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Programme: - Friday, Dec. 21, 2007

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???  
Guest Speaker :

Venue: - Hotel President, Sector 26, Chandigarh

Time: - 6.30 PM

## Right to Information Act Empowers People To Change India For the Better

**Mr. Shekhar Singh**

Mr. Shekhar Singh was the guest speaker for our meeting on 12 Dec 2007, and he spoke on the subject of Right to Information (RTI) Act with the aid of a well-prepared power point presentation.

The meeting was a joint meeting of the Club, the Rotary Club of Chandigarh Midtown, and the Chandigarh Management Association (Affiliated to the All India Management Association), which is headed by our own Veteran Rtn Vikram Hans as the President of the Chandigarh Management Association.

Rtn Gurdip Deep introduced the guest speaker Mr. Shekhar Singh.

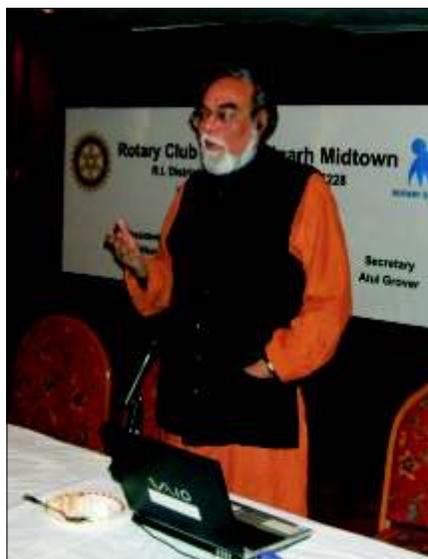
Mr. Shekhar Singh has been an Adviser to the Planning Commission and is a consultant to the World Bank. He teaches in St. Stephens College and the Institute of Public Administration New Delhi. He is a Founder Member and former Convener of the National Campaign for the People's Right to Information, and played a major role in the enactment of the RTI.

Mr. Ashwani Luthra introduced the subject, Right to Information Act, and said that the Act is applicable to the commerce and industry to also and that the Guest

Speaker will give the details. The Act, when properly used, enforces accountability and its scope will widen with time.

Mr. Singh started with a very suitable and motivating preview of the presentation. He said that the act was formulated in 2002 but remained in the drawers of the high and mighty, and ultimately was enacted on 13 Oct 2005. The act is applicable to all the government departments, the public sector undertakings and those organizations or institutions, including non government organizations, and those which do not get grants from the government but has been given land subsidies or any other concessions by the government. This is a very wide coverage and makes the act the most powerful act in the world. There are 59 countries in the world bt the Indian Act is the most powerful. The act covers even the private sector even if they do not get any grants or subsidies or

concessions. It includes penalties to those persons who give wrong information or refuse to give information or deliberately delay information or destroy or disfigure the information. The penalties include recovering the fines from the pays of the defaulters. And in some cases, the



*Mr. Shekhar Singh*

penalties include imprisonment also. The Act covers Executive and Judiciary also. Any information that can be approached by the income tax department or any other such department falls under the purview of the Act, and the common concerned person can ask for the relevant information. Even the samples of the materials used for construction or for any other finished item of common usage. Mr. Singh gave an interesting example that in Delhi the IIT students organized themselves in asking for samples of materials used for construction by the contractors and testing the samples and since then the quality of construction in Delhi has improved a lot.

The cabinet papers also come under the purview of the Act.

The Guest Speaker narrated another interesting story about the effectiveness of the Act. A person retired and his presence in the house increased considerably, and just like in his job, he would criticize and check all actions of his wife and the domestic help. The wife was quite perturbed. And then the husband came across the Act and organized some his retired friends and would go out in the morning to find flaws in the working of the

Municipal Corporation or the Water Supply or the Electric Supply and spend time on the RTI to rectify the deficiencies. The wife was very happy and thanked the RTI.

There are some exemptions where the Act is not applicable, such as some national security concerns, commercial information that may harm the interests of the organization.

There are some attempts by the executive, the judiciary and the bureaucracy to get exemptions but so far there is no change in the powers of the ACT, and hopefully, there will be none.

The learned speaker explained, in detail the process of getting information from any organization and the checks and stops to ensure that the correct information is provided to the person asking for it within a laid out time frame. The Act lays down clauses that make a citizen more powerful to get the required information, than the Parliament. Mr. Singh explained in detail the important clauses of the Act and illustrated the same with examples of case studies from Coal India, NOIDA land plots, schools, PM's Relief Fund, the notorious Nasik case and a



Guest Speaker in Action



Memento for Happy B'day Boy

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*Memento for the Guest Speaker*

young boy pulling up the SHO of a police station investigating the theft of his cycle. The ACT enables a citizen to expose corruption, quack doctors and the like.

Mr. Singh strongly advocated that the Rotarians should spend at least an hour per week to use the RTI to correct the surroundings and the flaws in the administrative work so that the quality of life in India improves.

There were many laughter provoking anecdotes, thrown

in the presentation, at suitable times to keep the interest of the audience alive and focused. It was a very educative, interesting and motivating presentation.

Veteran Rotarian Vikram Hans, President Chandigarh Management Association, proposed the vote of thanks and on behalf of the Rotary Club and the Chandigarh Management Association, presented a memento to Mr. Shekhar Singh, the speaker of the day.

Woman to Maintain a Distance Behind the Man?

Sometime back Barbara Walters did a story on gender roles in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. The period of the story was several years before the current conflict in Afghanistan.

She noted that women, customarily, walked five paces behind their husbands. Ms. Walters recently returned to Kabul and noticed, with amusement, that women in Kabul, now seem to walk behind their husbands keeping a distance of more than five paces even though the oppressive Taliban regime has been replaced by a democratically inclined government. The women seemed to be happy to maintain the old custom.



*Memento for PE, Happy B'day Girl*



*Punctuality Draw Winner*

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All Midtowners, less those going to Roop Nagar for the Bon-Voyage, are requested to attend the Camp and lend a helping hand.

Ms. Walters, out of curiosity, approached one of the Afghani women and asked, " why do you stick to the old custom, with increased distance, the custom that you tried so hard to change, and be happy at the same time".

The woman looked at Ms. Walters, straight in the eyes, and without hesitation said " Land Mines ". That is the instinct of self preservation.

MORAL OF THE STORY: BEHIND EVERY MAN IS A SMART WOMAN!!!! ?

*Contributed by Ann Indu Luthra.*

### Translation

I - Original:

'Pussy cat Pussy cat, where have you been?'  
 'I have been to London to see the Queen'  
 'Pussy cat Pussy cat what did you there?'  
 'I frightened a little mouse under the chair!'

Punjabi Translation:

'Mano Billi, Mano Billi, kithe gai si?'  
 'Rani Ji nu milan main vilayat gai si'  
 'Ki chan chareya tu othe ja ke?'

'Ghar wapis aa gai main chuhe kha ke!'

II - Original 'Baa Baa Black sheep have you any wool?'. 'Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full. One for the master, one for the dame, And one for the little boy who lives down the lane.'

Punjabi Translation: 'Kali Bhed, Kali Bhed, hai kucch unn?'  
 'Haan bhai, Haan bhai, Tin pandan gin, Ek tere waste, ek teri woti lai Ek us, munde lai jehra khara raste'.

III - Original Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall, All the kings' horses, all the kings' men Couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again

Punjabi Translation: Baba Karnail Singh baitha si Dukaan te', Baba Karnail Singh diggya dhadam se, Pind de log phir aa ke kehan lagge, Baba Karnail Singh te gaya hun kaam se.

*Contributed by Rtn Ashish Ahuja*

### Blood Donation, Camp- Sunday, 23 Dec 2007

As reported earlier in these columns, the Club President announced that the Camp will be held in Village Khuda Ali Sher, from 9 AM onwards. The Camp is being organized in collaboration with the Village Youth Welfare Club. Rtn Nitin Mathur has kindly volunteered to represent our Club to manage the functioning of the Camp.



#### BIRTHDAY GREETINGS

Rtn. Rajesh Vaidya	Dec. 22
Rtn. Dr. Nitin Mathur	Dec. 23
Rtn. Ravinder Krishan	Dec. 24
Rtn. Vinod Sobti	Dec. 24
PP. Rtn. Dr. Kesho Ram Gupta	Dec. 25



#### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY GREETINGS

R'ann Maniki & Rtn. Gurdip S. Deep	Dec. 27
R'ann Archana & Rtn. Dr. Nitin Mathur	Dec. 27



#### PUNCTUALITY DRAW

Won by PP. Rtn. R.S. Chandgothia

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