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NEXT MEETING

Wednesday
5th February 2025
at 07.00 PM
at Rotary Balbhavan



BULLETIN OF THE ROTARY CLUB OF COCHIN

Volume 89, Issue 29, 29th January 2025

THE COCHIN ROTARIAN

GOVERNMENT AND THE CITIZEN: EXPERIENCES FROM NORTH EAST INDIA

At the outset of his classification talk, Rtn. K.V. Eapen expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to address the Rotary Club and delved into the concept of a “classification talk,” reflecting on its purpose. He humorously recounted his initial curiosity about whether it was a rite of passage or a subtle form of ragging reminiscent of college days in the 1970s and 80s. However, he concluded that its essence lies in fostering closer bonds through shared experiences.

Rtn. Eapen and his wife, Elsa, were already impressed by the warmth and camaraderie of the club members, many of whom had long-standing relationships spanning generations. Highlighting familiar connections, he mentioned the iconic presence of Dr. Sujit, whose influence extends beyond healthcare to initiating celebratory messages within the club.

Early Rotary Impressions and Reflections

Rtn. Eapen shared his first encounter with Rotary during his time in Assam in 1985. He admired the Rotary Club of Guwahati’s initiative in identifying peace scholars from the Northeast for international exposure and study programs. This endeavor demonstrated Rotary’s commitment to fostering peace and good citizenship, extending beyond conventional government and civil society roles.

His classification talk centered on



the evolving relationship between government and citizens, drawing from his personal experiences in the Northeast and broader observations nationwide. He reflected on the layered identities of Indian citizens—national, regional, and communal—and how these shape their interactions with the state.

The Northeast Experience: A Complex Compact

Rtn. Eapen vividly recounted his arrival in Assam in 1985 as a 25-year-old civil servant. He was struck by the unexpected perception of being labeled an “outsider” or “Indian” in his own country. This experience exposed him to the complexities of identity and citizenship in a region where communities often felt alienated from the broader Indian identity.

He described the anti-foreigner agitation in Assam, driven by unchecked illegal immigration from Bangladesh. While the agitation’s basis was genuine, its resolution was long-drawn and fraught with violence. He emphasized

that citizenship is not a given but a dynamic relationship shaped by governance and public trust.

A Broader Analysis: Uneasy Compacts Across India

Rtn. Eapen offered a candid assessment of the relationship between the government and citizens across India. He noted that governments often distrust citizens, leading to excessive regulations and inefficiencies. The attitude of citizens towards the government varies by class: while the elite prefer minimal interaction, lower-income groups depend on public services like healthcare and education.

He contrasted the challenges in the Northeast, where a sense of Indian identity is still evolving, with the rising inter-community differences in states like Manipur. Despite these challenges, he observed a growing Indianness among the youth due to increased migration

and exposure to urban centers like Bengaluru and Delhi.

Decentralization and Governance Challenges

Rtn. Eapen critically examined the Panchayati Raj system, particularly through his observations in Kerala. While decentralization of governance was a promising reform, its implementation has been mixed. He questioned the effectiveness of a councillor-driven model, which often prioritizes political loyalties over efficient service delivery. In contrast, well-functioning municipal corporations like Indore demonstrate the importance of empowering government officials and leveraging technology.

He highlighted the need for automation and faceless interactions in governance, citing improvements in areas like income tax filing and passport services. However, he lamented the lack of similar advancements in state-level services, hindered by vested interests.

Call to Action

Rtn. Eapen urged Rotarians to address systemic issues in governance through advocacy and constructive engagement. He emphasized the potential for Rotary's influence in driving meaningful reforms and improving the citizen-government relationship.

Conclusion

In closing, Rtn. Eapen and Elsa expressed their gratitude for the warm welcome into the Rotary family and their happiness in being part of the vibrant community in Kochi. His insightful talk provided much food for thought, sparking discussions about the evolving dynamics between governments and citizens.

As Rtn. Eapen aptly concluded, fostering a harmonious relationship between the state and its citizens is essential for a prosperous and inclusive society—a principle that aligns closely with Rotary's mission of service and community building.

ROTARY MEMBERS JUMP INTO ACTION TO HELP LOS ANGELES WILDFIRE VICTIMS



Massive wildfires in California, USA, have destroyed at least 12,000 buildings, razed neighbourhoods, and displaced tens of thousands of people. Rotary members have raced to help.

Rotary Rises to Support Los Angeles Wildfire Victims

On January 7, Bill "Chilly" Chillingworth, president-elect of the Rotary Club of Santa Monica, watched his life change forever. That morning, he left his Pacific Palisades home for a business meeting, unaware it would be the last time he would see it. Hours later, wildfire smoke began billowing over the canyons near his neighbourhood, and evacuation orders quickly followed. Within minutes, he and his fiancé were making frantic decisions about what to save—people, pets, pictures, paperwork—before

fleeing. Despite the hope that their home might be spared, notifications from their security system gradually confirmed the worst: the house was gone.

Yet, even amid personal loss, Chillingworth and fellow Rotarians have stepped forward to help others affected by the wildfires. Rotary's response has been immediate and multifaceted, leveraging its extensive networks to provide both immediate relief and longer-term recovery solutions for victims.

The Santa Monica Rotary Club is spearheading two major fundraising initiatives. Its annual black-tie benefit on March 1 will dedicate most of its \$150,000 target to wildfire relief. Additionally, a Seattle-area fundraiser in January featured Chillingworth as a guest speaker, where he shared his harrowing story and highlighted the critical work of Rotary. These efforts underscore the club's commitment to turning tragedy into a catalyst for community support and resilience.

Rotarians are also addressing urgent needs on the ground. The Santa Monica club has partnered with other organizations, including the YMCA, Salvation Army, and Meals on Wheels, to assess and meet the specific needs of displaced families. Together, they are providing items such as ash sifters and protective gear for those returning to sift through the ruins of their homes. Home Depot has donated 150 sifters, and Rotary District 5280's

Wildfire Disaster Relief Fund is being tapped to purchase protective kits containing goggles, body suits, gloves, and booties.

Rotary District 5280, under the leadership of Governor Albert Hernandez, has raised \$350,000 for wildfire relief. These funds will help displaced Rotary members, support local organizations, and fund matching grants for community-led recovery projects. Hernandez, who also leads a homeless services nonprofit in Burbank, emphasizes that Rotary's impact goes beyond monetary aid. "There's a 'sense of touch' that comes with service," he says, describing heartfelt community gatherings and the power of simply listening to those affected. This approach has resonated far and wide, with offers of assistance coming from across the U.S. and even war-torn Ukraine, a poignant reminder of Rotary's global spirit of service.

Hernandez and others are looking beyond the immediate crisis to the longer-term implications of increasingly severe wildfire seasons fueled by climate change. "It's not just about homes," he explains. "It's about how many businesses were lost, how many schools burned down, and how many children are out of school. Restoring that sense of normalcy is critical."

Rotary members have been instrumental in supporting wildfire victims with paperwork for insurance and FEMA assistance, providing clothing and shelter, and

lending listening ears to those processing their loss. Clubs are working together to ensure relief is efficient and targeted, steering away from overwhelming evacuation centres with physical donations that cannot be stored. Instead, they're focused on understanding specific needs within communities, where Rotary's deep local connections are invaluable.

For Chillingworth, the experience has reinforced the power of Rotary's mission. "Rotary is all about jumping into action as quickly as we can," he says. Despite the devastation, he remains inspired by the outpouring of support from fellow members and the broader community. His story is one of resilience, highlighting the strength and compassion that Rotary brings to communities in crisis.

As Southern California faces a future with hotter, more intense wildfire seasons, Rotary clubs are preparing to adapt and respond. Whether through financial contributions, emotional support, or long-term rebuilding efforts, Rotary continues to serve as a beacon of hope for those affected by disaster.

— January 2025

An abstract from the original article on the Rotary International website.

Source: <https://www.rotary.org/en/rotary-members-jump-into-action-to-help-los-angeles-wildfire-victims>.

A FAMILY'S ENCOUNTER WITH PATRIOTISM: OUR EXPERIENCE AT THE ATTARI-WAGAH BORDER CLOSING CEREMONY

Visiting the Attari-Wagah Border to witness the Beating Retreat Ceremony was an experience that my family and I will cherish

forever. This daily ritual, which marks the boundary between India and Pakistan, is far more than a military drill. It is a vibrant display of

patriotism, tradition, and camaraderie that left each of us deeply moved and inspired.

The Build-Up to the Ceremony

As we approached the Attari-Wagah Border, the atmosphere was charged with energy and anticipation. The closer we got, the more palpable the excitement became. The grandstands were packed with families like ours, waving flags, wearing tricolor attire, and chanting slogans like "VandeMataram" and "Bharat Mata Ki Jai." The patriotic songs playing in the background added to the festive spirit, creating a wave of unity that swept through the crowd.

The border itself, flanked by stands and adorned in the Indian tricolor on one side and green and white on the other, was a visual treat. Surrounded by people of all ages, including parents holding children on their shoulders and elderly citizens clutching miniature flags, the enthusiasm around us was infectious. It felt like we were part of a collective heartbeat, pulsing with national pride.

The Ceremony Begins

When the ceremony started, the Border Security Force (BSF) personnel marched onto the parade ground with a precision that left us in awe. Dressed in their ceremonial khaki uniforms and towering red-and-gold turbans, they exuded strength and discipline. Every movement was sharp, every step deliberate. The high leg kicks and aggressive marching seemed to symbolize the power and determination of our nation.

The synchronized drills, the bugle calls, and the thunderous stomps created an electrifying ambiance. Watching these soldiers perform with such grandeur filled us with a surge of pride and admiration for their dedication to our country.

Joining the Crowd's Energy

What made this experience even more special was the energy of the crowd. My family and I found ourselves joining in the chants, cheering loudly alongside strangers who felt like extended family for that moment. The kids in our group ran along the length of the viewing area, waving the tricolour with boundless enthusiasm. Before the ceremony, the crowd had even broken into impromptu dances to patriotic songs, and



we couldn't resist clapping and swaying to the rhythm.

The sense of unity and pride was tangible. It was heartwarming to see generations come together, sharing the same emotions and celebrating the spirit of the nation.

The Emotional Climax

As the sun began to set, the ceremony reached its crescendo with the flag-lowering ritual. Watching the Indian and Pakistani soldiers lower their flags simultaneously was a moment of profound reflection. The precision and care with which they folded the flags signified respect for their respective nations. When the gates closed and the soldiers shook hands, it was a powerful reminder of the mutual respect that exists beyond the intense rivalry.

A Lasting Impression

Walking away from the Attari-Wagah Border that evening, our family felt a mix of emotions. There was an overwhelming sense of pride in our country, gratitude for the armed forces, and a renewed appreciation for the unity and resilience that the ceremony represented. At the same time, it was a poignant reminder of the shared history and complex relationship between India and Pakistan.

This experience wasn't just about witnessing a military ritual; it was about feeling the pulse of a nation, about connecting with its spirit and soul. For our family, attending the Attari-Wagah Border ceremony was not just an event but a deeply personal and unforgettable journey into the heart of patriotism.

- By Rtn Prathik Nayar



Rtn. PP R.S. Ramanujam	02 Feb
Rtn. PP Sherry Lukose	02 Feb
Rtn. Michealle Niaz	05 Feb



Rtn. Naveen Philip / Rtn. Dr. Malini	03 Feb
Rtn. Joseph Korah / Rtn. Nisha	03 Feb