



# ELDERS' VOICE

FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION ONLY

MARCH  
2023

News Bulletin of  
Senior Citizens' Forum Kottayam

Editor  
Pushpa Mathew

## President's Message

Dr. Joseph Cherian

In the last meeting of the Senior Citizens' Forum, Cor Episcopa Fr M. K. Varghese spoke to us with great passion about his vision of a high-speed railway line transporting close to a thousand Sabarimala pilgrims from Chengannur to Pampa, from where they would trek up the hill to reach the Sannidhanam. He has been pursuing this project for the past seven-odd years, driven by compassion for the distress suffered by the pilgrims in making this journey. He is apparently taken seriously by the railway ministry, who has approved a feasibility study. Everyone was impressed by the sincerity and commitment exhibited by Fr M. K. Varghese in trying to solve a complex transportation problem associated with the annual pilgrimage of massive crowds, which has huge engineering and environment issues.

The latest shocker from the world of Artificial Intelligence is the ChatGPT about which newspapers are quite voluble. The strange name stands for Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer, which is an artificial-intelligence chatbot developed by a San Francisco-based AI research company Open AI. Released in November 2022, you can have conversations with it on topics from history to philosophy, generate lyrics in the style of Taylor Swift or Billy Joel, write essays on any topic, and suggest edits to computer programming code. People are speculating on its impact on education, literature and social life. It is also perceived to be a challenge to Google, the popular search engine.

I read in the papers that the concept of a literary fest saw a sea change with the successful completion of the Kerala Literature Festival, recently held in Kozhikode. Perhaps it is Kerala's much-vaunted reading culture, which makes rock stars of its writers. Either way, reports say that there were phenomenal crowds that thronged the sixth edition of the KLF, held simultaneously at six venues across the Kozhikode beach from January 12 to 15. There were as many sessions in Malayalam as in English. The conversations had both the rigour of a public lecture and the intimacy of an "adda". Almost every venue was a full house, with people of all ages, but especially youngsters, walking in confidently, listening intently, and staying back to have a chat with the speakers.

But perhaps, the non-event of February was the threat to the Valentine's Day to be converted by the Animal Welfare Board of the Government of India into a "Cow Hug Day", hoping the move would both boost citizens' "emotional richness" and strike a blow for local heritage over what is a western cultural import. But the move appears to have backfired and had to be abandoned after it prompted a flood of internet memes, cartoons and jokes by TV hosts.

Shashi Tharoor, in his inimitable style, tweeted "Was the Government cow-ed by the jokes made at its expense or was it merely cow-ardice? My guess is the original appeal was an oral instruction: "Valentine's Day: let them hug their guy" & the last word was misheard by a Hindi Rashtravadi as "gaay" (cow)!"



Fr M K Varghese CorEpiscopa delivering the talk on the proposed rail link to Pampa

<https://www.seniorcitizensktm.net/>

<http://www.scfktm.com/>

# Editor's Musings

Pushpa Mathew

Hello Everyone,

The Union budget was presented on 1<sup>st</sup> Feb but it brought little cheer for Senior Citizens. The only benefit given was the increase in the maximum limit for investment in the Senior Citizens Savings Scheme from Rs 15 lacs to Rs 30 lacs with an interest rate of 8%, which is slightly higher than the FD rates offered by banks. It has a 5-year tenure and can be extended by 3 years on maturity. Once the investment is done, the interest rate remains the same throughout the tenure. However, if the investor extends the scheme after maturity, he/she will earn interest at the rate applicable on the date of extension.

On 27<sup>th</sup> Jan, Prof P C Varghese spoke on how much we owe to society. Birth is not our choice and each of us should be grateful to God for our circumstances. When 30% of our population lives below the poverty line and there are millions of illiterates, child labourers, bonded labour etc. we should show our concern and try our best to alleviate their condition. He urged each one of us to be compassionate to those who are not as fortunate as ourselves.

In this issue, Prof Varghese has written an article on the hazards of drugs in our society, which is a menace, that has to be tackled on a war footing.

On 10<sup>th</sup> Feb, Fr. M K Varghese, Cor Episcopa spoke passionately on his proposal for a Chengannur-Pampa rail service. The stampede on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2011 at Pull-umedu near Sabarimala causing the loss of 106 lives prompted him to come up with this proposal for an elevated railway line, which can be built without any large-scale land acquisition and without disturbing the peace and calm of the forests. Metroman E Sreedharan had presented this project to the railway ministry, who have given the green signal for the project's final location survey. The expected cost for the 75 kms line is Rs. 12,036 crores and the journey will take just 40 mins from Chengannur. If and when it becomes a reality, pollution and road accidents could be reduced and after the pilgrimage season, the line could be used for tourism purposes.



This time we carry the third part of Rani Mathew's "Journey to see 7 sisters", where she takes us through the state of Nagaland. We invite travelogues from our other members too, which can help those who are home-bound, to enjoy the pleasures of these places vicariously.

And here's the answer to last time's "Guess Who?" "It was Dr T C Benjamin and Molly Benjamin with their son. How many of you guessed correctly? And this time we have another couple with their son. Keep guessing.

Until next time then.

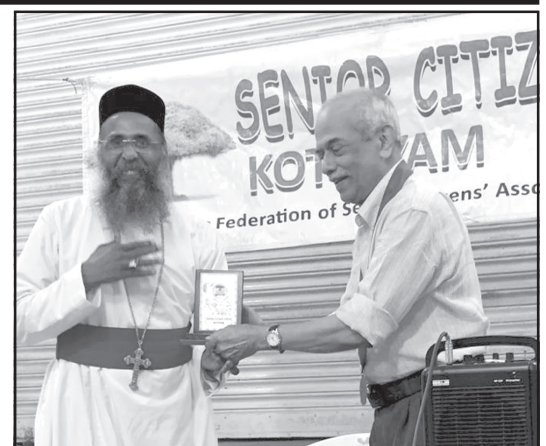
## Guess who is this?



Answer to last month's quiz "Guess who is this?":  
**Dr. T. C. Benjamin and Molly Benjamin**



Prof P C Varghese delivering the talk on 27 th January



Fr M K Varghese being felicitated by the President

# A JOURNEY TO SEE 7 SISTERS - PART 3 (Nagaland)

Rani Mathew



After completing a 2 days Assam tour, we proceeded to Nagaland by road. Nagaland is a landlocked mountainous state in northeast India, bordering Myanmar. Its capital city of Kohima suffered heavy fighting in World War II, commemorated by memorials at the Kohima War



Cemetery. The Nagaland State Museum exhibits ancient weaponry, and other traditional Naga cultural festivals. Nagaland is popularly known as the 'land of festivals'.

The predominant religion of Nagaland is Christianity. The state's total population is below 20 lakh as of 2011, out of which 88% are Christians, making it with Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, and Mizoram the four Christian-

majority states in India. Hinduism is a minority faith in Nagaland followed by 8.75% of the population. Muslim population is 2.47 per cent.

Each tribe in Nagaland has its own dialect. There are about 60 different spoken dialects. These dialects have no script of their own. English is the official language of the state. Nagaland has also emerged as the safest state for women.

An Inner Line Permit (ILP) is required for Indian (Domestic) tourists for entry into Nagaland. This entry pass is available at the check post while travelling by road. It is like a visa mandatorily required to visit Nagaland. Dimapur is the largest city in Nagaland and is well-connected through the state's only railway station there. The nearest Domestic Airport from Kohima city, is also Dimapur .

The State of Nagaland was formed in 1963 as the 16th State of the Indian Union to satisfy the movement of the hostile Nagas. It is bound by Assam in the west, Arunachal Pradesh in the north, Manipur in the south and Myanmar (Burma) on the east.

Nagas, like all resident tribes of the sixth schedule areas of the Northeast, are exempt from paying income tax. The tribals of

five north-eastern states - Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh-are fully exempted from tax under Section 10 (26) of the Income Tax Act, 1961.

Nagaland is predominantly an agrarian economy with 71% of its population dependent on



agriculture. Major horticulture crops grown in the state include banana, citrus, pineapple and potato.

Article 371A of our Constitution prohibits non-residents from buying land in Nagaland. Land can only be bought by tribals who are residents of the state.

We visited Dimapur and Mokokchung by road. And stayed overnight at Kohima to visit all the important places there like the War Memorial, the museum, the Cathedral, , Shilloy Lake, the bird sanctuary, Suku Valley etc. During World War II, Japan was defeated by the British at Kohima and the War Memorial here is worth seeing. Even now it continues to be maintained by the Common Wealth Commission.

Presently the state is ruled by The Democratic Alliance of Nagaland which is a state level coalition of political parties led by the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP).

(To be continued)



**CAN WE SAVE OUR CHILDREN FROM THE NARCOTIC HELL?**

**Prof. P C Varghese**

Our youth need to be rescued from the narcotic web. Don't we need to work together for this?

Parents, teachers, government, the public and social media should wake up and work collectively to prevent the spread of narcotics in our society.

**What are the reasons for the widespread use of narcotics?**

1. Uncertainty of the future due to lack of job opportunities.
2. Easy availability
3. Peer pressure
4. Promotion by social media
5. Broken family environments
6. Poor focus on augmenting good character to develop good citizens, as envisaged by Gandhiji.

**What are the focused solutions?**

**1. Family**

From the womb, right through childhood, a child needs constant

guidance and love from parents. Where such familial support is lacking, school and college teachers need to step in and address this issue.

**2. Teachers and school authorities**

"As the teacher, so the student". Where the family fails, an ideal teacher could be the role model. Teachers should have personal rapport and relationship with each student. In addition to academic pursuits, activities like NSS, NCC, Scouts & Guides and various sports can bring about closeness with the teacher outside the class room and channelize the energy of children in the right direction. Such outside classroom activities can be used to convey messages on the dangers of narcotics.

**3. Government efforts on war footing**

Police, excise and other such authorities should make efforts to minimize the availability of narcotics.

**4. Punishment**

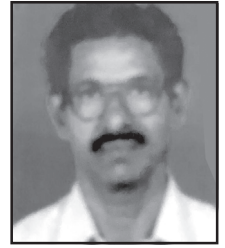
Severe punishment should be meted out to anti-social elements. Carriers and suppliers of narcotics are usually jobless youth. They should be identified and given opportunities for constructive and fruitful jobs.

**5. Spiritual leaders to wake up and address this issue.**

All religious leaders should identify dysfunctional families in their fold and effectively work to save them from their predicament.

**6. Individuals**

Each individual should understand this menace and work with one another to increase awareness and ameliorate the situation.



Mr Suresh Babu, (Secretary, Kali Arangu Society for Arts & Culture) felicitating Shri Shyam with ponnada.



Shri V G Shyam in the costume of Shri Krishna at Vasudeva Temple at Kudamaloor, Kottayam

**WISH YOU ALL A VERY HAPPY BIRTHDAY**

*May your birthday and every day ahead be filled with the warmth of love, the joy of good health and blessings in abundance!*



- |                             |                              |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Adv. Sivamani Kaimal</b> | <b>5<sup>th</sup> March</b>  |
| <b>Mrs. Maya Cherian</b>    | <b>8<sup>th</sup> March</b>  |
| <b>K. N. Nair</b>           | <b>10<sup>th</sup> March</b> |
| <b>Dr. George Kurien</b>    | <b>16<sup>th</sup> March</b> |
| <b>Dr. P I John</b>         | <b>18<sup>th</sup> March</b> |
| <b>Joseph Gabriel</b>       | <b>25<sup>th</sup> March</b> |
| <b>Chackochen Manamel</b>   | <b>26<sup>th</sup> March</b> |