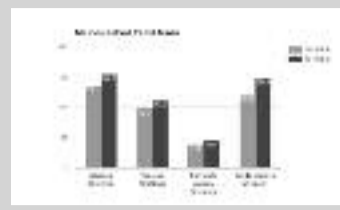




**Saving water for the summer**

Page 2



**Malnutrition prevalent in TN**

Page 3



**Threats can't stop me: Sandhya**

Page 4

## RK Nagar gearing up for April 12 by-poll

DURGA PRASAD

RK Nagar, the constituency of late Chief Minister J. Jayalalitha, is seeing a four-front competition for the impending by-election to be held on April 12.

Two factions of the AIADMK led by V.K. Sasikala and O. Pannerselvam, the DMK and the BJP are the main players in the election.

Confusion prevails among the supporters of AIADMK, which has won the constituency since 2001.

"Last time I voted for Amma (AIADMK), now I don't know whom to vote. I have to decide it only before the election," said 78-year-old A. Padmavathi from Karunanidhi Nagar in Tondiarpet.

Traditional supporters of AIADMK are shifting their allegiance to other parties.

K.S. Murugesan, a supporter of AIADMK for 19 years, joined the BJP nine months ago. He said that around 750 people had joined the BJP in the last few months.

Radha and Jyothi, from Karunanidhi Nagar, who had voted for AIADMK in the last election,



Locals of RK Nagar want candidate to work for the area.

DURGA PRASAD

were going to vote for DMK.

Some who continue to support the AIADMK are favouring the O. Pannerselvam faction. Nizam Ali, a resident of Netaji Nagar, said he would vote for OPS. Similar was the case with A.M. Dharasanamurthi, a gold worker from K.G. Garden.

M. Vanaishwaran from Gandhi Street said that for 40 years RK Nagar had no facilities, but after it had become the constituency of Jayalalitha, they got water, electricity and bridges.

"If the people do not vote for the ruling party (Sasikala faction), all the facilities will be stopped. So in

the end, everyone will vote for TTV Dhinakaran (candidate of Sasikala faction)," he said.

The election was necessitated by the death of Jayalalitha. After her death the AIADMK split with the then Chief Minister O. Pannerselvam alleging that he was forced to resign to make way for Jayalalitha's aide V K Sasikala. Sasikala, who got herself appointed party General Secretary, has been jailed on corruption charges. She appointed her nephew TTV Dhinakaran as the party Deputy General Secretary.

The DMK which had lost the previous election by a margin of about 20,000 votes stands to gain from the division of AIADMK votes this time.

"Even if DMK doesn't get any additional votes compared to the last election, the division in AIADMK will divide its votes, which will benefit us," said Sheikh Abdullah, a long time supporter of DMK.

K.S. Murugesan, a supporter of BJP, said "This election is going to be difficult, as Madhusudhanan-- is quite famous here."



This speed breaker on DGH Dinakaran Salai Road was painted recently.

ISSAC JAMES

## "Over speeding is a common sight here"

ISSAC JAMES

Five days after the accident on DGS Dinakaran Salai Road that killed race driver Ashwin Sundar and wife, residents living adjacent to the spot complained that over speeding vehicles continued to be a common sight.

"Over speeding vehicles, especially two wheelers, are a common sight," said Pugazhendhi D.N., a resident of Santhome who uses the road frequently.

He complained that the traffic police had done little to stop these vehicles. "They stop vehicles during day time. But at night, they are not so active," he said.

Some even suggested placing limits on the Cylinder Capacity of motorbikes sold in the city.

"Bikes above 150cc should be banned," said Mohan who is a local resident.

Avinash Ramachandran, a city-based student agreed. He noted that youngsters who had limited experience were riding 500 cc bikes on the city roads.

"If you ask them, they will say that they have been driving since the age of 12, which itself is a violation of road traffic rules," he said.

Mohan noted that youngsters had a tendency for rash driving.

When asked if he felt safe when riding on Chennai's roads, he said, "I avoid driving as much as possible." He felt public transport should be encouraged on a larger scale. "This will help decongest our roads and also help reduce accidents," he said.

Although the traffic police was blamed for not doing their job, some in the police community felt that despite their efforts, riders are not obeying the basic rules and regulations.

S Ramesh, a traffic policeman who was patrolling the DGH Dinakaran Salai Road, said that despite various awareness programmes, many riders still didn't wear seat belts or obey traffic lights. He was stopping vehicles barely 50 meters from where Sundar's car went up in

flames. He denied Pukazhendhi's claim that traffic police were inactive at night.

However, not many agreed that the fault lay in over speeding and traffic violation alone. Some said that the government was at fault for not doing enough to promote road safety.

The accident, which killed Sundar and his wife, occurred when the car in which they were travelling at a high speed encountered a non-illuminated speed breaker. Krishna Kumar an auto driver from the locality said that only two days ago the speed breaker had been painted. He agreed that it was difficult to spot the non-illuminated speed breaker at night.

Murugadas, a bike rider, said "The police are penalizing us for not obeying the rules. The government should make sure that roads are safe first. Don't blame the drivers. Find out how many traffic lights in the city don't function properly and how many speed breakers and not marked."

**Parties welcome VVPAT in RK Nagar by-poll**

BECHU S.

The introduction of Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) system for the April 12 by-election from the RK Nagar constituency is a result of their multiple attempts to convince the Election Commission, said the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) here.

A DMK spokesperson said that the system attached to the Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) would display on a printout the symbol on which the vote has been cast after a button has been pressed and this ensured the transparency of the election.

"The system ensures the people that their vote has been cast for the right person. We had written to the Election Commissioner three times requesting the VVPAT for RK Nagar. Electoral machines cannot be trusted and we need to make sure everything is fine," said M Shanmugam, All India General Secretary of the Labor Progressive Federation (LPF), which is the trade union wing of the DMK.

Shanmugam said the DMK had complete confidence regarding the election result. He said the recent political developments had made the people to rethink and the remedial measures to the mistake they have committed in 2016 will start from RK Nagar.

The VVPAT will be used across all the 256 polling booths.

Welcoming the use of VVPAT in the by-poll V.Rangarajan of the AIADMK said it would be a mode of reassurance to the people regarding to whom their vote has been cast. The system was a good technological advancement.

"A small section still gives worrisome feedback about the EVMs. The printed paper on which the party symbol will be shown is a great deal of reassurance to them," he said.

Dismissing the accusations made by the DMK, he added, "It is not our tradition to use fraudulent methods to win an election. People of RK Nagar know us and they are our power."

## Thiruvannamiyur-RTO flyover may be delayed

AVANTIKA CHOPRA

Even though the Thiruvannamiyur flyover project has been cleared, it is likely to be delayed as some of the residents and shopkeepers of the area are against it.

The Highways Department has given a heads up to the Revenue Department to begin the process of land acquisition for building the flyover from near the Tidel Park junction to near the Road Transport Office on the East Coast Road in Thiruvannamiyur. The 1.2 km long flyover will take off from West Avenue and land on the East Coast Road right before the RTO signal.

Residents and shopkeepers who may lose their land to make for the flyover are declining the compensation offered by the government and others are completely unaware of the project.

Venkatesh, who runs a departmental store near the Road Transport Office (RTO) signal for the past 10 years and Dilip Kumar, who runs a photo studio on the same road for the past two years were completely unaware about the upcoming project.

"A few months back some people came to measure the area of the shop but they said nothing about a flyover," said a shoe shop retailer opposite the RTO office.

There were others who have



ECR, where the flyover will end.

AVANTIKA CHOPRA

been notified by the revenue department but were not informed about the flyover project.

"In 2009 people came and spoke about some road extension but not about the flyover," said Suresh, the owner of a 15 year old hardware shop on ECR.

"A notice was sent which stated that they needed space for extending the road. They want a total area of about 15 feet but the compensation is too low," he added.

The government is offering a compensation of Rs. 4000 per square feet whereas Suresh and other owners are demanding a compensation of Rs. 10,000 per square feet.

Ashraf, an Uber driver, who is a

daily commuter as well as a resident of Thiruvannamiyur, said, "People have been living in that area for ages and the flyover needs the roads to be extended. They (the government) will have to break a lot of houses. Where will these people go?"

The shopkeepers who have been notified are planning to approach the court to fight against the project.

The commuters, on the other hand, are appreciating the project.

Ragesh Kumar, a daily commuter who travels from Injambakkam to Nungambakkam said, "I waste a lot of time everyday and more due to the temple processions that often take place on this road."

## Tough days for TN with GST expected in July

AVANEESH MISHRA

Tamil Nadu, already facing a fiscal deficit of 4.58 per cent, is expected to face more problems with the implementation of Goods and Service Tax (GST) in July.

Last time it was in 2010-11 when the state's fiscal deficit crossed the 3 per cent limit set by the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act (FRBM).

In the budget presented by Finance Minister D. Jayakumar, the fiscal deficit for 2016-17 is estimated at Rs. 61,341 crore, which is about 4.58 per cent of Gross State Domestic Product. The expenditure had gone up by more than Rs 16,000 crore, while the tax revenue declined by Rs. 3,000 crore.

According to Ranjeet Kumar, a Ph.D. scholar in the Madras School of Economics (MSE), GST will be a setback for Tamil Nadu.

"We are a producer State and most of our revenue comes from

selling goods. With GST we will lose a larger share of revenue," said Kumar.

"We cannot entirely blame the government. Last year Tamil Nadu was getting nearly 50 per cent of the revenue from this [selling produce to other States] now it will get only nearly 45 per cent. And

**TN Budget 2017-18**

also the State faced many problems like Vardah and then the oil spill which affected the economy," he added.

Also, no tax benefits were provided due to the impending GST implementation.

On the question of creating a Revenue Task force, as suggested by the opposition, Prof. Dr. Brijesh Purohit, MSE said that for such kind of a task force the implementation was the most important part.

"Revenue Task Forces totally

depends upon the State autonomy. For one particular State it is not easy to make a task force. On the Central level it might help," said Dr. Purohit.

"On the other hand the freebie culture of Tamil Nadu is also bad for the economy. Earlier the government was providing that from the State budget only, but now we might have to take loans for it, adding to the debt burden," he added.

The latest budget provided for the supply of free smart canes to 10,000 visually handicapped people. These canes would vibrate to alert the user to the obstacles in their way. The budget has also allotted Rs. 758 crores for distribution of free laptops.

It was also expected that the closure of nearly 500 Tasmac shops would hit revenue because the State was earning some Rs 26,000 crores from the sale of liquor. Ranjeet Kumar said that it won't affect the State economy that much.

## The Ilayaraja-SPB combo hits the wrong note

AVINASH R.

The legal notice sent by Music Director Ilayaraja to singer S.P.Balasubrahmanyam (SPB) to stop singing his compositions without permission on his stage shows has split the nation's music fraternity right in the middle.

Though the composer and singer seem to have come to a truce, the long-neglected issue of copyrights and royalty has resurfaced.

Ilayaraja's decision to ask for royalty has been questioned by other musicians who believe that

the singer also has rights over the song.

However, such a decision has become detrimental to the various bands that gain popularity by playing cover versions of Ilayaraja's songs.

"We would love to play our own compositions, but it is such covers that give us our first recognition," said Chandaran, a singer and part of a music band.

The real issue seems to stem from the composer's displeasure over the functioning of the Indian Performing Rights Society (IPRS).



Ilayaraja and SPB

GOOGLE IMAGES

"It is the organiser's duty to pay a royalty to the protection societies

like the IPRS, which in turn shares the proceedings with the rightful

owners," said Samuel Vijayan, a musician.

Ilayaraja had earlier alleged that he hadn't been paid properly by organisations like IPRS.

Though the law says that for musical works, it is the composer who owns the copyrights unless it is assigned to someone by way of sale or part sale, the Bombay High Court has said that the singer is a part of the original creation and can claim the rights to perform.

"It is still undecided by the Supreme Court. The Madras High Court may take a different view,"

said Vikas Muralidharan, a lawyer.

This is not the first time Ilayaraja has raked up this issue. He had earlier asked radio stations and television channels to stop playing his songs without obtaining the required permission.

There were many radio channels that had to scrap their "Ilayaraja Special" shows.

"Though it initially did affect our audience base, gradually we played songs by other composers and this has now become the norm," said an executive of a private radio station.

# Universities save water for summer

JOSEPH SEBASTIAN

With the mercury rising and the water table dropping, universities across the city have adopted methods like rain water harvesting and waste water recycling to combat water shortage.

Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IITM), which sprawls over 250 acres, consumes around 22 lakh litres of water on an average working day for everything from drinking to horticulture activities.

"Around 50 percent of our requirement is met by treated water and bore wells," says Prof. Ligy Philip, Chairperson - Engineering Unit at IITM.

The university boasts a 40 lakh litre capacity sewage treatment plant and treats around 28 lakh litres of sewage water daily. The plant produces 8 lakh litres of treated waste water which is used for flushing in the college and hostel buildings as well as horticulture and landscaping.

"We also have the permission to use six wells and six tube wells apart from a lake for rain water harvesting. We get 3 lakh litres of water from them," she says.

Apart from these, the institute is also phasing out RO water treatment plants, which waste 50 per cent of the water, in favour of their treatment system with carbon and UV technology which is being installed in all the buildings and new hostels.

At Anna University, an artificial pond with a capacity of 3 lakh litres has been built to reduce the



Waste water treatment facility and artificial pond at Anna University

| JOSEPH SEBASTIAN

university's dependence on Chennai Metro Water Supply and Sewage Board (CMWSB) for its daily requirements.

"The university houses around 7,500 students and staff. They require about eight lakh litres of water a day," said Prof. V.K. Stalin, Estate Officer of the university.

With the water table falling rapidly, CMWSB has reduced the

supply to five lakh litres a day. However, the university utilises three bore wells as well as the Department of Water Resource's water treatment plant to make up for the deficit.

"We manage to save about 3.5 lakh litres of water a day by recycling waste water generated by canteens and hostels. This water is used mainly for gardening and

horticulture activities," says Dr. N.K. Ambujam, Professor of Water Resources in Anna University.

Another way the college is trying to reduce water consumption is by closing the semester early.

"Earlier we used to have five working days a week but since January, Saturdays have also been a working day to help us finish up the syllabus early," she adds.

However, the situation is different at the University of Madras's Chepauk campus.

K. Ahmed, a student at the university, says, "We have been receiving very bad water supply. It is sometimes muddy and black."

Students say the water supply at the hostel is also erratic.

University of Madras officials were unavailable for comment.

## Portable water purifier by IIT-M

CHANDAN K. MANDAL

launched officially.

A family doesn't need to invest huge amount of money to get pure drinking water at their home. A filter worth of Rs. 600 can supply the same purified water provided by expensive electronic filters.

Scientists at the Indian Institute of Technology - Madras have developed a water purification system which is not only easy to use and cheaper than other filters available in the market but also portable.

The team leader behind the water treatment system, Prof. Ligy Philip at the IIT's Environment and Water Resources Engineering Division under Department of Civil Engineering said the water treatment system works as efficiently as any other water filters available in the market.

"This water treatment system is cost effective than other filters available in the market. It is designed for households prone to water-borne diseases and especially in slum areas where people can not afford to buy an expensive filter," said Philip.

The system was experimented for three years among families living in Mylai Balaji Nagar slum in Velachery before it was

launched officially. "The filter is effective in treating any kind of water. It removes odour and colour and kills harmful bacteria as well," said Philip.

The system can be installed anywhere with maximum investment of Rs. 600, which will be used for buying water drum, pipes and taps.

"Anyone can install this filter once they see this filter. It's easy to install. Also, this is a completely community friendly model as most of its materials are locally available. Sand and charcoal are available everywhere," said Philip. The technology uses a layer of charcoal and sand is placed in a 100-litre plastic drum. Once the water drips down, a 2mg chlorine tablet can be used to kill harmful bacteria. Users can get 20 litres of water within half-an-hour after the sand and charcoal absorbs harmful elements from the water.

According to Philip, the institution has not patented this system so that anyone can use it for free. Meanwhile, the IIT-M and Tamil Nadu Small and Tiny Industries Association (TANSTIA)-FNF Service Centre on Monday signed a memorandum of understanding to take the technology to the public.

## PDS gives free wheat and rice

DURGA PRASAD

People have welcomed the Government's decision to give free wheat to rice card holders through the fair price shops in the city.

The Government order dated February 2 had asked FPS to give free wheat of about 5-10 kg reducing the same quantity of free rice which was earlier given to the rice cardholders.

"Every rice cardholder used to get certain units of rice, now instead of rice they can get some units of wheat. If they used to get 20 kg of rice earlier, now they can get 15 kg of rice and 5 kg of wheat," said G. Shanti, a saleswoman at the Fair Price Shop on L.B. Road in Thiruvanniyur, where free wheat was given from March 1.

L. Selvi, resident of Visalatchi Thottam in Mandaveli, came to know about the change by reading a notification put outside the shop.

"We usually get at least 5kgs of wheat at Rs.7-8 per kg from FPS every month. Now they are giving it themselves for free" she said.

However, Malika of Karunandhi Nagar in Tondiarpet went home with only 15 kg of rice due to non-arrival of wheat stocks.

Shanti, the saleswoman in Thiruvanniyur, said "If there is not enough stock of wheat, people can get rice or can get wheat when the stock arrives."

But a woman at a shop in Mandaveli, complained about irregularity of supply and lack of information on when the stock arrived.

"They suddenly give all the products on the same day and many people come to shop that day resulting in overcrowding. I have to wait for hour to get my supply," she said.

# Are days of canine menace back in the city?

BECHU S.

Though official records indicate a steep drop in the stray dog population of the city, residents of places in and around Adyar complain about the increasing menace from these canine packs.

The aggressive animals bark at and chase any person coming in their way, and have caused minor road accidents in the recent months.

"Two weeks back dogs chased me when I was coming back from my friend's place. They follow bikes barking till you speed away. A friend of mine fell down near his home at R.A Puram as dogs came across his scooter at night," said Ganesh, a student of Anna University and resident of Gandhi Nagar.

The dogs at times catch people by surprise at junctions and turns,

causing minor mishaps.

"The vehicle lights seem to attract the dogs. They follow the bike barking. Applying the brakes at the right time have saved me from a dog jumping across on several occasion," said a policeman who has been on night patrolling duty near the Fortis Malar Hospital.

Mass Rapid Transit System (MRTS) stations on the Velachery - Chennai Beach line are also occupied by street dogs. At the Kasturibainagar, Indiranagar, Thiruvanniyur and Taramani stations, security personnel keep away the animals only for some time, after which, they will come back and settle down inside the station premises. Commuters getting down at these stations are terrified by the animals at night times.

"Dogs are common inside the



30 sterilization surgeries done daily by Blue Cross. | MASTYLECARE.ORG

station irrespective of day or night. But they show up in large numbers by night and become wilder in behavior. They bark at people and chase school children," said Santha Devi, who lives near Kotturpuram

station. "They drag garbage inside the station. They sleep and excretes anywhere inside the stations," she added.

The Chennai Municipal Corporation had implemented the

Animal Birth Control (ABC) scheme way back in 1996 in association with Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and Blue Cross. The scheme showed immediate results as Chennai was declared the first rabies-free city of India in 2002.

The officials claim that the number of stray dogs are being brought down by disciplined sterilization programme. However, the Chennai Corporation has received 162 complaints about dog menace within the past three years online alone. A dog that attacked 26 people including 2 minors earlier this February has been the worst case reported in recent times.

But, Blue Cross Society Chennai chapter President and Animal Rights activist Dawn Williams said the calls for the extermination of dogs were not civilized and the

dogs alone were not blamed.

"The definition of the word menace is complicated. People are too lazy to deposit their domestic waste inside the large trash cans and leave them on the ground. Later, if a dog drags it around, then it is accused of littering. Who do you expect to be more intelligent - a dog or human beings?"

About 30 sterilization surgeries are done daily under Blue Cross. "The expenditure of State Government is Rs.450 per dog and nothing is happening in the other birth control centres. Our organization submits monthly reports to the Corporation with number of testicles and ovaries removed but others don't. Poor accountability is the reason for the failure of ABC in the city and don't blame the animals for that," he added.

## Street vendors await enumeration

DEEPAK SINGH

The process of enumerating street vendors is just limping along even 15 months after the State Government notified the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014.

On November 2, 2015, The Government told the Greater Chennai Corporation to enumerate street vendors within six months, as per law, and constitute the Town Vending Committee (TVC).

The corporation had announced earlier this month that the enumeration would start from March 8, 2017. Although the process began, it lasted only a few days.

"They started the registration process in some areas but because of elections in RK Nagar, they stopped," said M.V. Krishnan, President of the Chennai Street Vendors Association. This he said was due to feared impact on voting.

"There is no future for us until the law comes in force or they will keep harassing us," said Krishnan.

Until the enumeration is complete, the corporation cannot draw on the law to form a TVC. "It is only after we have a headcount on the number of vendors can we go ahead with the formation of the vendors' committee," said V. Anbuselvan, Deputy Commissioner of the Greater Chennai Corporation.

The headcount and registration

are to be done through a biometric system and Anbuselvan said that corporation had outsourced to an agency for all personal details of vendors, which would include biometrics, location of their business and other personal information.

The outsourcing of this work has itself faced number of delays as the Corporation invited fresh bids for the second time, in January.

According to law, the urban areas should be divided into two parts, vending and non-vending zones, where vendors shall be permitted and prohibited respectively. After enumeration, "Those doing business in prohibited areas will be relocated to existing or newly formed vending

zones," said Anbuselvan.

The TVC, as mentioned in the Act, "shall ensure that all existing street vendors, identified in the survey, are accommodated". TVC, the act says "shall carry out a draw of lots for issuing the certificate of vending for that vending zone and the remaining persons shall be accommodated in any adjoining vending zone to avoid relocation."

The Act makes eviction illegal until TVC is formed and certificate of vending is issued. On the contrary, the Chennai Corporation tried to evict vendors on NSC Bose Road, according to The Hindu.

"We will not stay quiet until all street vendors get authorised authorisation for street vending," remarked Krishnan.

# Laws no bar for manual scavenging

ASMITA NANDY

Despite laws, violation of human rights and practice of manual scavenging continues rampantly in Chennai.

According to the provisions of The Prohibition of Employment of Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, the families of the deceased manual scavengers are supposed to be compensated with Rs. 10 lakhs.

However, Change India director and petitioner for curbing manual scavenging, A. Narayanan, states that only 141 families in the State have received compensation while another 41 families remain to be compensated. Another 22 families are still untraceable.



Manual Scavenging, a reality in Chennai | DEEPAK SINGH

The Act also prohibits employing any person for 'hazardous cleaning of a sewer or a septic tank' by any agency or local authority unless the need to employ falls under cases of exemptions

made by the Supreme Court.

On 20th March, three persons employed by the Tamil Nadu Water and Drainage Board (TWAD) died in Cuddalore while trying to clean a septic tank.

Narayanan said that progress on the part of State Government has happened in the past few years in terms of procurement of machinery and organizing training camps for manual scavengers.

"Though there are good intentions, the Government does not have enough man-power to implement the policies. Moreover, manual scavenging remains to be a problem of caste oppression across the country," said Narayanan.

G. K. Daniel, employed under a private contractor, said he had to sometimes use his hands to remove the sludge that was difficult to pipe out with the machines.

R. Kuppan who works under a private contractor named Gunasekharan in Anna Nagar,

complains of hardly being able to meet his ends with the wage of Rs.160. He has only recently been given gloves and shoes.

The data on Chennai Corporation's website shows there are 252 manual scavengers in the city whereas the survey done in 2014 by Safai Karmachari Andolan (SKA), a country-wide movement against the practice of manual scavenging, said there are more than 15,000 manual scavengers in the city itself.

Velankani Samuel, State Convener of SKA said, "The Government is not accepting self-declaration forms. Infact, they are tempting the contract workers by promising them permanent jobs if they go into the manholes."



Men installing pumps to lift ground water | JOSEPH SEBASTIAN

## Slum-dwellers get new homes

JOSEPH SEBASTIAN

Long pipes, men digging to reach the under ground aquifer and leveling floors and laying tiles is a common scene these days at Ayodhyakuppam where residents have started moving in to their newly built houses.

"We get water once every four days," says Mahilini, who had to vacate her house three years ago after the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board started its State-funded Reconstruction of Dilapidated Tenements Programme.

There are 708 tenements in the area and each is 375 sq ft in area. All the residents living in the area are fishermen or come from a similar background. They pay Rs 250 as rent and another Rs 250 for maintenance which also covers water bill.

However, Mahilini and many other residents are shelling out around Rs 30,000 for a bore well. To cut costs, two or three houses pool in money to install the motors and share the water they get.

R. Arunkumar, a committee member of the Ayodhyakuppam Fishermen's Association, says, "There is water problem, but we are happy to move into the new houses. We had to pay huge rents while the buildings were being constructed but we get almost all facilities. Every house has an electricity connection and there are no power cuts."

S. Sasikumar, President of Ayodhyakuppam Fishermen's Association said that the old tenement area had 42 three storey buildings.

"There 31 buildings now and each building has four floors," says Sasikumar.

The new Ayodhyakuppam tenements house around 2000 residents. There are 400 people yet to move in as work is still pending in a number of buildings.

"The project was supposed to be completed last year. We went daily to TNSCB (Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board) to get them to complete the work on time. The rest of the people will move in next month," said Sasikumar.

# Doctors press for their safety

AVINASH R.

The protests observed by the doctors and medical students of the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital (RGGGH) last Thursday, have brought to the forefront concerns about the safety of doctors.

Following the physical abuse of a duty doctor at the RGGGH by the attenders of a patient, students and other doctors staged a road-roko to express their displeasure against such incidents that are on the rise.

“Critical care is a field where emotions take pole positions. Science takes a backseat,” said Vignesh Ramalingam, a resident doctor at a private hospital here.

Without proper security, such incidents are bound to happen in various sections of a hospital, where emotions run high.

Unlike as in many private

hospitals, the numbers of visitors and attenders aren't kept in check in the government hospitals. This creates a friction between them and the duty doctors.

“It gets tough to explain an ailment or its treatment to every single person accompanying a patient. Restrictions on the number of attenders at the Government Hospitals will help,” said Dhanvanth Raveentharan, a resident doctor at the Royapettah Government Hospital in Chennai.

After the talks between the doctors and the Tamil Nadu Principal Health Secretary Dr J Radhakrishnan, most of the demands that included the installation of CCTV cameras and permanent security measures were accepted by the State Government for review and implementation.

However, such unplanned protests are risking the lives of

many patients.

“We see doctors as our gods and these hospitals as temples. Gods can't do mistakes and just get away without helping us,” said Rathinammal, a relative of a patient in the RGGGH.

Doctors vehemently disagree and expect some sort of humanity and concern from those criticising them.

“We work a 36-hour shift at times. We tend to get exhausted. It would be better if people understand our plight,” said S.Saravanan, an assistant surgeon at the Government Hospital.

With the Judiciary instructing the doctors to work irrespective of security, the Executive curbing their right to a peaceful protest and people being unaccommodating to the plight of the doctors, they feel isolated in their battle for increased personal security.

# Malnutrition prevalent in TN

CHANDAN K. MANDAL

Nearly 24 per cent children under the age of five are underweight in Tamil Nadu, according to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4). On the other hand, a staggering 27.1 per cent are stunted, meaning they don't have height as per their age.

The proportion of underweight, however, has come down by six per cent in the last decade when the last NFHS-3 was released in 2005-2006. More than 20 per cent children are wasted in Tamil Nadu. Out of total 20.3 per cent wasted, nearly eight per cent are severely wasted.

The figure revealed by NFHS-4 is still surprising for a State like Tamil Nadu where various children and women welfare schemes are undergoing.

Tamil Nadu has been implementing all the major schemes like the Integrated Child Development Services Schemes (ICDS) and the mid-day meal scheme for school children.

The ICDS scheme is being implemented through 54,439 Anganwadi Centres functioning

under 434 ICDS Projects. The State government had allocated a whopping Rs. 1,699.79 crores in the last fiscal year for this scheme. The government has spent Rs.3, 239 crores since May 2011 under Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy Maternity Benefit Scheme.

However, experts think that these schemes have not yielded the

most of the problems can be avoided,” said Job Zachariah, Chief, Field Office for Tamil Nadu & Kerala, UNICEF.

“Mid-day meals,” said Zachariah “which children get only after being enrolled in school cannot address malnutrition. Malnutrition occurs in the first two years, which cannot be reversed later.”

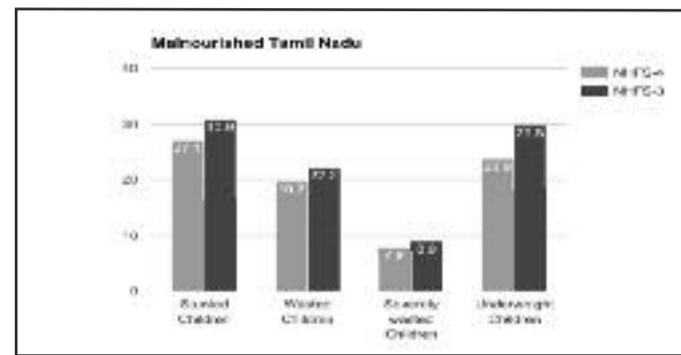
Child Health and Child Hospital (ICHCH) said. “Continuation of breastfeeding till six months can solve many problems related to malnutrition.”

Despite Tamil Nadu having a record of 99 per cent institutional children birth, the number of children breastfed within the first hour of the birth have rather gone down to 54.7 per cent from 55.2 per cent. Only 48.3 per cent children are breastfed for next six months after birth.

Children in Tamil Nadu aren't getting an adequate diet as well. Only 21.4 per cent breastfeeding and 47.1 per cent non-breastfeeding children under four years are receiving adequate diets.

Not only children, but mothers are also malnourished in Tamil Nadu.

According to the NFHS-4, one in two women aged between 15-49 age group i.e. about 55% women are anaemic whereas 44.4 per cent pregnant women of same age group are anaemic. The report stated that only 64 per cent women consumed iron folic acid for 100 days or more when they were pregnant.



INFOGRAPHIC: Malnutrition in TN | CHANDAN K. MANDAL

desired results as they target children at the later phase.

“The first 1000 days of children is very important which shapes their overall development. If we can provide right nutrition during thousand days to our children then

Several studies have shown that breastfeeding to the newly born child within one hour of birth can minimize 20% chances of malnutrition.

Dr S. Srinivasan, Head of Nutrition Department, Institute of

# UGC stalls jobs for distance Phd students

ASMITABHA MANNA

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has ordered that students doing PhD in distance mode will not be eligible for teaching jobs.

“These external students take guidance over phone from guides without discussing their research methods face to face. Interaction and exchange of in-depth knowledge with the guide are not possible in education through correspondence,” says Syed Rahamathulla, ret. Professor of Hindi Department, Madras University.

Around 10-15 per cent Phd students enroll for distance mode education. Universities like Madurai Kamaraj University, Tamil Nadu Open University, VELS University and Andhra University take in distance mode Ph D researchers for teaching positions and that is “corroding” the education infrastructure across country, according to Professor Rahamathulla.

Criticising distance mode Ph D, Dr. K. Jothi Sivagnanam, Director of Agro Economic Research Centre says, “Correspondence for social sciences can be accepted but what about science? It is impractical without labs. Phd researchers need to attend and present papers in seminars.”

Sivagnanam stressed the importance of researchers being

taught by experienced professors, presenting lectures in front of UG (Under Graduate) and PG(Post Graduate) students which enriches their knowledge, ensures clarity in their topic and enhances their practical knowledge. The norm regarding the number of journals and articles required over 10-15 years is ignored when teachers are appointed.

Dr. V. Madha Suresh, Head of Centre of Natural Hazards and Disaster Studies, said, “This process of education cannot be acceptable as the discipline and mandatory submission of research progress to the guides do not happen”

The universities look at appointing distance mode Ph D students for teaching jobs as a form of business. The IQAC (Internal Quality Assurance cell) responsible for maintaining teaching and non-teaching staff in Madras University is disregarding regulations in appointing professors and the quality of research is degrading because university take a fee Rs. 3lakhs to appoint distance mode Phd teachers.

Ph D students are distraught over the regulation as 5-6 years of research and dissertation is invested. Yamini a Ph D student feels the regulations are not framed properly and UGC should look after every possible situations for students to continue research.

# Inspite of Idea-Voda merger, Jio still leads

KARTIK BHARDWAJ

Business experts are doubtful if the recent merger of mobile service providers Vodafone and Idea would help them get a better share in the market.

“The merger is definitely to have an upper hand in the market,” says Aarati Krishnan, a journalist with Business line. “Although there have been changes in tariff rates by both Idea and Vodafone, the prices are not competitive enough. Airtel has also resorted to giving free data of around 10 GB in a month but Jio users still enjoy better connectivity.”

Earlier this week, Idea and Vodafone the two giants in the telecommunications industry decided to merge into a single entity with about 400 million customers, 35 per cent customer market share and 41 per cent revenue market share. Vodafone will own 45.1 per cent shares in the merged entity after transferring 4.9 per cent to the promoters of Idea Cellular for Rs. 3874 crores in cash after the merger although Idea cellular and Vodafone would still function as independent brands in India.

It remains to be seen if the merger will affect the fortunes of the other service providers. Oblivious to the tariff war, Reliance Jio users still remain loyal to the brand even though they have to pay for the service from April 1 when the free service ends.



Mobile users in India still prefer Jio. | GOOGLE IMAGES

“It is only because of the internet connectivity,” says Neeraj, a student of Anna University, “Jio has built its customer base by giving free data and luring in customers. But I think that people will go for Jio even when it becomes a paid service as the tariff rates are comparatively better than other networks.”

According to a survey by Bank of America Merrill Lynch, at least 84 percent of current Jio users will subscribe to the paid membership called Jio prime. The survey was conducted online over 1000 Jio users. Some users say that those who got their connection earlier enjoy better connectivity compared to ones who got them later, close to April.

“Call drops are frequent and I see a ‘no service’ sign in my phone almost everyday,” says NV Aiswarya, a Jio user who got the

connection in January this year. “I think it is because of the huge customer base they have right now.”

“We are still getting around 50 to 100 customers every week,” says Kumara Raja, the Jio attendant at Reliance digital Adyar. “Although people do come up with problems of bad connectivity sometimes it is not a major problem. More than that people come up with the problem of mobile number portability as they are not able to shift their current numbers to Jio. But the company is planning to resolve this issue on April 1.”

Manoj Singh, an Infosys employee, says “With the advent of Whatsapp calls, free calling has become the norm. India has become a booming market for internet users. The only way to get ahead in this business is better and cheaper data.”

# Chennai has a long way to go

ISHA ARORA

In a recent survey, approximately 58% of the people surveyed said that Chennai's infrastructure and quality of services are below average, while 64% stated the same for its living conditions.

The survey was conducted following NITI Aayog's announcement of devising an index to estimate the rank of 500 cities with population of more than 1 lakh on the three criteria of infrastructure, quality of services and living conditions of the citizens of Chennai.

“In Tamil Nadu, most of the infrastructure projects get stalled due to inter departmental fights and political turmoil,” said 25-year-old Vivek Shiva. A resident of Kodambakkam, Vivek Shiva added that the construction of the two-wheeler subway in the locality began in 2007 but was completed in 2014.

A lot of people, during the survey, stated that infrastructure in cities like Bangalore and Delhi is better than that of Chennai.

In terms of the quality of services, people praised the MRTS and bus services in Chennai. However, the popular view was that the transportation during night gets reduced as the

city sleeps early.

The people stated that water services would continue to take a backseat due to the underlying water crisis. “With each passing year, the water problem is intensifying,” said Sharada Sridharan, a Velachery resident.

Popular opinion maintained following NITI Aayog's announcement of efficient services.

“With each passing year, the water problem is intensifying.”

“The living conditions in the city are more convenient than those in Delhi and Mumbai, also it should be noted that Chennai is one of the safest cities in the country,” said Manjot Singh who shifted here six months back.

The accommodation cost is cheap, public transport with the exception of auto rickshaws is adequate and the city is a pioneer in provision of medical facilities. People from across the nation come to Chennai to get treated for various ailments. Majority of the people surveyed maintained that Bangalore provides the best living conditions.

“Even though Chennai might not be trending in various aspects of urbanism, it is a safe, reliable and friendly city compared to other high end metropolitans,” said Aditya, an architecture student.

# ‘Unreasonable’ terms delay child adoption in Tamil Nadu

DEEPAK SINGH

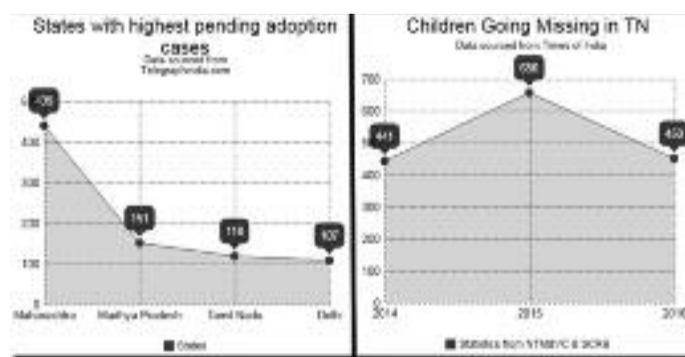
One hundred and eighteen cases on adoption are pending before various courts across Tamil Nadu (TN), due to “failure on implementation” of guidelines put forth by the Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act, according to Deepak Kumar, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA)

He said that the JJ rules have defined all roles and duties, but on the ground implementation at the state level is poor. The legal procedure is the biggest hurdle in child adoption, he added.

“Most of the cases get cleared, but if it doesn't, then you have to wait for a very long time,” said an employee from the Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust in Chennai.

When asked about the amount of time an adoption process could take in Tamil Nadu, she said, “We just do not know by when the process gets cleared.”

Further, judicial interference interference makes matters worse. Few months ago, it was reported



| DEEPAK SINGH

that a Madras High Court judge had asked adoptive parents to donate Rs. 1 lakh to a local school. In another case, Burdwan district court had ordered parents to produce the child at regular intervals of 3-6 months until the child was 18.

“Such unreasonable pre-conditions discourage people from adopting a child legally. Genuine parents will be forced to do so by illegal methods,” said Deepak. He also added, “Judges themselves are unclear about the act and the procedures. As a result adoption

cases in TN have been languishing for years.”

In February this year, Centre had written to Chief Justice of India on the need to sensitize judges over a large number of adoption cases stuck in the legal process.

Kumar complained that there is little clarity on the adoption process. When a child is found abandoned, nobody knows whom to report to. “Such negligence in child care system has led to miniscule number of such children coming into the pool of adoption.”

“In a country like India, where

lakhs of children are in need of care and protection, only over a thousand children in our protection indicates that there is some problem because of which remaining ones are not coming in our fold,” said Deepak.

Officials are taking a backseat when it comes to getting such cases reported. Neither do they care to familiarize themselves with the guidelines of the Act.

These children are victims of the unregulated atrocious activities prevailing in the society. Some of them are luckily rescued from traffickers, while many others are abandoned and forsaken by parents who don't want them. But they should atleast get a chance to meet their Prospective Adoptive Parents (PAPs). According to the Childline India Foundation's website, “An estimated 1,000 to 1,500 Indian children are smuggled out of the country every year to Saudi Arabia for begging during the Hajj.”

Minister of Social Welfare of Tamil Nadu, V. Saroja was unavailable for comment.

# No laws for refugees in India

AVANTIKA CHOPRA

There are over one lakh refugees in Tamil Nadu but not one single law protecting them in India, according to Dr G Sathish Kumar, who has researched the movement of refugees across the world.

Discussing his research on Mobility of World Refugees at the Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS) here Dr. Kumar spoke about the UNHCR programme that provides right to asylum and protection to refugees around the world.

However, the same could not be applied to the refugees in India because India was not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention or its 1967 protocol.

There was no legal frame work at present to help the refugees living in India, said Kumar, who is Assistant Professor at Great Lakes Institute of Management

Asked about the state of refugees

in India, he said “There are over 214 refugee camps in Tamil Nadu alone. The ‘Right to Education’ Act is extended to them but they are only allowed to work in the informal sector. There is a need to initiate laws for refugees.”

When asked why he did not do research on the refugee mobility in

immediate need for refugee development laws in India and he wanted to push forward his research in the same direction.

Taking data from the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), he said his research was focussed on two broad aspects of the refugee movement. First, did the number of refugees vary between developing and developed countries based on Income Levels (high income-low income) and Human Development Index (HDI)? Second, did the concentration of refugees shift from low income countries to those with high Human Development Index?

In his research, Dr. Kumar took data of all countries and divided the refugees according to two categories; Refugee by their country of Asylum or Refugee by their country of Origin.

The study concluded that the major proportion of mobility of refugees (both asylum and origin) from one place to another had occurred within the Asian and African region.



No country for refugees | GOOGLE IMAGES

# “Threats cannot stop me” Is Chennai a cheap city?

ISHA ARORA

“The lowest point of my career was when I was with a popular news channel had a good reputation and handsome pay, yet I felt like I could not do this anymore,” said Sandhya Ravishankar.

Having harbored the dream of being a journalist since sixth grade, Sandhya took to freelancing after being in the mainstream media for 12 years. Mainstream journalism ceased to produce content and became more about agenda setting for her, propelling her to quit. What started off as a boon for her, took an ugly form when she did an exposé of the sand mining mafia in Tamil Nadu.

“It’s amazing how people can get away with anything if they keep the politicians happy. I have



Sandhya Ravishankar on her assignment in Chhattisgarh | THE WIRE

received flak before, but this time it was a lot more vicious” she said. Death threats, online abuse and illegal surveillance came her way

for doing her job. She had started working on uncovering the scam in 2013, and finally before she could even reap the fruits of her toil, she got stuck in a legal battle with the Government.

An alleged ‘manufactured’ report was submitted to the Ministry of Environment and Forests quoting miners and citing ‘personal enmity’ as one of the reasons for her coverage of the sand mining mafia. “It is a case of abuse of Government machinery to target an individual and help another one,” said Sandhya.

While she is still awaiting a response from the Government for the charges levied against her, a Public Interest Litigation against VV Minerals and its owner S. Vaikundarajan has been filed in the court.

However, setting aside all abuses and threats, Sandhya remains unfazed and continues to look forward to doing good work.

A woman of substance, she is happily nestled in the companionship of her journalist husband, three dogs and her parents.

She wants to venture into Environment Journalism in the near future to improve her knowledge in the field.

She had planned on starting her publishing house after drifting from mainstream media, but the current lull in print journalism discouraged her to do so.

“I finally feel that I’m doing the kind of work I was cut out for, such instances are mere obstacles, I don’t see them as low points in my career at all,” she added.

ASMITABHA MANNA

Chennai ranks as the sixth cheapest city in the world by Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) in the report titled “Worldwide Cost of Living 2017”.

EIU released the report based on stability, healthcare, culture and environment. “The report does not suggest Chennai to be the sixth livable city in the world. It says a lot more than that as a cheap city does not qualify as being livable.

We need to ensure which segment of the population we are targeting. Because, if we look from the perspective of migrant workers’, the cost of living will be a huge factor,” said Dr. Shashanka Bhide, Director of Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS).

Basudev, a migrant construction worker from Dhanbad said, “I need essentials for daily survival. I find hard to save money from my salary of Rs. 10,000. Vegetable prices are higher as a kilogram of tomatoes costs me Rs 20 here compared to Rs 5 in my hometown. Moreover, packaged water is a necessity due to water scarcity and polluted water that causes saving money hard.”

IT sector employees are also facing the brunt of house rent and transportation costs. “I do not find Chennai cheap. I share a 2BHK flat for Rs 20,000 and Air Conditioner is compulsory in this city so the electricity bill is also high,” said Sandeep Chandra, a Wipro employee.

He emphasized that though the Mass Rapid Transit System (MRTS) is cheap, it is very hard to limit transportation costs as auto fares are irregular and ranges anything between Rs 100-200 for 4-5 km of travel.

Sandeep admits that common

food shops are cheap but not near his home. Bus transit is at an interval of half an hour and non-existent after 8:30 PM. So, he has to travel to Anna Nagar in shared cabs or auto rickshaws after changing stations.

He ends up spending Rs. 2500-3000 every month on transportation. “The indicators for livability from what you see as price is debatable,” said Dr. Bhide.

Cheap city not only means lower prices but also connectivity and

larger spaces as it is mentioned in the same report with the most expensive cities like Singapore, Hong Kong and New York. Smart City project has similar parameters to fulfill to rank Chennai as a livable city with less pollution, flow of traffic and spaces. Dr. Bhide stated.

With development of infrastructure and maintenance of environment sustainability in cities like Singapore and Hong Kong, cheap city parameters should be defined with more emphasis.”

Air pollution in Chennai is a concern as motor-vehicular congestion is increasing every day and health is affected. Health is listed as one of the criteria for being chosen and in this city the health expenditure is not reasonable as Aritra Chowdhury, a student of IIT Madras said, “Food prices and transport costs are affordable but health care is excessively expensive.”

Besides cheaper prices in certain aspects, sustainable living is not uniform for all sections and so living in Chennai does not mean cheaper living. A cheap city should ensure availability of basic requirements for proper living at such prices that all sections of society can avail.

*Cheap city should first ensure availability of basic requirements for proper living.*

## Performance not confined anymore

ASMITA NANDY

While the stage in Delhi and Mumbai has shifted out-of-the-box, Chennai is still catching up on performances in alternative spaces. The second edition of the music and dance festival, Urur Olcott Kuppam Vizha, earlier last year, took art amidst people, moving out of comfortable auditoriums to a 29C bus or a wooden boat. From classical to folk, the fishing village broke down social barriers when musicians and dancers shared the same stage. Groups like Supportive Cities and Sofar Sounds also experiment with venues and endeavour to take art into more inclusive spaces by asking people to open up their living rooms, kitchens, garage, terraces etc.

Musical gigs, stand-up comedy and poetry reading often don’t need a heavy setup and can be managed with acoustic equipments. These groups don’t reveal the exact location of the performance unless you register for the event. “Artists like performing in such intimate spaces because the environment is such that people come here only for the music and there is scope for personal interactions with the audience. Shaktisree Gopalan and Shraavan Sridhar are two big names who have performed for us so far,” said Aditi Kuriakose, one of the programme coordinators of Sofar Sounds.

Nandhitha, Assistant Project Manager of



Artists performing at the music & dance fest, Urur Olcott Kuppam Vizha | DECCAN CHRONICLE

Inception Business Services, that has already organized events in cafes like Madhatters, Craveyard and Café Coffee Day, said, “We would love to host more performances in open spaces like railway stations, beaches, museum etc. Wish we could get permission.”

A lot of cafes and restaurants are opening their doors to art exhibitions, story-telling sessions, poetry reading and musical gigs.

A hub for learning and collaborating for artists, Wandering Artist, was started last month by Sriram Ayer, founder of

Nalandaway Foundation and Kavery Poovanna, an artist. The café also holds regular training sessions in different art forms. “We wanted to create a space where children and adults can learn and collaborate art at their convenience. We also have a working space where people can just come and create art. There is enough scope for performances with an auditorium that has a capacity of 70-100 people and a makeshift stage,” said Sriram Ayer.

However, when it comes to theatre,

veteran theatre artists in the city believe there are still not enough venue-driven plays that are happening in Chennai. V. Balakrishnan, founder and artistic director of Theatre Nisha, said, “Street plays and stand-up comedy are still happening in unconventional spaces but when it comes to proper theatre plays, groups are sticking to the old setup. Even if they are performing in different venues, they are hardly experimenting with the nuances of the venue.”

“Long back we travelled across the slums in the city and performed plays for raising awareness in collaboration with The Chennai Corporation but now there is hardly any leadership in the group to take the plays outside auditoriums or the terrace of our house,” said Natesh Muthuswamy, son of Na. Muthuswamy, founder of one of Chennai’s oldest theatre groups, Koothu-P-Patrai.

Spaces in Besant Nagar run by eminent arts editor and cultural journalism teacher Sadanand Menon hosts intimate plays but fails to break down the barrier of a amphitheatre set-up. “An unconventional performance space should have a risk factor attached to it where the artist cannot anticipate what lies ahead. Ebrahim Alkazi broke the barriers of theatre with his play amidst the water tanks on the terrace of a building in Mumbai before he went onto become the director of the National School of Drama,” said Sadanand Menon.



Members of Serene Chennai at work. | KARAN KUMAR

## Fostering a ‘Serene’ city

AVANEESH MISHRA

‘Serene Chennai’, a voluntary organisation, is credited by the residents of Saidapet for clearing garbage off the streets in the area.

However, Gowri Shankar R, founder of the organization is too generous to accept that gratitude.

“I am not doing anything great. I haven’t done anything yet. I just want to make a difference,” he said, talking about his plan to convert a deserted room in Saidapet into a library for children.

“When we came here, the situation was really bad. The place was the hub for anti-social activities.

Teenagers were regularly doing drugs here. I want to not just clean up the place, but bring about a shift in the attitude of people,” he added.

“We started doing this nearly two-and-a-half years ago. The Quaid-e-Milleth College at Mount road was surrounded by heaps of garbage. The walls were

covered with movie posters and stains of urine. Along with a few of my friends, I talked to the Principal and decided to clean it. That was our first work,” added Gowri Shankar, an IT professional with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS).

Since its inception, the volunteer group has been working in Chennai nearly every weekend, with blessings of the people and personal satisfaction being the only takeaways.

We changed the face of many government schools and colleges too, says Gowri Shankar with a smile on his face.

“We are nearly 60 people now. Sometimes it is hard to find help. Most of the people who come to help are poor people.

They are daily wage earners with a family to feed. I cannot force them to come with me every time,” he added.

Gowri said, “Though the limitations of manpower is a hurdle, I am not going to stop that easily. I still have a lot more to do.”

## TNHDC exhibition gets mild response

ISSAC JAMES

The Tamil Nadu Handicraft Development Corporation’s exhibition of handicraft items at Valluvar Kottam has received a lukewarm response so far.

“The customer turnout is not as per the expectations this time,” said Amudhapani S, who is the manager of this year’s exhibition.

The organizers had expected an upward of 1000 visitors daily, but were having to contend with barely 300.

Amudhapani blamed the ongoing school exams and the city’s weather for low visitor

turnout. “[School] exams are going on, and also, the weather is very harsh,” he said.

However, the sellers claimed that the visitor turnout has been low for the past few years. Some of them disagreed that the school exams and the weather were the culprits.

“The youngsters are losing interest in the handicraft products,” said Suryan Achary, an artisan from Mamalapuram who was exhibiting stone craft works.

He claimed that the sales used to be “very good” five to ten years ago.

He dismissed the manager’s claim that weather was

discouraging people from visiting the exhibition. “If people are genuinely interested in handicrafts, they would turn up, despite the weather,” he said.

The organizers and sellers also blamed the increase in the number of exhibitions held in the city as another possible reason for lower customer turnout.

“Ten years ago, this exhibition had a big name. Today, many [such] exhibitions are held across the city and [as a result] the crowd is diffused,” said Achary.

Nevertheless, some sellers were optimistic. “We had a big crowd last weekend,” said C.N. Binu, an

artisan of Kerala origin, hailing from Kanyakumari. “On weekdays, it’s typically low,” he said adding that he and other artisans were expecting a much bigger turnout over the following weekend.

Although the organizers claim that the customer turnout is low this year, the items on sale have impressed some of those who visited the stalls.

“Quality wise the products are very good. Cost is the only problem,” said Meaheshwaran, who was planning another visit with family.

“The collection [of items] is fairly good,” said Anupama

Sujatha, another visitor.

According to the organizers, over 100 artisans from all over India were participating in the exhibition, which is open until March 27.

Products on display included bangles from Rajasthan, wood works by south Indian artisans, carpets and silk cloths from Kashmir.

The exhibition also featured, for the first time according to the organizers, items made of fish scales and fish bones.

Products from as far as Jammu and Kashmir and Rajasthan were on display.

## Of treks and trash bins: Story of Peter Geit

KARTIK BHARDWAJ

The blonde haired man stands at the door of his house with a welcoming smile.

Dressed in a green Nike jersey and shorts, Peter Van Geit gives a soft handshake and has an observant eye. He notices my uneasiness with the heap of cardboard, plastic bottles and polythene bags at his porch.

“All these are gems I collected from my endeavors,” says Peter Van Geit, a Belgian who settled in Chennai back in 1998.

He sits on his living room couch with photographs of his travels adorning the wall behind. Though his house seems to be unorganized with a laptop and pile of newspapers lying strewn on the floor, a collection of running shoes is neatly stacked on a shelf in the corner.

“At CISCO where I work right now, some friends and I started travelling around the city during weekends. Ten years later my friends increased to 40,000 and now we call it the Chennai Trekking Club.” Chennai Trekking Club, a non-profit organization was started by



Peter Van Geit talks about his journey and stresses on his having miles to go | KARTIK BHARDWAJ

Geit in 2008 as a Facebook page. The organization prides itself in being the biggest trekking club for people for whom the idea of enjoying weekends is more than going to a mall.

“Almost all our members are 9

to 5 job people. You don’t need to leave your job to go for an adventure,” he said.

Although in 2010, this group of wanderlusts was in the news for reasons other than trekking. “It all started when we went for a trek to

Tada falls. We saw what humanity could do to nature. I could see glass bottles and polythene bags dumped near the falls. I also saw a lot of plastic bottle caps on the beaches in Chennai and we decided to do something about it.”

Chennai Coastal Cleanup was a cleanliness drive started by Geit in 2010. It had 5000 volunteers who vouched to pick up waste from various beaches in Chennai. They cleaned up over 50 tons of garbage.

Geit decided to take this initiative one step further in June last year.

In Noachikuppam village he started the zero waste management system, where with the help of over 20,000 fishermen, they went door-to-door to provide separate bins for biodegradable and non-biodegradable waste.

“It is important for people to understand that plastics when dumped in the sea keep on coming back to the shore and it becomes a vicious cycle.

People need to know which waste nature can absorb and which it cannot,” he said. The plastics collected from the movement were given to various factories for recycling. As we bid farewell, I came across the same heap of plastic and unused material around at his porch. Referring to it he said, “We collected all of it from the cleanliness drives every week. I think it is time to do a zero waste for my home too,” he smiled.