**INTERNATIONAL POET LAUREATE JAVED AKHTAR HEADLINES THE WORLD’S LARGEST NGO, AKSHAYA PATRA’S, UK GALA FUNDRAISER**

***£1 Million Sent Back to India by Akshaya Patra Foundation UK in Just 3 Years, to Provide Free School Meals for Underprivileged Children***

**Thursday, 19th September 2014, London:**A host of the UK and India’s most esteemed dignitaries, social glitterati, charity ambassadors and Indian film royalty gathered at the iconic Four Seasons Hotel in Park Lane, London, on the **19th of September**, for a night of fun and fundraising at the **AkshayaPatra Foundation UK’s** annual *The* *Sparkle Ball*charity event. The event had as its lead sponsor**Interiors With Art,** a niche design, construction and lifestyle company, based in London, financial services firm **Sun Global Investments,** and **Amira Rice**.

One in three of the world’s malnourished children live in India. The Akshaya Patra UK is the world’s largest NGO-run school meal programme, which feeds and educates some of India’s poorest, underprivileged childen. The prestigious event – a highlight in every Londoner’s diary -  saw an eclectic night of high-brow discussion, inspiring poetry recitation and delightful entertainment, all interspersed with vital fundraising pledges. In just under three years, a staggering amount has been raised by the Akshaya Patra UK through events and initiatives such as The Sparkle Ball, with £1 million already being sent to India support the cause.

**Lionel Barber, Editor-in-Chief** of the **Financial Times**, was the guest speaker who shared his experience of having the honour of meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi as well as exclusive political and financial anecdotes and his time at the Financial Times. Other esteemed attendees included **G.P Hinduja, Pramod Mittal, Jo Johnson MP, Lord Hameed, Tom Singh (Founder of New Look),**and**Rt. Hon. Imran Mirza, Pakistani High Commissioner.**

 An event highlight was a special poetry recital from acclaimed poet laureate and lyricist **Javed Akhtar**, who delivered an inspirational and thought-provoking reading of his work, much to the awe of the assembled guests. There then followed a Q&A session with Javed Akhtar by renowned actor, columnist and marketing guru **Suhel Seth.**The twoheavyweights debated about politics, India’s development and its position in the world order and Bollywood villains,in a lively andspirited exchange of words and wit. The successful event came to an end with a performance by singer **Navin Kundra,**who sang an array of Javed Akhtar’s most acclaimed music tracks.

Speaking about The Sparkle Ball event, **Mr Harin Thaker, Chairman** of **Akshaya Patra UK**and **Ms**.**Dipika Khaitan, Executive Director of Akshaya Patra UK** said: *‘Holding events like this is key to raising awareness of the Akshaya Patra UK; it brings together a variety of people and gives us the opportunity to maximise our fundraising efforts. And we do all this for one simple reason - to provide meals to children, eliminate child malnourishment and provide education to those who don’t have it. Feeding a hungry child is not charity. Feeding a hungry child is our social obligation, and the money raised from the Sparkle Ball will help us transform children's lives through education.’*

**Sanjay Sharma**, the Director of Interiors With Art said: *‘IWA is delighted to be the lead sponsor for theAkshaya Patra Foundation UK’s Sparkle Ball. This very worthy cause provides an invaluable service to children in India, by ensuring children have a wholesome and nutritious school lunch, thus enabling them to attend school and, most importantly, stay at school. As they say: knowledge is power; it is only through education that a society can grow and can equip itself with the skills and tools it needs to function properly and to develop into a leader on the world stage.’*

The Akshaya Patra UK is a leading charity pioneering a school lunch programme that addresses two of the most immediate challenges facing India: hunger/malnutrition and access to education. It is the first Indian NGO to have been selected for a case study by the Harvard Business School of USA. The organisation began in Bangalore with the ambit of feeding 1500 children in five schools. For many children it is their only complete meal of the day. This meal gives them an incentive to come to school, stay in school, and provides them with the necessary nutrients to develop cognitive abilities, enabling them to focus on learning. Ultimately, this aids in helping them to become self sufficient and gainfully employed. The organisation has the impressive projection of feeding five million schoolchildren in India everyday by 2020. Currently, the work of Akshaya Patra has resulted in 78.2% of parents reporting that their child’s health had improved due to having an Akshaya Patra meal at school, with 85% of headmasters and teachers believing that student grades had improved as a result. This essential work is partly funded by the Central Government of India, the respective state governments, corporates and benevolent individuals.

The charity has been awarded several accolades, including the Innovations in Services for the Urban Poor (World Bank, SIDA and Ministry of Urban Development); Leap Vault Change Leadership Award for Social Change Leadership; and the Lifebuoy National Child Health Award. Akshaya Patra was ranked number 23 in the world in the top 100 NGOs 2013 by The Global Journal, number 1 for children and youth and the number 1 charity in India. The charity has an esteemed list of Trustees and Advisors in India, the UK and the USA, who advise and guide the charity’s operations on a daily basis. Some of its renowned supporters include: My Narayanmurthy, Deepak Chopra and Fareed Zakaria.

Just recently, former US President Bill Clinton visited The Akshaya Patra Foundation’s Kitchen in Jaipur, Rajasthan.  The Jaipur kitchen, which is part of Akshaya Patra’s Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) Commitment to Action, was built in 2004 and currently serves free school meals to over 106,000 underprivileged students in more than 1,400 schools every day. It is one of 20 such kitchens thatAkshaya Patra operates across India, home to 1 in 3 of the world’s malnourished children.

Today, **The Akshaya Patra Foundation** provides freshly prepared, nutritious meals daily to over 1.3 million underprivileged children in over 8000 schools in eight states from 19 kitchens.

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**About Akshaya Patra:**

The Akshaya Patra Foundation was founded in the year 2000 to address two of India’s most immediate challenges - hunger and education. Since then, the Foundation has gained a formidable reputation and is listed in the Global Journal's Top 100 NGOs in the world. No child should be deprived of education because of hunger.

**Mission**

Our mission is to feed over 5 million children by 2020.

**Company Overview**

One in three of the world’s malnourished children live in India.

Families facing extreme poverty often have to make choices that the rest of us find difficult to stomach. Sending a child to school is not a priority if you are struggling to get enough food and even if a child does make it to school, a hungry pupil is not the best learner.

The Akshaya Patra Foundation is the world’s largest NGO providing school meals to over 1.39 million of India’s most deprived children. In partnership with the Indian government, local authorities, businesses and private individuals, we provide healthy meals across nine Indian states to 10,050 schools.

By providing free nutritious meals, the Foundation encourages families to send their children to school and allows pupils to concentrate better when they are in class.

**Awards:**

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| * Gold Shield Award for Excellence in Financial Reporting by the Institute of Chartered Accounts of India (ICAI) for 5 consecutive years
* Akshaya Patra ranked 23rd among Top 100 NGOs in the world by The Global Journal
* Best Bhagidari Award 2011, Government of India
* The world's largest school meal program: Limca Book of Records
* Leap Vault Change Leadership Award, 2010 for Social Change Leadership
* Americares – Spirit of Humanity Awards 2010
* Marico Innovation Foundation Award
* Gold Award for excellence within industry (Non Profit Annual Revenue $10-$100 million) worldwide in LACP 2010/11 Vision Awards
* World Economic Forum invited Akshaya Patra to share its experiences for THE PROJECT HUNGER in Africa
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