrad Adenauer Foundation's Media Programme Asia in Singapore, I offer my warmest congratulations on this milestone. And more than that, my sincere thanks, for your partnership and your purpose.



In DataLEADS, Konrad Adenauer Foundation found a partner that not only aligned with our goals but also consistently translated them into action with integrity, humility, and impact. DataLEADS has never sought the limelight, and yet their work has illuminated pathways for so many."



GUNA RAJ LUITEL

Prominent and highly respected Nepali journalist, author and the Editor-in-Chief of the Nagarik National Daily. With over three decades of experience, he is known for his work covering political, social, and developmental issues in Nepal. His work has earned him various prestigious prizes for journalism in the country.

DATA, TRUST, AND IMPACT: THE RISE OF DataLEADS IN ASIA'S NEWSROOMS

It was the year 2007 when I met a gentleman from India in the Philippines. We were classmates in the MA Journalism programme at Ateneo de Manila University. Since then, our connection has endured—a quiet, steady friendship. That man was Syed Nazakat. At the time we were both immersed in our newsrooms, each watching the other's work unfold across borders and headlines.

Syed Nazakat travelled to Guantanamo Bay to cover one of the world's most notorious prisons—a story that quickly made him a sensation in Indian journalism. Then, almost abruptly, he stepped away from the newsroom to launch a data-driven initiative. At the time, it was a modest beginning, far from the influential force DataLEADS would become. Today, data is indispensable to modern journalism, and when Syed Nazakat founded DataLEADS in India, many sensed it could change the game—and they were right. DataLEADS became more than just a name—it became synonymous with him, a force quietly extending its reach across South Asia and beyond.


Today, data is indispensable to modern journalism, and when Syed Nazakat founded DataLEADS in India, many sensed it could change the game—and they were right. DataLEADS became more than just a name—it became synonymous with him, a force quietly extending its reach across South Asia and beyond.

Two years ago, in November, I visited the DataLEADS office and saw Syed Nazakat's work in full bloom. The team's passion was palpable—their eagerness to share, to explain, to connect left an impression. Their warmth and clarity gave me a profound appreciation for the meaningful work they continue to do, quietly reshaping journalism's landscape.

DataLeads' growth has been multifaceted. It has become a hub for newsrooms across Asia. The Asian Dispatch is emerging as a unique platform—a space where journalists engage in cross-border reporting and pool knowledge and skills to craft journalism that matters.

What strikes me most about Syed Nazakat is not just his passion for reporting, but his relentless drive to expand journalism's boundaries through innovation and collaboration. In an era defined by "zero trust," the act of simply telling stories no longer suffices. What matters now is building credible, shared platforms where journalists across countries can practice their craft freely and collectively. In this context, I deeply admire Syed Nazakat's initiative as the founder of DataLeads.

The Asian Dispatch holds transformative potential for the region. Nepal, in particular, shines as a space where public-interest journalism thrives with comparatively greater freedom. DataLEADS' expanding footprint there could add a crucial dimension, nurturing Nepal's promise as a vibrant center for journalism education. In this unfolding story, DataLEADS can be the catalyst—connecting, empowering, and coordinating the next generation of storytellers.

INFOR
RE.

IMMIGRATION SILENCE

BELIEVING IN
THE POWER OF FACTS



GOVINDRAJ ETHIRAJ

Govindraj Ethiraj is a journalist, media entrepreneur, and founder of IndiaSpend, BOOMLive, and The Core. With 25 years in business journalism, he pioneered fact-checking initiatives in India, champions data-driven reporting on health, education, and climate, and hosts The Core Report podcast. He is a McNulty Prize Laureate

DATA AS A WEAPON FOR CHANGE

I first met with Syed Nazakat as a member of the GIJN and have since seen him build and scale DataLEADS into an organisation that is pioneering the use of data and evidence in story-telling by working with hundreds of journalists over the years.

As we have advocated through our own work at IndiaSpend, data and evidence are key in maintaining the highest standards of accountability and governance. My belief is that if people are more aware of issues and have better data, they will also be more engaged, and demand better governance from their representatives in order to take informed decisions.

As an organisation, I see DataLEADS with a similar vision of working towards building a thriving, information- and knowledge-rich society. I have been fortunate in witnessing and participating in their efforts in building large nationwide coalitions for verifying information and training journalists on digital safety. I see DataLEADS as an organisation that has a strong capability in building partnerships, bringing people and initiatives together and creating a powerful mix of ideas and content that leads to action.

The global media scene is in a heightened state of flux as mainstream media grapples with a trust deficit in a manner perhaps never seen before. The opportunity to create evidence-based information and content with the right amount of training and support has thus never been higher.

The need of the hour is to be a responsible leader who contributes meaningfully to society in a very specific way to create some definitive impact and bring about transformational change. Organisations ought to work ethically and responsibly, and with passion to create a healthy information ecosystem that serves us all.

At BOOM and IndiaSpend, we emphasise the importance of facts rather than opinions and work on data-driven stories that help people understand issues better, improve transparency, and make better-informed decisions in governance.

I look towards DataLEADS to continue to work on some of the biggest information challenges we are facing in these times and help guide journalists and media persons to produce high-quality data and evidence-backed insights that can help increase consumers' trust in journalism and reporting.

And make this world a better place!



I see DataLEADS as an organisation that has a strong capability in building partnerships, bringing people and initiatives together and creating a powerful mix of ideas and content that leads to action."



SUDHAKAR REDDY UDUMULA

Editor (Investigations) at The Times of India, Hyderabad, and a veteran journalist with 27 years of experience. A former Bureau Chief and City Editor at Deccan Chronicle, he is a GIJN Fellow, IJLP Alumnus, and Chevening Fellow, media trainer and author. An award-winning investigative reporter, his work spans corruption, governance, environment, health, and human rights.

FROM HYDERABAD TO THE HEART OF INDIAN JOURNALISM

My journey with DataLEADS began during the Google News Initiative's training programme in 2018, where I was part of the Telugu cohort in Hyderabad. That workshop was more than just training; it was a turning point. It connected me to a growing network of committed media professionals focused on countering misinformation with clarity, integrity, and evidence. It made me aware of the huge responsibility that journalists were shouldering in the rapidly changing times.

Since then, I've had the privilege to serve as a trainer under the GNI-DataLEADS partnership, conducting sessions across Telangana and Andhra Pradesh—in journalism colleges, universities, press clubs—reaching both young students and seasoned journalists. The training covered data verification, digital literacy, and tackling misinformation, especially through impactful initiatives like PollCheck.

What stands out about DataLEADS is its unwavering clarity of purpose and consistency. The leadership of Syed Nazakat and Surabhi Pandit Nangia has been instrumental. Syed Nazakat, with his watchdog and data journalism roots, has led with vision and credibility, building one of the most active media networks in Asia. His influence has not only shaped the media landscape in India but also inspired change across the region.

DataLEADS doesn't just run workshops—it fosters capacity, trust, and long-term impact. I've been part of collaborative training programmes for Urdu, Telugu, and Odia-language TV journalists, especially through partnerships with the U.S. Consulate and Osmania University's journalism faculty. These weren't one-off events; they sparked sustained engagement and action. Many of those who attended have gone on to establish independent initiatives like *NewsMeter* and *TeluguPost*.

The impact is tangible and far-reaching. When I see former trainees leading their own workshops or setting up regional desks, it reaffirms the quiet yet powerful transformation DataLEADS has enabled. In regions and languages that are often overlooked, this organisation has invested time, effort, and trust to create meaningful change.

Ten years is a significant milestone, yet it feels like only the beginning. DataLEADS has created more than a network—it has helped cultivate a culture of responsibility and truth in journalism. Being part of this journey, witnessing its reach and relevance grow year by year, has been a privilege. I look forward to continuing this mission with DataLEADS, championing accuracy, resilience, and integrity in our media landscape.



Ten years is a significant milestone, yet it feels like only the beginning. DataLEADS has created more than a network—it has helped cultivate a culture of responsibility and truth in journalism."



SURYA GANGADHARAN

Editor of StratNews Global and veteran journalist, formerly International Affairs Editor at CNN-IBN and Foreign Editor at NDTV. He has also held senior positions at PTI, The Indian Express, India Today, and the Straits Times Group in Singapore.

He has reported from major conflict zones, covering the Arab Spring in Egypt and Syria, wars in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, as well as the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide and the crisis in Somalia.

FROM BASEMENT BEGINNINGS TO DIGITAL FRONTIERS: THE JOURNEY OF DataLEADS

The exact date escapes me, but the moment is vivid. I was in Chennai, at my sister's home, when Syed Nazakat called one late evening. He spoke about launching a new digital platform. The specifics have faded, but I remember the jolt of energy his words carried. I didn't fly to Delhi the next morning, but restlessness settled in. After years in print journalism—steady, familiar, almost too comfortable—I'd been longing for a different rhythm.

Syed Nazakat outlined his vision: a platform rooted in digital, data-driven journalism, tracking policies and programmes—untested territory for me. The part that gripped me was a watchdog platform, ambitious in scope, paired with training programmes for journalists in storytelling that informs and interrogates. That was the kind of journalism I had always believed in.

I worked on early website drafts, conversations stretching late, shaping words with care. Soon, I helped with the first watchdog manual for Asian newsrooms—a modest start for something that felt larger than the room we worked in.

The shift from print and TV to this emerging digital space was unsettling. Media was fragmenting, audiences scattering, authority changing form. But Syed Nazakat seemed far ahead of the curve—reading the winds of change before the rest of us saw the clouds. Social media was becoming a dominant force, and he lived its possibilities.

Eventually, the pull of old routines took me back to television, at WION. But Syed Nazakat and I stayed connected. We'd meet at the Army's public affairs office in South Block, where Maj. Gen. SL Narasimhan (later Lt. Gen) headed the unit. Syed Nazakat was still at *The Week* but already eyeing entrepreneurship. I had tried launching a defence and tech magazine, but funding ran dry. Syed Nazakat, thankfully, pushed ahead.

It was at WION that I connected him to Raju Santhanam, who in turn introduced him to Surbhi Pandit and Raj (Varadarajan Ananthakrishnan)—the team that would turn DataLEADS into a formidable force.

The future is unmistakably digital. Syed Nazakat saw it early and shaped DataLEADS with quiet persistence. What lies ahead is unresolved, but the need is clear: a global media platform that reflects India's contradictions and aspirations—Independent, unswayed by politics or corporate agendas, and sustainable enough to do what journalism demands: be on the ground, listen to people, and tell the story as it is.

Perhaps Syed Nazakat already knows the next step. I hope he lets us in.



The future is unmistakably digital. Syed saw it early and shaped DataLEADS with quiet persistence. What lies ahead is unresolved, but the need is clear: a global media platform that reflects India's contradictions and aspirations."



NISHA BHAMBHANI

India's leading senior Advocate specialising in media law, regulatory advisory, and litigation across print, electronic, and digital media. She practices before the Supreme Court, Delhi High Court, and key tribunals. Her expertise spans broadcasting regulation, licensing, ICT accessibility, television audience measurement systems and disputes between various stakeholders in the broadcasting industry.

GUARDIANS OF FACT: A LAWYER'S JOURNEY WITH DataLEADS

Being a lawyer in the media space for almost three decades, my journey with DataLEADS began in 2019. Conducting research projects and workshops and participating in panel discussions relating to media and its various facets has been very insightful for me, professionally. I have been part of multiple projects, like *FactShala: The News Literacy Project* in India, designed to help the underprivileged communities in Tier 2 and 3 cities in the country analyse online information and news critically and sift online misinformation.

Legal and Ethical concerns of Investigative Journalism was another online capacity building training programme for journalists of Assam, conducted by the Don Bosco University, Assam in collaboration with the Guwahati Press Club and DataLEADS. That apart, there were sessions on *Media Laws and Misinformation* aimed at supporting journalists, fact checkers and media educators; and *Shakti-India Fact Check Collective*, a consortium of Indian fact checkers and news publishers working collaboratively to counter online misinformation and aid in early detection of online misinformation and deepfakes.

 *DataLEADS is committed to promoting and facilitating empowerment of journalists particularly in relation to dealing with misinformation and disinformation; increasing digital literacy for the benefit of society and maintaining the integrity of data in the increasingly complex digital landscape.*

These programmes are the urgent need of the hour in view of changing information landscape. Collaborating with DataLEADS and the Forum on Information & Democracy, France, I came to be part of the Working Group from various countries, which set-down a concrete set of recommendations on how to regulate artificial intelligence to support information integrity and ensure democratic control of AI in the information space. The recommendations resulted in rendering a policy framework in 2024 titled "AI as a Public Good: Ensuring Democratic Control of AI in the Information Space".

DataLEADS is committed to promoting and facilitating empowerment of journalists particularly in relation to dealing with misinformation and disinformation; increasing digital literacy for the benefit of society and maintaining the integrity of data in the increasingly complex digital landscape. This commitment aligns with my belief that information is arguably the most potent tool in today's world and it must be used ethically and for the benefit of the people at large. Not only does the team at DataLEADS have an unwavering commitment to promoting ethical and impartial use of data and information, their enthusiasm, sense of purpose, dynamism, creativity, teamwork and efficiency is inspiring and infectious. I look forward to continuing the journey with DataLEADS and contributing professionally to help bring credibility and sanity to the rather complicated and anarchic digital era.



PROF. ANUBHUTI YADAV

Head of New Media and Course Director of Digital Media Course at IIMC, media literacy pioneer, author, award-winning researcher and educator, advisor to National and International organisations on digital literacy, fact-checking and media education, with over 20 years' teaching and research experience.

WALKING WITH DataLEADS: A JOURNEY INTO MEDIA LITERACY

Since 2018, my journey with DataLEADS has been one of continuous learning, sharing, and collaboration. It has been a path filled with opportunities to explore, contribute, and grow—both personally and professionally.

Over the years, I have participated in most of the initiatives undertaken by DataLEADS, sometimes as a trainee, at times as a trainer, sometimes as an adviser, and often as a curriculum developer. Each role brought its own set of insights and learning, and every experience has been deeply enriching and rewarding.

Although my engagement with media literacy began back in 2008, it is in the last few years that I have seen the movement gain unprecedented momentum—and much of that credit goes to DataLEADS and its partners. Their vision and commitment have played a pivotal role in taking the concept of media literacy beyond academic circles and into the real world, where it is needed the most.

DataLEADS has truly lived up to its name—it has taken the lead in empowering journalists, educators, and communities with skills in data verification. I have witnessed, firsthand, how a series of workshops gradually transformed into a larger movement. Trainers and educators across the country embraced the mission of combating misinformation and disinformation with enthusiasm and determination. From integrating media literacy into academic curricula to establishing data verification desks in newsrooms, the impact has been both visible and meaningful.

One of the most remarkable initiatives I was privileged to witness and be part of was FactShala. This program exemplified how a concept rooted in books and research papers could be translated into grassroots action. It brought media literacy to communities that are often overlooked—rural populations, small-town youth, local educators, and civil society workers. DataLEADS has always been at the forefront of experimentation and innovation. Initiatives like ADiRA (AI for Digital Readiness & Advancement) are further examples of how the organisation remains ahead of the curve, addressing emerging challenges with creativity and foresight.

Throughout this journey, what has remained constant is the passion and dedication of the team—the trainers, researchers, and coordinators—who work tirelessly to bring about the change. From 2018 till today, my association with DataLEADS has been more than just a collaboration—it has been a journey of purpose and community. I look forward to continuing this shared mission of promoting truth, building resilience against misinformation, and creating a more literate and empowered society.



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PRATYUSH RANJAN

Chief Editor, Digital Services, AI Integration & Fact-Checking at India's leading wire service, PTI. A digital media professional with over 22 years' experience,

he specialises in fact-checking, journalism training in India and abroad, and strategising the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in content management.

He also leads PTI's fact-checking strategy and operations.

A JOURNEY OF GROWTH, TRUST, AND TRUTH IN JOURNALISM

My journey with DataLEADS has been far more than a professional collaboration—it has been a profound path of growth and unwavering commitment.

I first encountered DataLEADS when India's fact-checking ecosystem was still in its infancy. What immediately drew me to them was the clarity of their mission: to empower journalists with the tools and skills necessary to build an informed and resilient public sphere. But it wasn't just the mission that stood out—it was the people behind it. Syed Nazakat, the founder and driving force of DataLEADS, embodies a spirit of mentorship and vision that transforms not just projects, but people.

Syed Nazakat believed in me long before I fully believed in myself. I was selected for the inaugural training programme under the Google News Initiative, at a time when I was still finding my footing. His mentorship and the unwavering support of Team DataLEADS during that first training session in 2018 were instrumental in shaping me into a trainer. Their belief in my potential gave me the courage to find my voice, refine my methods, and embrace the responsibility of guiding others in the fight against misinformation.

What sets DataLEADS apart is its spirit of collaboration, inclusivity, and trust. Through workshops, bootcamps, and countless training sessions, I've had the privilege of engaging with journalists from every corner of India and beyond. Together, we developed verification modules, ran impactful training programs, and created spaces where accuracy and integrity were paramount. Each workshop reaffirmed the same truth: that accurate information is not just a necessity—it's a public good.

One of the most rewarding aspects has been witnessing the ripple effect: how a single workshop can reshape newsroom policies, how a single partnership can inspire others, and how a single verified fact can challenge waves of misinformation. It's a testament to what can be achieved when like-minded individuals unite around a shared vision.


One of the most rewarding aspects has been witnessing the ripple effect: how a single workshop can reshape newsroom policies, how a single partnership can inspire others, and how a single verified fact can challenge waves of misinformation."

As DataLEADS marks this milestone, I'm proud to say that our journey is far from over. Now, as the Fact-Check Lead at the Press Trust of India, I remain committed to building digital resilience, promoting media literacy, and standing firm for journalism that serves the public interest. With DataLEADS as a trusted ally, I look forward to the road ahead—with gratitude, optimism, and purpose. Here's to DataLEADS—for the trust, the impact, and the shared journey that continues.



KANCHAN KAUR

Professor of Practice at Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Bengaluru, and a seasoned journalist and media educator with over four decades of experience across media and communication. She serves as an assessor for the International Fact-Checking Network and has been working in the area of Media Literacy since 2016 and has now turned her attention to Journalism and AI.

THE POWER OF A COMMITTED FEW: MY JOURNEY WITH DataLEADS

They say it takes a village to raise a child. To educate an entire nation in media literacy it takes a small, dedicated team that works tirelessly, with foresight, planning, and an unwavering sense of purpose.

DataLEADS is that team—a close-knit family united by camaraderie and shared vision, constantly expanding yet rarely losing a member. Their network spans India, from major cities with their institutions and organisations to tiny villages, remote hamlets, and hard-to-reach settlements. Wherever they go, the goal remains the same: empowering people to think critically and resist misinformation.

The blight of misinformation is not new, but the internet age has accelerated its spread. Recognising this early, DataLEADS emerged as a transformative force, training thousands in media, healthcare, education, and civil society. Their mission: to equip people with the skills to combat misinformation and consume information ethically.

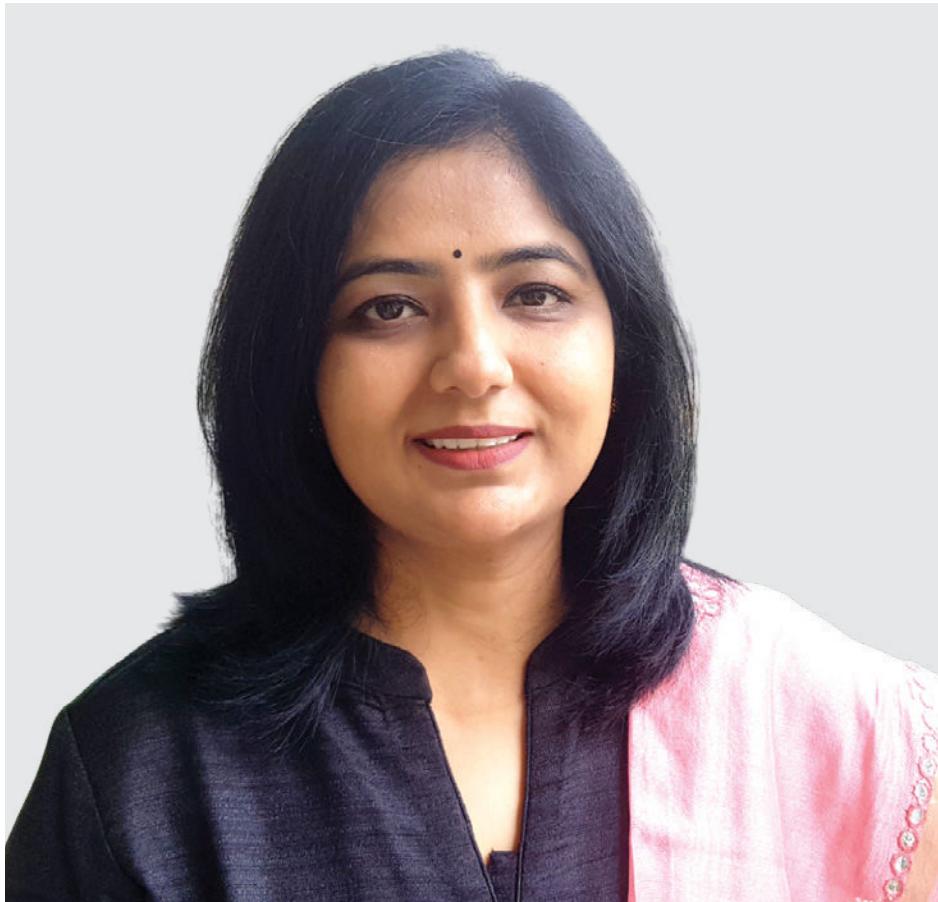
Today, their work spans multiple verticals—Factshala, Shakti, collaborations with Stanford History Education Group and BBC World Service have produced robust curricula translated into several Indian languages. Globally, partnerships with the World Health Organisation have led to initiatives such as *Science for Fact Checkers* and the *Global Infodemic Management Course*, which has trained healthcare professionals from over 100 countries.

I first joined this family of truth-seekers about six years ago, moderating a panel on media ownership. I was struck by their warmth, professionalism, and encouragement. That encounter led to my involvement with the *Special Webinar Series* on navigating the Covid-19 Infodemic when the pandemic brought life to a standstill. DataLEADS adapted swiftly, hosting online and offline editions of the Trusted Media Summit—events I was fortunate to be part of.

What sets them apart is constant innovation and agility. In 2023, *Zonal Hubs* evolved into the *University Network*, fostering collaboration across campuses. Most recently, their AI-focused programme ADiRA brought together health professionals and media practitioners to explore ways of countering AI-related misinformation.


Working with DataLEADS has been an honour—offering me opportunities to teach, to learn, and to be inspired. Each interaction has been enriching, a reminder of the power of collective action.

Working with DataLEADS has been an honour—offering me opportunities to teach, to learn, and to be inspired. Each interaction has been enriching, a reminder of the power of collective action in defending truth. Every week, I look forward to Syed's thoughtful newsletter and think: *May the force be with you!*



DR. SHILPI JHA

Dr. Shilpi Jha is a Dean of School of Media and Humanities at Manav Rachna International Institute of Research and Studies. Dr. Shilpi is an academician, journalist, trainer, and author with 24 years of experience in media and academia. A former broadcaster with Aaj Tak, India Today TV, and Voice of America, she specialises in media literacy, fact-checking, and digital accountability, while leading research, training, and academic initiatives worldwide.

SHAPING MEDIA EDUCATION IN THE AGE OF AI

I first met Syed, Surbhi, and the team in August 2018 during the first cohort training for Google's News Initiative in Gurgaon. I was awestruck at how meticulously they had planned the sessions and the ease at which they operated. Since then I have been fortunate to partner with them at most of their training related initiatives and now I am incredibly excited to join as a trainer for the ADiRA training programme.

It has been over 7 years of great learning, teaching, co-creating, and bonding experience for me, and still counting. I have shifted jobs and even cities since then but the association with some of the most wonderful people I have met in my professional journey continues to grow. Some of these relationships have grown beyond the professional realm and are more part of an extended family. Along the way we have created some wonderful memories together.

As a media academic, the content which we have been using has made me realise the importance of critical thinking in media education and has motivated me to include online verification and media literacy as an integral part of the curriculum. My interactions with media professionals and newsrooms during the training sessions have helped me keep updated with the latest newsroom trends and identify changes in workflow taking place due to changing technologies. This backward integration helps me train and prepare my students better for the industry.

In the last 7 years the AI driven data and content world around us has changed, and how. While everyone is scrambling to adapt to the challenges posed by the sudden tech disruption, a lot of newsrooms are struggling to find out what works for them the best. Legacy newsrooms too find it challenging to steer themselves in the right direction because adaptation demands time and resources and many times it lags behind a fresh bout of up-gradation. On the other hand, at the grass root, cohorts are struggling to make a head start with the very basics.

Being part of ADiRA has given me a perspective about a beginner's headway into the world of AI. While we are already integrating this with the fresh curriculum, we are working on making it an inclusive and evolving process where responsible usage of AI can aid students in being prepared to face the industry.


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GLOBAL

HEALTH

STRENGTHENING THE HEALTH
INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM



TINA D PURNAT

Doctor of Public Health and Prajna Leadership Fellow at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. With over two decades of international experience, she has led major initiatives at the WHO, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, and in academic and policy settings to modernise how public health systems use data, technology, and evidence.

STRENGTHENING GLOBAL HEALTH COMMUNICATION: INSIGHTS FROM WORKING WITH DataLEADS

I first connected with Syed Nazakat and the DataLEADS team during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the global demand for clear and community-grounded public health information was growing rapidly.

At the time, I was leading the inaugural infodemic management efforts at the World Health Organisation in Geneva. DataLEADS was already recognised for its digital and media literacy work in India, and we collaborated on several initiatives aimed at addressing health misinformation.

In 2020, their team supported us in organising public health panels at the Medical Misinformation Summit, an event they regularly hosted. Their on-the-ground understanding of communities and experience with digital ecosystems brought valuable context to global discussions. Later that year, DataLEADS played a key role in supporting the organisation of WHO's 3rd Global Conference on Infodemic Management, with a focus on whole-of-society approaches to responding to the COVID-19 infodemic.

The collaboration continued into 2021, when they worked with WHO colleagues to deliver science communication training and a series of train-the-trainer workshops for the APAC region. These efforts supported the growth of infodemic management capacity among healthcare workers, particularly in South and Southeast Asia. Since then, it has been notable to see how DataLEADS has advanced this work independently, including by developing dedicated training programs for healthcare professionals and public health partners.

DataLEADS brings together practical field experience, digital literacy, and the ability to build and sustain international networks. Their work during the pandemic and beyond has contributed meaningfully to how partners and communities navigate health information challenges. This has been reflected in the appreciation they've received from collaborators, and in the number of organisations that have continued to engage with them over time.

Their partnerships and programs continue to support health information integrity in both local and global contexts. Working with DataLEADS has been a constructive part of broader efforts to strengthen public health communication in an evolving and complex information environment.



DataLEADS brings together practical field experience, digital literacy, and the ability to build and sustain international networks. Their work during the pandemic and beyond has contributed meaningfully to how partners and communities navigate health information challenges."



DR. KARAN THAKUR

*Group Vice President for Corporate Affairs & Sustainability at Apollo Hospitals.
He is an Eisenhower and Chevening Gurukul Fellow with academic training
from Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Manchester Business School,
University of Manchester, Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore
and National Law University, New Delhi.*

CELEBRATING A DECADE OF DATA-DRIVEN IMPACT WITH DataLEADS

It has been a remarkable ten-year journey of collaboration and mutual respect with DataLEADS and its visionary founder, Syed Nazakat. I still vividly remember the day Syed Nazakat first walked into my office, eyes gleaming with passion, armed with an idea that was just beginning to take shape. That meeting a decade ago wasn't just another professional interaction—it was the spark that ignited something truly transformative.

As Syed Nazakat shared his vision of harnessing data to strengthen health sector reportage, I felt an immediate surge of excitement. The healthcare sector at the time was struggling with both a lack of reliable information and an increasing tide of misinformation. What Syed Nazakat proposed—creating a platform that not only highlighted data but used it as the bedrock for meaningful journalism, policy, and administration—addressed a critical gap. I strongly encouraged him to pursue this much-needed intervention.

Over the past ten years, DataLEADS has not only lived up to that early promise but exceeded it. It has empowered journalists to tell stories rooted in truth, enabled policymakers to make decisions based on solid evidence, and supported healthcare leaders like myself in translating complex information into clear, actionable strategies. In an era where misinformation can spread as rapidly as disease, DataLeads' role in promoting data literacy and integrity has been nothing short of stellar.

DataLEADS was one of the first of its kind—and remains a beacon in its field. Its work has embedded the importance of data not just as a collection of numbers but as a powerful tool for transparency, accountability, and improved health outcomes.

Reflecting on this journey, I feel immense pride in what DataLEADS has accomplished and I am hopeful for the future. In a world increasingly shaped by information and analytics, the role of institutions like DataLEADS will only become more vital. Syed Nazakat's leadership and the unwavering commitment of his team have shown that it is possible to harness data to drive meaningful change—not just in the health sector, but across all facets of public life.

Here's to the next decade of impact. I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Syed Nazakat and the entire DataLEADS team. May your journey continue to inspire, innovate, and illuminate.

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PAULA FRAY

Co-founder & CEO of the Fraymedia Foundation, she is a veteran South African journalist and media leader. A former editor of the Saturday Star and Regional Director for Inter Press Service Africa, she is also a Nieman Fellow at Harvard. Fray has been a strong advocate for gender equity and media sustainability across Africa. She has served on the boards of The New Humanitarian in Geneva, Africa Check and Accountability Lab South Africa.

CLARITY IN CHAOS: REFLECTIONS ON A COLLABORATIVE JOURNEY

It has been a privilege to work with DataLEADS, particularly on the Global Infodemic Management Course. At a time when the world was grappling not just with a health crisis but an information crisis, the course provided timely, evidence-based support for doctors and healthcare professionals worldwide.

DataLEADS' approach throughout was deeply collaborative. They valued input, welcomed diverse perspectives, and ensured that the final product reflected the lived realities of health professionals in different parts of the world. DataLEADS developed a programme that was practical, relevant, and responsive — enabling frontline professionals in 79 countries to better understand, manage, and communicate in the face of misinformation.

What impressed me most was DataLEADS' thoughtful and values-driven approach. They brought together global expertise, local insight, and creative delivery to produce a course that was grounded in reality and designed for impact. The team worked with professionalism, agility, and care to ensure that every aspect of the course served the real needs of healthcare workers under pressure.

Now, as DataLEADS celebrates 10 years of innovation, collaboration, and growth, it is inspiring to reflect on how far they've come. From a two-person initiative in 2015 to an organisation that now partners with global tech companies, governments, media houses, and grassroots organisations, their journey is a remarkable one. Their reach is matched by their integrity and their enduring commitment to informed, empowered communities.

I am honoured to have played a small part in their journey and look forward to seeing how DataLEADS continues to shape the future of information ecosystems. DataLEADS is a trusted partner in a noisy world - bringing clarity, credibility, and creativity to every project they take on.


What impressed me most was DataLEADS' thoughtful and values-driven approach. They brought together global expertise, local insight, and creative delivery to produce a course that was grounded in reality and designed for impact.



DR. SALEEM UR REHMAN

Former Director General of Health & Family Welfare, Jammu & Kashmir; Director of Health Services, J&K; and Director General of Youth Services & Sports, J&K. He has also served as Project Director of the AIDS Control Program, J&K, President of the State Medical Council for J&K & Ladakh, and as a member of the National Medical Commission, India.

AHEAD OF THE CURVE: DataLEADS, AI, AND THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC SERVICE

I first heard about DataLEADS sometime in the late autumn of 2015—when I was serving as Director, Health Services in the Jammu and Kashmir government. It wasn't DataLEADS that people spoke of at first. It was Syed Nazakat.

When I first met Nazakat, he spoke with the clarity of someone who had already played the long game in his mind. He acknowledged, without hesitation, that it would take time—that people would need to be sensitised to the idea of data work, to understand its urgency and relevance.

DataLEADS, as he described it, was rooted in data analysis, in the urgent need to make sense of data and information rather than just pass it along. Back then, this was still an unfamiliar language for most of us. But something about it—perhaps the clarity, perhaps the audacity—struck me. It was new. And it was deeply fascinating.

I asked him, almost instinctively, "But how will you do it?"

And then he spoke—about strategy, about tracing problems back to their roots, about building systems that didn't just respond but anticipated, adapted, evolved. What struck me most wasn't just the plan—though it was clear he had one—it was the way he spoke about it. With conviction. With care. The competence was there, of course. But more than that, there was clarity and commitment.

"But in time," he said, almost matter-of-fact, "we'll grow. We'll do it this way. And one day, we'll be known—credibly, and widely—not just across the country, but around the world." There was no bravado in it. Just a quiet certainty, conviction, faith and perseverance that the idea would carry. What he said has been proven right when we look at where DataLEADS stands today.


DataLEADS is doing a remarkable job—a true public service, and in many ways, a national service. Under Syed Nazakat's vision—especially DataLEADS' early leadership in Artificial Intelligence—the organisation is already ahead of the curve.

Looking ahead, all I'll say is this: DataLEADS is doing a remarkable job—a true public service, and in many ways, a national service. Under Syed Nazakat's vision—especially DataLEADS' early leadership in Artificial Intelligence—the organisation is already ahead of the curve with its new programme ADiRA (AI for Digital Readiness & Advancement). And you must keep evolving. Stagnation, after all, breeds decay.

We're living through uncertain, accelerated times. Social media, artificial intelligence—everything is shifting rapidly. No one knows what's coming next, but someone on the team should always be scanning the horizon—so DataLEADS gets there first.

I wish DataLEADS continued success in all they do.



SATYAJIT SARKAR

Public health strategist with 30 years' experience, former WHO, FAO and UNICEF expert, specialising in risk communication, socio-behavioral change, and global health emergency response, currently Research Scientist (AMR Policy & Advocacy) and Project Technical Lead (The RADAAR Project) at International Vaccine Institute (IVI), Seoul, Korea.

DATA, SCIENCE, COLLABORATION: MY DECADE WITH DataLEADS FOR A HEALTHIER FUTURE

Confucius once said, "Choose a job you love, and you will never work a day in your life." I believe Syed Nazakat, Dr. Sabba, and the entire DataLEADS team are living proof of this. There's a radiant, never-say-die spirit that hits you the moment you meet them—whether for the first time or the fiftieth.

I stumbled upon Syed Nazakat and Sabba nearly a decade ago, when DataLEADS was just a two-person outfit operating from a tiny basement in South Delhi. But they had vision—and that mattered. We worked on a series of advocacy documents for WHO-SEARO that cleverly used data and graphics to tell human-centred stories. It was early evidence of the creativity that would become DataLEADS' signature.

Soon after, Syed Nazakat invited me to a "Data Boot Camp" with over 100 journalists, scientists and policy makers. I remember being blown away by the passion, intelligence, and clarity of purpose. The sessions were helmed by global leaders working on data, technology and addressing online harmful content long before it became a buzzword. That bootcamp was more than a workshop—it was a window into the future.

Years passed. Life moved on. We lost touch. Then one day, out of curiosity, I looked up DataLEADS again—and was floored. A breathtaking portfolio had quietly taken shape: global collaborations with WHO, Google, UN, prestigious universities, national campaigns tackling vaccine hesitancy, grassroots health literacy projects, and even AI skilling for frontline workers. The team had grown but the spirit? Unchanged.

In 2024, I reached out to explore collaboration on a Fleming Fund-supported initiative addressing antimicrobial resistance through the International Vaccine Institute. My project was modest yet vital: building a data hub for the Regional AMR Data Analysis for Advocacy, Response, and Policy—RADAAR. Without hesitation, Syed Nazakat replied, "Consider it done." In that moment, I was reminded of a conviction I hold close: those you trust most are the ones whose support is so steady, it becomes quietly indispensable.

DataLEADS, to me, is not just an organisation. It is a culture—of joy, intelligence, action, and deep listening. As they step into their *agla dashak*, their next decade, I have no doubt they will continue to break ground—with laughter, with care, and with unmistakable brilliance.

I wish them the very best.



I was reminded of a conviction I hold close: those you trust most are the ones whose support is so steady, it becomes quietly indispensable.

DataLEADS, to me, is not just an organisation. It is a culture—of joy, intelligence, action, and deep listening."



DR. CAIT MCMAHON

Psychologist, educator, and innovator with 30+ years' experience supporting journalists' resilience to trauma. Founder of Dart Centre Asia Pacific, OAM awardee, Honorary Fellow at University of Melbourne. Developed pioneering research on journalists and trauma, and continues advancing mental health, transparency, and fact-checking initiatives globally.

STRENGTHENING JOURNALISM THROUGH CARE, RESILIENCE, AND TRUTH

I have known Syed Nazakat since the early 2000's when he visited Australia and we met to discuss the intersection between journalism and trauma in my role as the founding managing director of the Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma – Asia Pacific. We kept in touch over the years. As a psychologist immersed in the journalism world in the Asia Pacific, I would attend various journalism conferences in our region and beyond, and we would bump into each other, and rekindle our friendship.

It was at the 2019 GIJN Conference that Syed and I had a decent catch-up, and he told me that he had established Data Leads, an initiative bringing together health professionals, journalists and researchers to challenge misinformation in health sector reporting. I was invited to join the First Check team, a fabulous group of health professionals in the Asia Pacific region and globally.

I facilitated a Trauma Literacy - Training of Trainers for Indian media professionals and educators through Data Leads some years back and I was struck by the deep and sincere commitment to learning about the impacts of psychological trauma in the participants. We discussed the personal impact of trauma on the individual, but we also discussed Indian society and the collective nature of trauma impacts – the ripple effects that may occur through one's family, village, and society at large. It has been a real delight to see some of those trained go on to facilitate their own training. The participants took the material and translated it and made it culturally appropriate to their own situations, which was inspiring to see.

Finally, I would like to address the current state of the world with the various wars, civil conflicts, attacks on minorities that journalists report on that seem to be becoming a global norm. All societies – local and global, and especially those of us who work in the media sphere need to support journalists so that they can maintain their resilience to do the important work we need them to do. We need healthy journalists to undertake healthy journalism.

It has also been wonderful to watch Syed Nazakat's professional growth and development over the 20-plus years since I have known him. He has contributed so much to journalism, especially to ensure that facts are checked in the most important aspects of our lives – our health and wellbeing.

Congratulations to the team at Data Leads – and happy 10th birthday!



All societies – local and global, and especially those of us who work in the media sphere need to support journalists so that they can maintain their resilience to do the important work we need them to do. We need healthy journalists to undertake healthy journalism."

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COMMUNITY BUILDING

REAL IMPACT HAPPENS WHEN
BORDERS BLUR—ACROSS
GEOGRAPHIES, LANGUAGES,
AND DISCIPLINES



EOGHAN SWEENEY

Founder of OSINT Essentials, Eoghan is a digital media consultant and expert in online investigations, verification, and fact-checking. He has helped shape workflows at FirstDraft, led global skilling initiatives, and trained journalists in 27 countries, empowering media professionals worldwide to tackle misinformation and strengthen reporting standards.

JOURNALISM WITH IMPACT: THE SUBTLE POWER OF PURPOSE AND THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH

If someone asked me to distil my aspirations for a life in journalism to a single word, I would reply -without hesitation: "impact". I think for any of us who embarked on this journey in the spirit of a vocation rather than simply a "career", the idea that you have contributed in any tiny way to improving the state of the world is deeply gratifying. As I became convinced of the value of training journalists and civil society groups, the opportunity arose to dedicate myself to it full-time. One of the first projects — and still the largest — began with a few dozen journalists from across India, gathered for several days in a room in Gurgaon. Several people ventured the suggestion to me that the need for cooperation and sharing meant we were doomed to failure. "What you have in Indian media isn't so much rivalry as outright hostility," one said.

They couldn't have been more wrong.

The generosity, creativity, and commitment shown by so many of that initial group, and those who followed in subsequent months and years, have contributed to an astounding network of like-minded professionals committed to truth and accuracy. In an online environment where mistakes and pratfalls have been superseded by massively resourced deliberate campaigns of disinformation and obfuscation, the value of such a collective cannot be overestimated.

DataLEADS has, without a hint of exaggeration, been absolutely key to this. The team's logistical excellence, energy, creativity and unfailing tolerance and good humour combined to provide as good a laboratory for this great experiment as one could ask for. Having started with an effective focus, DataLEADS identified and added disciplines and found experts willing and able to communicate them. All the while, disagreements and differences of opinion were wrangled in an effective and respectful manner.

All of which brings me back to impact. What could have been an over-funded, bloated talking shop has through the efforts of all, and the leadership of Dataleads, delivered on a scale that is probably beyond the wildest expectations of those present at its inception. Personally, I can say without hesitation that it ranks with my most valued involvements in journalism — and life.

Circumstances closer to home have since conspired to wrench me away from this milieu and back toward somewhat more "traditional" journalism. But the thirst for impact remains. And the existence of organisations like Dataleads, and those inspired by them, means quality journalism and those who wish to practise it have a powerful champion in their corner.



DataLEADS has, without a hint of exaggeration, been absolutely key to this. The team's logistical excellence, energy, creativity and unfailing tolerance and good humour combined to provide as good a laboratory for this great experiment as one could ask for."



JAYANT MAMMEN MATHEW

Executive Editor & Director of Malayala Manorama, 137 year old, India's largest media organisation with a strong presence across print, television, radio, and digital platforms. A former President of the Indian Newspaper Society (2018-19), he is an award-winning journalist and an alumni of Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, and Columbia University, New York.

WHEN THE TRUTH NEEDS AN AMBASSADOR

I got a call from Syed Nazakat last year about the FactShala Ambassador programme. He told me about the initiative's mission to combat misinformation online, issues that are causing deep harm to our social fabric. As a former colleague and a stellar journalist, Syed Nazakat's work has purpose. He had once called his time at Malayala Manorama a golden period in his career. I was glad to reconnect and agreed to be the programme's Ambassador in Malayalam. In a world increasingly unmoored from fact, this felt necessary.

Becoming part of this campaign pushed me beyond my comfort zone — and I'm grateful it did. I found myself in front of the camera, speaking about information literacy and addressing misinformation in a way that could truly connect with people in Kerala. In just two days, we recorded over 10 videos. The pace was relentless.

The Malayala Manorama Group threw its full weight behind the initiative. The videos were promoted across platforms—digital, broadcast, and print. The response was immediate and deeply affirming. Viewers reached out, not just to commend the clarity and tone of the messaging but to express relief that finally, someone was speaking plainly about a topic too often buried beneath jargon.

In fact, I was later invited to speak on a panel on health misinformation at a medical conference because someone had seen these very videos. That's how these things travel: quietly, screen to screen, mind to mind, until they shape conversations in rooms you never expected to enter.

If one thing is clear, it is this: misinformation is not an abstract problem. It is a slow, corrosive force. It erodes trust. It confuses the young and elderly. It disorients the vulnerable. There is no single fix to this challenge. Governments, tech platforms and us journalists all have a role to play. And we must act together, across sectors and disciplines, not as saviours but as guardians. We need more community-powered initiatives in India, rooted in information literacy, digital safety and collaboration.

For me, this wasn't just a series of videos. It was a quiet act of public good. A decision to stand for facts, for fairness, and for a kind of journalism that still puts the people first.

As DataLEADS marks its tenth anniversary, I wish the team success. I look forward to building more collaborations, together, in this crucial fight for truth.



Becoming part of this campaign pushed me beyond my comfort zone — and I'm grateful it did. I found myself in front of the camera, speaking about information literacy and addressing misinformation in a way that could truly connect with people in Kerala."



RAJESH UPADHYAY

Editor-in-Chief and Executive President at Jagran New Media, newsroom leader with prior leadership roles at major Indian media houses including at Hindustan Times Media and DB Corp, and IIM Indore alumnus specialising in digital journalism, digital transformation, and media strategy.

A PARTNERSHIP ROOTED IN TRUTH: GROWING THROUGH IMPACT

My association with DataLEADS began in 2018, when I had the invaluable opportunity to be part of the first cohort of journalists trained under the Google News Initiative's fact-checking program. This program, a collaborative effort with DataLEADS, provided the foundational frameworks that inspired my newsroom to structure a dedicated team, adopt a professional and technology-driven approach to verification, and embed media literacy into our core strategy.

Over the years, this initial training blossomed into a strong, values-driven collaboration. We've worked together on numerous significant projects, including the Shankti Collective initiative, which stands out as one of the most impactful newsroom collaboration and training programs I can recall. What truly impressed me was not just the sheer scale of the initiative but also the exceptional leadership and energy the DataLEADS team consistently brought to the table. Their dedication and clear journalistic vision made every collaboration seamless and incredibly meaningful.

Our partnership has been pivotal in helping us transition from reactive fact-checking to a more proactive, community-centric media literacy model. Together, we've conducted training sessions across India, reaching a diverse audience including educators, students, and fellow journalists, empowering them to engage with information critically. This work has had a profound ripple effect, significantly shaping our editorial direction and deepening our outreach efforts.

A moment that will forever stay with me occurred during a field training session in a Tier 2 city. A schoolteacher approached me, tears in her eyes, sharing how the training had utterly transformed the way she and her students understood the news. That raw, honest, and hopeful moment truly encapsulated the purpose of this shared journey with DataLEADS: to empower citizens with the essential tools to seek truth.

As DataLEADS celebrates this significant milestone, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations. It has truly been a privilege to grow alongside an organisation so deeply committed to integrity, innovation, and impact. I eagerly look forward to our continued collaboration and collective progress in the ongoing fight against misinformation.


What truly impressed me was not just the sheer scale of the initiative but also the exceptional leadership and energy the DataLEADS team consistently brought to the table. Their dedication and clear journalistic vision made every collaboration seamless and incredibly meaningful."



AVIJIT DUTT

Actor, filmmaker, theatre director and communications consultant, widely recognised for his work as a social activist in child welfare and consumer rights. His featurette on child abuse, AkkarBakkar, was screened at the Parliament of India and the Cannes Film Festival in 2010, and has been employed by UNIFEM for advocacy and educational purposes.

DataLEADS: AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME

In 2020 I received a call from a previous partner from a publication, during my advertising days. He was inviting me to be on the jury of a Boot camp organised by his new employer, DataLEADS, a digital media and tech company. His brief introduction to what was then a seven-year-old concept, of helping people understand the world around them, immediately excited me. The colleagues to feature on the Advisory Council were a spectacular collection of achievers. It didn't need a second invitation! And I was surprised. Here was a concept that was just what we needed in this 'Post Truth World' and there weren't too many I knew of, certainly not in my neck of woods.

My subsequent interactions with Data LEADS filled me with hope. At the junction of Data, Information and opportunities for data verification and building on software efficiencies the organisation was pulsing with the potential for growth. Today, DL has created impactful platforms for data journalism, information integrity and digital safety.

The initiative of DataLEADS Academy is the bedrock of this journey. Forming a dynamic bridge for various people to upskill through training and inclusive learning; essentially creating Digital resilience in professionals in Media, Healthcare, Education, Civil Society & youth networks.

At their Media Trust gathering in Delhi in '23 I was stunned by how deep the organisation had penetrated countrywide, with a vast grassroots presence. Meeting the various partners who constituted the stakeholders, I could see a company not just of strategists but of doers. This was a first hand experience of the width of personnel who could add muscle and perspective to various media programmes.

Finally, the AI foray has begun in earnest. Already considered an able ally by the Government, DataLEADS is on the Consultative Committee on AI. ADiRA the homegrown initiative to train healthcare and media professionals with practical AI skills to enhance efficiencies & embrace the future. I have personally seen how institutes and industries are being led into this future with confidence. The Gautama Buddha had famously said -understand the mind, only then can you use it for your evolution!

In this cacophony of over indulgence of information, DataLEADS is a major milestone in effectively leveraging data to be able to use it for 'actionable insights in preparation of a data driven future'.



The initiative of DataLEADS Academy is the bedrock of this journey. Forming a dynamic bridge for various people to upskill through training and inclusive learning; essentially creating Digital resilience in professionals in Media, Healthcare, Education, Civil Society & youth networks."



DR. DP SINGH

Founder & Secretary-General of the Federation of Community Radio Stations (FCRS), a federation of 289 Community Radio Stations (CRS) based across India.

He is a social entrepreneur, educationist, researcher, and community media pioneer, awarded for his contributions to social welfare, environment, and grassroots empowerment in India.

AIRWAVES OF TRUST: A JOURNEY WITH DATALEADS AND COMMUNITY RADIO STATIONS

As I look back on life and the experiences that have left a lasting impression, my association with DataLEADS stands out as a golden memory. It was more than just collaboration—it was satsang, a journey rooted in purpose, trust, and truth.

During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, while the world stood still, those of us in community media knew our responsibility had only grown. As General Secretary of the Federation of Community Radio Stations (FCRS), which is a network of 289 working Community Radio Stations (CRS) based across India, I had the responsibility of keeping India's community radio stations informed, united, and active—despite the lockdowns.

As part of our outreach, we began conducting webinars to support community radio professionals. One such session, focused on "Fake News and Rumours," featured Syed Nazakat, Founder of DataLEADS, as a guest speaker. That conversation marked the beginning of a powerful partnership—one grounded in a shared mission to protect the public from harmful information.

What struck me most was the clarity, compassion, and conviction with which Syed Nazakat and the DataLEADS team approached their work. In an age of overwhelming information, their commitment to sorting fact from fiction and reaching the last mile with truth was inspiring to us all.

That partnership found a new milestone when DataLEADS established E-Hub at Radio Kamalvani 90.4 FM, located in my village Kolasia, Jhunjhunu (Rajasthan). More than a technological milestone, it was a statement of intent: that even the most remote voices deserved access to verified, responsible information.

From training modules like 'PollCheck' to participatory online verification workshops designed for rural communicators, DataLEADS and FCRS together brought information literacy and digital safety into the heart of community radio. These efforts gave broadcasters a new perspective—and a renewed sense of purpose.


What struck me most was the clarity, compassion, and conviction with which Syed Nazakat and the DataLEADS team approached their work. In an age of overwhelming information, their commitment to sorting fact from fiction and reaching the last mile with truth was inspiring to us all."

During a time when even mainstream media faced criticism, community radio emerged as the one trusted source of information in many villages. This trust was sustained, in part, by the fact-based, grassroots-focused collaboration between our teams.

Looking back, I am filled with pride. Our journey with DataLEADS wasn't just about protecting people from online harm—it was about upholding the dignity of truth, even in crisis. And I'm grateful to have walked that path, together.



SUBHRA PRIYADARSHINI

Veteran science journalist and Editor of Nature India. An award-winning reporter on climate change and disasters, she is recognised globally as a leader in science communication. A Chevening, Robert Bosch, and UNESCO Fellow, she serves on the Board of the World Conference of Science Journalists and is the founding President of the Science Journalists Association of India.

THE LONG AND HAPPY FACT-SHIP

I can't remember the exact year I met Syed Nazakat (could be a couple of decades now) — but I do remember the feeling: here was a journalist who got it as an insider in the media industry. Over the years, he quietly translated this into DataLEADS — to address the chaos of the information age, the power of training over preaching, and the crucial need to build a curious, data-savvy, questioning community of journalists.

Though I have witnessed its birth pangs and we met over coffee to discuss its first hirings, my serious collaboration with DataLEADS happened for a health misinformation project followed by a climate change fact-check project through the Science Journalists Association of India. These projects were as earnest as they were ambitious, trying to debunk myths and strengthen media literacy in India's newsrooms.

Working with DataLEADS has always felt more like joining a movement than ticking off a project. Whether it was the Health Misinformation Summit (where I had a front-row seat to some dazzling conversations), the Fact and Fit series (yes, we did debunk tonnes of health and climate claims), or the Train the Trainers workshops where we bonded over browser tabs, data sets, and chai — each experience has been marked by generosity, clarity, and a shared sense of purpose.

And behind it all — the beating heart of the operation — are people like Surbhi Nangia, Parul Goswami, Jyoti Singh Rathore and others who make everything run so smoothly you forget how much work it must take. From the first travel itinerary email to the last late-night wrap-up call, they bring humour, hustle, and heart to every step.

What I've always admired about DataLEADS is that they take data and information seriously, but never themselves. That makes them a rare and essential ally in journalism today. They've created a space where you can be idealistic and practical, skeptical and hopeful, all at once. And they've done it with warmth and camaraderie.

Through our collaborations, I've learned as much as I've taught — about tech, about trust, about training — and about what's possible when you build alliances grounded in public interest, not just professional interest. To work with DataLEADS is to believe again in the slow, steady work of strengthening the information ecosystem — one workshop, one journalist, one story at a time.

I'm incredibly proud to be a part of this long and happy fact-ship.

“What I've always admired about DataLEADS is that they take data and information seriously, but never themselves. That makes them a rare and essential ally in journalism today.”



DR. SIMON CHAUCHARD

Associate Professor of Political Science and Distinguished Researcher at Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, and Principal Investigator of the ERC-funded POLARCHATS project. He is the author of Why Representation Matters (Cambridge University Press) and has previously held academic positions at Dartmouth College, Columbia University, and Leiden University.

DRIVING CHANGE THROUGH MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY

My association with Dataleads started in the summer of 2022, as my co-author Sumitra Badrinathan (American University, D.C., USA) and I were looking for partners to help us implement a media and information literacy course in North India – what became the BIMLI (Bihar information and media literacy initiative) project.

The Bihar Information and Media Literacy Initiative (BIMLI) represents a ground-breaking intervention addressing the critical challenge of health misinformation among adolescents in rural India. Over 14 weeks, this randomised controlled trial reached nearly 14,000 students aged 13-18 across 99 community libraries in 32 districts of Bihar, testing whether classroom-based media literacy training could improve students' ability to distinguish between accurate and false health information. A few weeks into the project, In October 2022, Sumitra and I visited Dalateleads' HQ in New Delhi to bounce the idea with Syed Nazakat, Surbhi, and others as to how we could pull off a project at that scale. We quickly realised ideas were flying and that this would be a productive collaboration! Over the following eighteen months or so, we co-created the unique curriculum for the intervention, supervised the hiring necessary for the project in Bihar, and jointly managed our relationship with public stakeholders in Bihar.

While this was not always an easy ride — the project's sheer scope and reach created inevitable challenges, as did the involvement of multiple local actors — these were overall smoothly managed. The team at DataLEADS was always professional. Good communication and clarity over our common objectives, in fact helped us achieve something important: demonstrating to the world that media and information literacy does change the way in which people consume information!


The team at DataLEADS was always professional. Good communication and clarity over our common objectives, in fact helped us achieve something important: demonstrating to the world that media and information literacy does change the way in which people consume information!"

The intervention achieved remarkable success. Students demonstrated a improvement in accuracy discernment, meaning they became significantly better at distinguishing true from false health-related claims. Their sharing discernment improved indicating more responsible information-sharing behaviors, while source discernment increase suggested of an enhanced ability to identify reliable versus unreliable information sources. Perhaps most significantly, the effects persisted in a 4-month follow-up survey, demonstrating the persistence of these effects. The intervention also produced remarkable spillover effects, with parents of participating students showing improved information evaluation skills, suggesting a "trickle-up" education effect from children to adults.

None of this would have been possible without DataLEADS, and we would jump at the chance of having another opportunity to collaborate with them. May there be many more anniversaries!



“Shaping the future
AI, and collaboration
resilience and emergency
societies in a fast-
changing world.”



re with data,
tion—building
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-changing world.”

—Syed Nazakat

The Decade
of DataLEADS

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INSPIRE.
IMPACT.**



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