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## NEXT MEETING

Wednesday  
4<sup>th</sup> December 2024  
at 7.00 PM  
at Rotary Cochin  
Balbhavan



BULLETIN OF THE ROTARY CLUB OF COCHIN

# THE COCHIN ROTARIAN

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## WHY I CHOSE POLITICS AS A CAREER & MY VISION FOR KERALA

The Rotary Club of Cochin was honored to host Adv. Jebi Mather, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, and President of the Kerala Pradesh Mahila Congress, as a distinguished speaker. In her inspiring and candid address, she shared insights into her journey in politics and her progressive vision for Kerala. The evening was both a reflection on her remarkable career and a roadmap for addressing the state's pressing challenges.

### Choosing Politics: A Journey Rooted in Responsibility

Adv. Jebi Mather began her speech with humility, acknowledging her privileged upbringing. Born into a family with a legacy of public service, Adv. Jebi received access to the best opportunities in education, healthcare, and personal growth. However, this privilege became a catalyst for her political aspirations. "I realized early in life that while I had the best of everything, many around me did not even have access to basic necessities like quality education or healthcare," she said. "That was the turning point. I decided I wanted to give back and bring positive change to others' lives."

Her journey into politics began at the grassroots level in her hometown of Aluva, where she became a municipal councillor in 2010. This marked the start of a steady climb through the po-



litical hierarchy, fueled by her commitment to addressing community issues. From addressing mosquito infestations to ensuring timely garbage clearance in her ward, Adv. Jebi emphasized that impactful change often begins with small, localized actions. "Politics is not just about holding grand positions—it's about solving everyday problems and making a tangible difference," she remarked.

Her steadfast approach led her to hold significant roles, including Vice Chairperson of the Aluva Municipality, State General Secretary of the Indian Youth Congress, and later National Secretary, representing states like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. In 2022, Adv. Jebi was elected as a Member of Parliament in the Rajya Sabha, becoming the first woman from Kerala Congress to hold the position in 42 years. She attributes her success to her grassroots experiences, which provided invaluable

able lessons in patience, problem-solving, and perseverance.

### **Lessons from Grassroots Politics**

Reflecting on her time in local governance, Adv. Jebi shared how those early years shaped her leadership style. “It was the foundation of my political career,” she said. “The grassroots level is where true democracy begins.” Whether it was presenting a budget as Vice Chairperson of Aluva Municipality or addressing concerns like power outages and sanitation, Adv. Jebi learned to navigate the complexities of governance while staying connected to the people she served.

She recalled a transformative moment from her school days that instilled in her the importance of responsibility. A teacher’s comment on her reluctance to take up challenges motivated her to embrace responsibility as a core value. “That one line in my report card shaped the way I approached every role in my life, from being a municipal councillor to becoming an MP,” she shared.

Adv. stressed the importance of enjoying the journey rather than fixating on the destination. “In politics or any career, the key is to focus on doing your best in your current role. Success will follow when you work hard, stay passionate, and leave no stone unturned.”

### **A Vision for Kerala: Harnessing Opportunities and Overcoming Challenges**

Adv. Jebi’s vision for Kerala is rooted in addressing systemic challenges and capitalizing on the state’s strengths. One of the critical issues

she highlighted was the mass exodus of youth from Kerala to other states and countries. She expressed concern over the lack of opportunities and confidence among Kerala’s youth to build their futures locally. “Our youth need to believe that Kerala is a land of opportunities,” she emphasized. “We must create policies and ecosystems that allow them to dream and achieve right here in our state.”

Another challenge Adv. Jebi identified is the financial strain on Kerala’s budget, with a significant portion allocated to salaries and pensions. While she acknowledged the political sensitivity of such issues, she urged bold decision-making to free up resources for developmental projects. She cited examples from other states that have implemented successful fiscal reforms to drive growth.

Adv. Jebi also stressed the need to make Kerala investor-friendly while preserving its ecological balance. “We cannot afford large-scale industries that require extensive land, but we can focus on sectors like IT, tourism, and hospitality, which align with Kerala’s strengths,” she explained. She pointed to successful initiatives like the Vizhinjam Port and Smart City as examples of bold leadership and political will that have brought positive change.

### **Empowering Women and Strengthening Local Governance**

A cornerstone of Adv. Jebi’s vision is the empowerment of women in local governance. She emphasized the importance of ensuring that women holding decision-making roles are not mere figureheads but are equipped with the skills and knowledge to lead effectively. “My

goal is to see women in local bodies who are not just wives, sisters, or relatives of male politicians but individuals with genuine political and administrative capabilities,” she said.

Adv. Jebi’s upcoming initiative—a yatra spanning eight months and covering all 1,474 mandalas in Kerala—is aimed at motivating women and addressing local governance issues. She plans to engage with communities, identify grassroots challenges, and advocate for a mindset shift among local leaders to prioritize integrated development over fragmented ward-level projects. “This yatra is not just about politics; it’s about building a stronger, more inclusive Kerala,” she explained.

### **A Call for Institutionalized Development**

Adv. Jebi called for an institutionalized mechanism in Kerala to ensure continuity in development, irrespective of political changes. She drew comparisons to states like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, where stable governance frameworks enable consistent growth. “In Kerala, every new regime brings new priorities, often disrupting ongoing projects. We need to move beyond this and focus on long-term development strategies,” she said.

She also emphasized the need for Kerala to seize missed opportunities, such as attracting global investments and leveraging its natural resources. “With 44 rivers, abundant rainfall, and a moderate climate, Kerala has everything it needs to shine on the global stage. All we need is a change in mindset and the political will to act,” she stated.

**-Adv. Jebi Mather, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha**

It was like manna from heaven. The thin wispy bearded youngster stood in front of me and taking in the entire Universe with a wave of his hand grandly announced that our road (appropriately named Narakathara Road) had been selected under the “Cochin Smart City Mission” for drastic improvement and that our lives would never be the same. If I could, I would have done a few cartwheels and back flips of celebration. I was thrilled and delighted that we had been singled out for this distinct honour and to date the youngster’s words ring out in my head “Your lives will never be the same”. How right he was the young so and so.

With an urgency defying normal public works etiquette and sloth, they started working at 8 in the late evening. A trench was dug right across my gate and five to six concrete slabs I had put in were unceremoniously purloined. (I understand these are taken so as to retrieve the metal rod therein). After the flurry of activity that night there was a short period of uneasy calm. Two chaps then approached me and said that there was a mistake and the trench was actually meant to be on the opposite side but they really couldn’t do anything about the muck-up done on my side because the contract didn’t say anything about covering up mistakes.

While the contractors went berserk on the road like little kids with a new toy (a JVC), another lot was busy opening up a new front. Leaving the first road in utter disarray, the road perpendicular to the first one - T.D Road) became the object of their destructive desires. Digging up roads, I suppose, is like eating

potato chips. Once you eat one you just got to eat them all. Another JVC now joined in the fun & games and a three foot wide trench was dug just outside my wall for the ostensible reason of putting in proper drainage. Boards were proudly put up declaring this a project of the Smart City whatever. One noticed that when the trench was dug, a great many cables & wires appeared to our view and nobody seemed to know what they were and where they came from or where they led to. Everything came to a grinding halt. The boards were now at the bottom of the trench.

In the meantime, the rains started and the trench which had no exit, filled up rapidly with liquid finally fulfilling a desire I had long harboured – to have a waterfront property. The water therein soon turned green with algae & life forms like tadpoles, frogs & guppies frolicked within. Even birds were fooled. I saw two types of kingfishers, a pond heron, a cormorant, several Egrets and I heard rumours that an Albattross had been sighted but I cannot vouch for this. All this while repeated complaints & requests to onsite and offsite officials were met with the standard reply that everything would be OK in a couple of days (or was it years?).

There was a virtual genocide of all wires in the area. In no time the area resembled a Chinese kitchen with noodles flopping around hopelessly from poles, trees, walls and on the ground. No quarter was given. Ensuing days saw representatives of KSEB, Jio, Airtel and Asianet running around like chickens with their heads cut off and arguing as to which cable belonged to whom. Suddenly telephones were dead,

TVs showed snow & the Internet was a distant dream. KSEB got into the act by repeatedly cutting off the power in order to erect new giant poles to carry power lines. One of these concrete monsters was placed at the narrowest part of the old drain effectively blocking the water flow altogether and improving the catchment area which by now was host to a plethora of botanical specimens including edible leaves like spinach.

Finally the drain was made after intervention by one of our club members (his identity will have to remain a secret). However a small detail was overlooked. They failed to connect our drains to their ones. But they say that this should be OK in a couple of days... so maybe in 2028.

The Narakathara Road singled out for all this attention and pampering remains forlorn, pitted and scarred awaiting deliverance from the horrors she had been subjected to. TD Road anticipates the next round of misadventure. Telephones are still out but we have Internet & TV (Praise the Lord).

All that may change soon. I see a JVC pulling up outside my gate.....

(This was written a couple of years ago . Ultimately.... The road was re-laid with interlocking tiles and bears a remarkable semblance to a semi decent road. Everyone is delighted especially car drivers from near & distant places who find parking space on the road and auto rickshaw drivers who have been willed by God to park anywhere. The only unhappy persons are the residents who cannot negotiate the road because of the traffic).

**Rtn. MD PP Dr. Sujit Vasudevan**



## ENSURING SCHOOL ZONE SAFETY: A CALL TO ACTION

School zones are places of joy, learning, and growth. They are also areas that demand the highest level of vigilance from all of us—parents, educators, local authorities, and the broader community. With bustling activity during pick-up and drop-off hours, school zones are hubs of energy but also potential danger. Road safety in these areas is not just a matter of rules but a collective responsibility to protect our most vulnerable citizens: children.

### The Current Scenario

Despite speed limits, warning signs, and crossing guards, many school zones remain accident-prone. Reckless driving, inadequate pedestrian crossings, distracted driving, and poorly planned infrastructure exacerbate risks. According to recent statistics, a significant percentage of traffic-related injuries to children occur within a few kilometres of schools, highlighting the urgent need for improved safety measures.

### Steps to Enhance Safety

#### 1. Strict Enforcement of Speed Limits:

Many drivers fail to adhere to school zone speed limits. Local authorities must employ speed cameras, road humps, and regular monitoring to ensure compliance.

#### 2. Improved Infrastructure:

Dedicated pedestrian crossings, clear road markings, and child-friendly traffic lights can significantly enhance safety. Adding barricades along sidewalks can prevent children from accidentally stepping onto the road.

#### 3. Awareness Campaigns:

Educating parents, students, and the community about road safety through workshops, posters, and interactive sessions can create a culture of safety.

#### 4. Safe Drop-Off and Pick-Up Zones:

Schools should have well-organized zones for parents to drop off and pick up their children. Separate lanes for buses, cars, and pedestrians can

minimize chaos and accidents.

#### 5. Volunteers and Crossing Guards:

Trained personnel or volunteers stationed at busy crossings during school hours can help children cross roads safely and manage traffic flow.

#### 6. Technology Integration:

Smart traffic systems, including automated pedestrian signals and apps to guide traffic during school hours, can streamline movement and reduce risks.

### Community's Role in School Zone Safety

Road safety is not the sole responsibility of authorities; it is a community effort. Parents must lead by example by following traffic rules and avoiding distractions such as mobile phones while driving. Schools can collaborate with local organizations to conduct regular safety audits and workshops for students and parents. Rotary Clubs, known for their commitment to community welfare, can spearhead initiatives like setting up reflective signs, sponsoring safety equipment, or launching awareness drives.



### A Safer Future

Children deserve to grow up in an environment where their safety is non-negotiable. By making school zone safety a priority, we can protect lives, nurture responsibility, and build a community where everyone feels secure. As Rotarians, let us lead the charge, ensuring that every child has a safe journey to and from school—a simple yet profound step toward a brighter future.

Together, we can turn school zones into havens of safety, one step at a time.

**By Rtn. Prathik Nayar**



Rtn. PP K. Lava / Rtne. Dharini

28 Nov

Rtn. PP K.P. Satish / Rtne. Meena

29 Nov