

# VOICE OF APLAR



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## WELCOME MESSAGE

This is Dr. Debashish Danda, President of APLAR. The APLAR Congress at Chiang Mai is just a few weeks away and the excitement is building. We are looking forward to catching up with you in the beautiful city of Chiang Mai. This is the time for the annual meeting. We have this time record number of accepted abstracts which is over 1,000. And we have already more than 1,500 registrations till date. It is my honour and privilege to meet you all in person.

As the President of APLAR, I am proud to share with you some of the remarkable achievements that we have made over the past two years. These include:

- Establishment of APLAR Academy & several short courses under the Academy supervision.
- Centre of Excellence exchange program for rheumatologists in developing nations.
- New treatment guidelines launched for various rheumatic diseases.
- Increased number of APLAR Congress travel grants, Fellowship grants, Research grants & COPCORD grants.
- Gender & Zonal equity in all APLAR activities and committees.
- Numbers of Special Interest Group (SIG) increased from 12 to 18, covering a wide range of topics and interests.
- APLAR grand round by APLAR Young Rheumatologists (AYR), a monthly online educational program for young rheumatologists.
- Midterm symposium, midterm EXCO & midterm general assembly initiated to enhance communication and collaboration among APLAR members.

- Finance committee installed to ensure transparency and accountability of APLAR funds.
- Grants for Scleroderma registry, Primary care rheumatology & APLAR Academy to support research and education in the region.
- and many more ...

These achievements reflect our commitment and dedication to advancing rheumatology in Asia-Pacific. I would like to thank all of you for your support and contribution to APLAR. I hope you will join me in celebrating our success and looking forward to our future endeavors.

I have had a look at the scientific program which was designed by the local organising committee and I have seen that this particular fully live event since 2019 is going to be a very special occasion. We have a wide range of presentations on offer, 124 speakers from 18 countries along with some very special social functions and networking opportunities.

All your friends will be there and we hope you can join us.



**Prof. Debashish Danda**  
APLAR President

## SHAPING THE FUTURE TOGETHER: THE EVOLUTION AND PROSPECTS OF VOICE OF APLAR

As the Editor-in-Chief of *Voice of APLAR*, the official bulletin of the Asia Pacific League of Associations for Rheumatology (APLAR), I humbly take this opportunity to reflect on the journey of our publication. It is a great joy to reconnect with you in person, seizing the opportunity presented by the 25th APLAR Annual Meeting in Chiang Mai, after a few years of online interactions. It is both a privilege and a pleasure to introduce the growth of *Voice of APLAR* and extend a heartfelt invitation to our esteemed colleagues across the Asia-Pacific region. Seizing this moment, I warmly invite you all to share your valuable insights and contribute to the ongoing development of *Voice of APLAR* for the editions to come. Your contributions will undoubtedly enrich our collective knowledge and enhance the collaborative spirit of our esteemed publication.

### Harmony Across Borders: APLAR's Journey Through Time

Our journey commenced in 1963, an era when rheumatology tentatively took its first strides. The seeds of APLAR found fertile ground in Sydney, where Australia, India, Japan, and New Zealand joined hands to sow the seeds of the South East APLAR (SEAPAL). The inaugural Congress in 1968 unfolded at the iconic Taj Mahal Hotel in Bombay, India. From that moment, SEAPAL flourished, welcoming numerous nations into its league. Over time, it transformed, embracing its present identity as the APLAR. Since then, APLAR has grown into a formidable network with 33 national rheumatology association members.

### Evolution of Voice of APLAR: Connecting Minds, Sharing Insights

*Voice of APLAR* has its roots in the SEAPAL Bulletin, which was inaugurated in January 1975 by founders Dr. Kenneth Muirden and Ray Robinson. This precursor served as a communication medium for the national leagues of Asia-Pacific Area. Notably, it succeeded the APLAR Journal of Rheumatology in 1997.

In 2016, the mantle was passed to Dr. Prakash Pispati, who transformed it into the contemporary *Voice of APLAR*. This quarterly Bulletin emerged as a platform for relaxed and easy reading on rheumatology themes, complementing the more research-oriented International Journal of Rheumatic Diseases (IJRD).

As we journeyed through the years, the editorial leadership transitioned to Dr. Temy MY Mok in 2019. Under her guidance, the bulletin was renamed APLAR Pulse, featuring a refreshed format and expanded features. APLAR Pulse showcased highlights from prominent rheumatology conferences worldwide and provided a platform to spotlight updates from diverse committees. Additionally, it recognized the commendable

efforts of APLAR Young Rheumatologists. The bulletin went further to exhibit the contributions and progress in rheumatology promotion from various member national organizations within the APLAR community.

In 2021, as a tribute to Dr. Pispati, we returned to our roots and relaunched the *Voice of APLAR*. As the current Editor-in-Chief, along with my dedicated editorial team, we are committed to transforming it into a platform that connects rheumatologists, researchers, and patients across the Asia-Pacific region. Our goal is to showcase scientific innovations, the evolving landscape of rheumatology in various countries, and the commendable efforts of APLAR organizations. Additionally, we remain attentive to the individual journeys and contributions of each rheumatologist in the Asia-Pacific region, recognizing your vibrant work and life. Moreover, we emphasize our concern for the well-being of our rheumatic patients, striving to enhance their welfare through our collective efforts.

### Looking Ahead: A Call for Contributions

As we stand on the threshold of the 25th APLAR Annual Meeting in Chiang Mai, I invite our esteemed colleagues for contribution. Share your insights, interesting cases, patient education efforts, or personal stories as rheumatologists. Let *Voice of APLAR* be the medium through which we grow together, offering a vibrant and interactive space for learning and sharing.

In the spirit of APLAR's legacy and dedication to rheumatology, let us make this special edition an invitation to our collective journey. Feel free to express your thoughts, fiddle with your "mouse" to contribute freely. Your active engagement and valuable contributions are warmly welcomed.

Here, our editorial team kindly assists in providing a submission method for everyone. You can submit your contributions via email: [editorial@voiceofaplar.org](mailto:editorial@voiceofaplar.org).

*Zhanguo Li*

Editor-in-Chief,  
*Voice of APLAR*

## 2016 - 2018



**Dr. Prakash Pispati**



## 2019 - 2020



**A/Prof. Temy NY Mok**



## 2021 - 2023



**Prof. Zhanguo Li**



## WELCOME MESSAGE

### DEAR COLLEAGUES, DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, AND PARTICIPANTS,

We are truly delighted to welcome all of you to the 25th APLAR congress between 7-11 December 2023 in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The APLAR 2023 congress is the first fully face-to-face meeting after the COVID-19 pandemic. "Together Towards Tomorrow", the theme of our meeting, represents the reconnection of our rheumatology community to exchange expertise, foster collaboration, and advance the frontiers of knowledge through research work.

Throughout this 5-day meeting, we have a comprehensive program. There are all kinds of interesting workshops over the first 2 days of the program including the musculoskeletal (MSK) ultrasound workshop, the MRI axial imaging course, the modified Rodnan Skin Score (mRSS) assessment course, GRAPPA symposium, and the AYR Clinical Skills workshop - the labial salivary glands and muscle biopsy. The MSK ultrasound workshop is particularly special this year given its first APLAR fully endorsed course. Moreover, on the second day you will have a chance to meet with the Editor-in-Chief of the International Journal of the Rheumatic Diseases in order to gain a broader perspective on publication in academic journals.

The next 3 days will feature the cutting-edge scientific sessions encompassing 4 plenary lectures, 17 scientific sessions from the APLAR Special Interest Groups, 19 other scientific topics including the ACR and EULAR symposia, 16 oral abstract presentations, and 4 industry symposia. More than 130 speakers around the world are joining these activities. In addition, there are over 1,000 abstracts to display, which is the highest number of abstracts ever submitted to the APLAR congress. One hundred abstracts were selected for the oral presentations. Some intriguing lectures are:

- Geo-ethnic variations in vasculitis disease by Prof. Debashish Danda
- Update of guidelines on treatments of interstitial lung disease in connective tissue diseases from ERS/EULAR by Prof. Oliver Distler

- Novel treatment algorithms in axial spondyloarthritis - what is the current status? by Prof. Xenofon Baraliakos
- Early RA diagnosis - where are we now? by Prof. Daniel Aletaha
- Rational DMARDs use in Asian context by Prof. Tsutomu Takeuchi
- Measuring disease activity in lupus clinical trials: finding the right metrics for success by Prof. Eric Morand
- New concepts of lupus nephritis treatment by Prof. Chi Chiu Mok

Currently, we are excited to hear that more than 1,500 participants have already registered to join the APLAR 2023 congress.

Furthermore, we would like you to explore Chiang Mai. Chiang Mai is the second largest city of Thailand, and was the Capital of Thailand during the Lanna Kingdom 700 years ago. Chiang Mai has its own culture including unique and distinctive language, tradition, and northern Thai cuisine. Please take a chance to visit ancient ruins and elaborate Buddhist temples up to 700 years old, walking streets, night markets, elephant sanctuaries, local villages, and national parks especially Doi Inthanon which is the highest mountain in Thailand. You will have an extraordinary experience with the northern Thai dancing and drumming during the opening ceremony and Gala dinner.

We believe this upcoming APLAR 2023 congress will make you and your family joyful by not only sharing the latest scientific breakthroughs and discoveries with you, but also providing an unforgettable experience in exploring Chiang Mai and Lanna culture.

Last but not least, we would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the organizing committee, sponsors, and everyone who plays a role in bringing this congress to fruition.



**Worawit Louthrenoo, M.D.**

*Chairman of the APLAR 2023 Congress  
On behalf of the APLAR 2023 Local Organizing Committee*

## Chiang mai at a glance

Chiang Mai, the second largest city in Thailand, nestled in the mountainous region 700 kilometers north of Bangkok. It is one of the most popular tourist destinations given its unique blend of cultural richness, colors of contemporary, and beautiful nature. Chiang Mai means "New City" in Thai as it was founded as the new capital of Lanna Kingdom 700 hundred years ago. The city still carries with it today a great number of cultural heritages.

Until now there remains ancient ruins including Tha Phae Gate, and Wiang Kum Kam, a recently-discovered lost city. There are also more than 300 meticulously preserved temples in and around Chiang Mai. The must-see ancient temples when visiting Chiang Mai are Wat Chedi Luang Worawihan, a testament to the ancient Lanna Kingdom, and Wat Phra Singh, which houses an important Buddha statue called "Phra Buddha Sihing". These Sacred Sites not only showcase architectural brilliance, but also serve as spiritual havens. In addition, Wat Phra That Doi Suthep, a spectacularly beautiful mountainside temple draped in gold is a must visit. Reaching the top of the temple offers the breathtaking panoramic view from the top of the mountain over the city.

Chiang Mai is the city for nature lovers. The natural sights around Chiang Mai include misty mountains, lush forests, caves, rivers, and waterfalls. Outdoor activities to do in Chiang Mai ranges from hiking, biking, birdwatching, river rafting, to hot spring mineral bath. Doi Inthanon National Park is the perfect destination to explore the beautiful natural scenery. Doi Inthanon is the tallest mountain in Thailand at 2565 meters. The summit of Doi Inthanon is the popular site for watching sunrise. The Royal Twin Pagodas, rice terraces, tea

and coffee plantations, and hilltribe villages are great places to visit among Doi Inthanon national park. His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej initiated the Royal Project in 1969 to improve the quality of life of hilltribe people. The Royal Agricultural Station Ang Khang, and The Royal Agricultural Station Inthanon are notable research stations in winter plants especially fruits, flowers, vegetables, and tea. These places are excellent sightseeing spots including ecotourism. Elephant sanctuaries focus on providing a safe and ethical environment for the elephants. Activities offered at the elephant camps range from observing the elephants in their natural habitat to interactive experiences such as feeding, bathing, and walking with elephants.

Beyond its physical beauty, Chiang Mai is known for the warmth and friendliness of its residents. The welcoming atmosphere creates a sense of ease for visitors, making it a destination where one can truly connect with the local culture. The Nimmanhaemin Road area has emerged as an artistic hub, where galleries, boutiques, and cafes converge to form a vibrant creative community. The Sunday Walking Street transforms the historic old city into a bustling market where artisans showcase their craftsmanship, and vendors entice passerby with aromatic street food. Northern Thai cuisine, with its bold and aromatic dishes, is a culinary adventure waiting to be savored. This includes Khao Soi Noodle Soup, Sai Oua sausage, Kanom Jeen Nam Ngiew, Nam Prik Noom Kab Moo, and many more.

In summary, Chiang Mai is a captivating destination that seamlessly blends cultural heritage, natural splendor, and modern vibrancy. Whether you seek spiritual serenity, outdoor adventures, or a taste of authentic Thai cuisine, Chiang Mai invites you to experience its unique allure.

