

34th CMAAO General Assembly

GOA

Text by Dr Chong Yeh Woei | Photo by Confederation of Medical Associations in Asia and Oceania (CMAAO)

It was my first time in India; the Mumbai airport was new, sparkling and worthy of the crown that cosmopolitan Mumbai desires of herself. During my four-hour transit, I left the airport building to head to Starbucks for a coffee, and I realised that the airport, like India herself, was still under siege. There were soldiers armed to the teeth with live rounds and a machine gun post outside the building. The shadow of the 2008 terror attack still hangs over the city. Later on during the security and luggage clearance, the soldiers themselves did the personal pat-downs and manned the X-ray machines. You can be sure that personalised service was far from their minds.

I landed in Goa at nearly 4 am and got into a car that brought me to the conference venue – a resort 50 km from the city centre. The road was winding and mostly unlit; the skilled driver had to navigate the small road with headlights and the “cat’s eye” reflectors on both sides of the road. It did not help that the drive was interrupted by huge brightly lit trucks from out of state and the occasional cow that would wander onto the road.

Commencing the meeting

It was always good to see familiar faces at the conference – secretary general Dr Mari Michinaga of the Japan Medical Association (JMA), treasurer Dr Alvin Chan of the Hong Kong Medical Association, Dr Yoshitake Yokokura of the JMA and our generous host Dr KK Aggarwal of the Indian Medical Association, among others. As chairman of the council, it was my pleasure to welcome 13 national medical associations (NMAs) and their presidents and councillors.

On our agenda is always a country report by all the NMAs. This is where we learn from each other about the problems we face, the solutions we have found,



the lessons learned from our successes or mistakes, and how we handle our respective governments. A commonality we found was that the problems faced by the NMAs of the developed world were potential problems the NMAs of the less developed world would eventually face. I recall going to the Australian Medical Association meetings to hear them speak frankly of their problems and issues, only to see Singapore eventually face the same issues years later. Listening to the country reports of the First World NMAs was like peering into a crystal ball.

“The Path to Wellness”

This year’s Taro Takemi Oration, named after the JMA’s former president of 25 years and one of the founding fathers of CMAAO, was delivered by Dr Ketan Desai, who gave us an insight into wellness according to the Vedic Literature. I must admit that we are so caught up in the medical world of diagnostics and therapeutics that wellness may seem alien to most of us. In a nutshell, subscribing to wellness would require us to observe social, environmental, nutritional, behavioural, psychological, spiritual, occupational and even financial aspects. I personally find wellness more of a concept, ideal or goal that we should all aspire towards.

Exploring Goa

On the last day, our host brought us to the Basilica of Bom Jesus, the oldest church in Goa built in 1594. It also houses the mortal remains of St Francis Xavier who died in 1552 in China. The city has elements of Portuguese influence and architecture reminiscent of nearby Malacca. The Portuguese had ruled the city since 1510 till it was annexed by India in 1961. The food in Goa is unique and I had a great fiery vindaloo the first day I arrived. Thankfully, we are well trained in Singapore when it comes to spicy food! ♦

Legend

1. Dr Chong with outgoing CMAAO president Dr Ravindran Naidu of the Malaysian Medical Association

Dr Chong is in his fifth decade and trying to decide what is important going ahead for the last leg. Is it leaving a legacy, drinking good Pinot noir, reading the good stuff, keeping an active lifestyle, or just enjoying the good company of his friends? He would like your honest opinion!

