

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

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Believe it or not! *Chennai India's best city!!*

(By The Editor)

To those of us who live in Madras that is Chennai year in and year out its faults may be many and seemingly immitigable. But the world appears to think differently. A recent scan of Indian cities by *India Today* puts Chennai at the top of the chart across various categories, making it the best city in the country, two years running. This comes shortly after a *New York Times* survey of the top 52 tourist destina-

tions of the world in which Chennai was the only Indian city to be featured. Clearly there is much in Chennai to cherish, but that can be no cause for complacency.

The survey spanned 50 cities of India across eleven parameters – Economy, Transport, Public Services, Housing, Investment, Education, Healthcare, Entertainment, Crime & Safety, Environment and Cleanliness. Chennai has scor-

ed well on most counts – barring the obvious few where it needs to do much better – cleanliness, housing, and tourist inflow. What is alarming is the way the city has fallen behind on some of these counts within just one year – on housing it ranks 7, five steps below where it was last year, on cleanliness it does not even make it to the top ten and as for tourist inflow, it has slipped from 2nd position to the 8th. The worst however is the economy growth ranking – it has fallen from 2nd position to 9th.

Some results are surprising – take pedestrian friendliness for instance. The city ranks number one, which probably indicates how bad other metros are on this count. A more careful perusal reveals that this ranking is biased by a pronouncement of the Corporation which is yet to become reality – building footpaths and exclusive 'no motor vehicle' zones. To that we

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The way Chennai has fared

Criteria	Rank in 2014	Rank in 2013
Overall	1	1
Housing	7	2
Transport	1	2
Education	1	1
Healthcare	2	3
Crime and Safety	4	4
Public Services	2	4
Entertainment	8	24
Economy	9	2
Environment	6	28

The Metro Rail again!

The continuing deep tunneling work by Chennai Metro Rail Limited (CMRL) in the George Town area has claimed yet another heritage building as its victim – the historic Law College. A recent letter from the Public Works Department addressed to the Principal of the College has said that its mean building is now structurally unsafe and poses a grave threat to students and faculty alike. It stated that the building needs to be vacated immediately. What is of greater concern is that it has, in the same letter, accused Metro Rail authorities of concealing the damage by means of some short-term plastering work. This has thrown into doubt the various claims made by CMRL of hav-

Historic Law College building endangered

ing taken concerns regarding heritage seriously while it went about its work.

That the Law College building has become unsafe has probably taken only the PWD by surprise. It was evident to any layman that this would soon come to pass. As pointed out in this publication over two years ago, barricades for CMRL work had come up within five feet of the structure. The Heritage Conservation Committee (HCC) of the Chennai Metro-

● by A Special Correspondent

politan Development Authority (CMDA) had made note of this and also commented on the proposed alignment of stations with regard to the Law College building. While the latter was taken into consideration and changes were made accordingly, what was not altered was the position of the barricades. Work continued nevertheless. A final from one of the domes fell a year ago. CMRL promptly denied that its work had anything to do with this. But the latest developments have

(Continued on page 4)

Madras Landmarks – 50 years ago



● The year 1887 was a special one for the British empire. The Queen Empress, Victoria, was completing fifty years as sovereign and many were the celebrations across the world. In Madras, it was decided that the commemoration would be by way of the Victoria Public Hall and the Victoria Technical Institute (VTI). The latter was planned as a body that would promote local arts and crafts and also include a venue for their exhibition and sale.

The VTI came into existence thanks to funds collected by the Central Jubilee Committee which was in charge of the celebrations. The Government made a matching grant on condition that the President and one-third of the managing committee of the Institute ought to be its nominees. This was accepted and the VTI was set up in 1887 as a charitable trust. On October 26, 1889, it was registered as a Society. Its councillors immediately began fanning out into the districts of Madras Presidency, meeting various craftsmen and convincing them to route their products through the VTI. In addition, scholarships were instituted in the Madras School of Arts (now the College of Arts and Crafts) and lectures were organised on the talents of Indian artisans. As the Government began setting up technical institutes and colleges of arts in other parts of the Presidency, the VTI's importance grew.

While the VTI was a success from Day One, its permanent exhibition centre was slow to get off the ground. It was only when Queen Victoria died in 1901 that the idea was revived again. In 1906, the Prince of Wales, later King George V, laid its foundation stone inside the Museum complex at Egmore. The building, named the Victoria Memorial Hall, designed by Henry Irwin as a scaled down model of the *Bahadur Durwaza* at Fatehpur Sikri, was completed by T. Namburumal Chetty in 1909 and the VTI had a home. An account in 1920 has it that it was the chief attraction in the Pantheon Complex, outshining the museum and the library.

With the coming of World War II, the VTI's Victoria Memorial Hall was commandeered by the Government and the Institute had to move to a shop on Mount Road. Hope Tod, wife of a boxwallah, remembers it to have been a "large, double-fronted shop on Mount Road where 52 different missions of all denominations sold their wares." Clearly, given the British administration, products from ecclesiastical missions were what were sold through the VTI. Hope Tod remembers them to have been "the most beautiful embroidered garments, children's clothing, luncheon tablemats and so many other items".

When the War ended, the VTI did not want to go back to Egmore. In any case the Victoria Memorial Hall was found to be in a bad state. The Govern-

(Continued on page 3)

World's tallest statue

– L&T to undertake monumental project

The Buildings & Factories Business of L&T Construction (formerly Madras-based ECC) has won the prestigious Rs. 2,989 crore order (\$487 million) for the design and construction of the Statue of Unity proposed by the Government of Gujarat. The Statue of Unity is a dream project of Prime Minister (and former Chief Minister of Gujarat) Narendra Modi.

Island with the mainland along the Narmada River; an internal roadway 5 km long; and improvements to the existing roads/bridges/culverts connecting the area of Sadhu Island. The project also provides for an administrative and management hub, a conference centre, and a star hotel.

S.N. Subrahmanyam, Member of the Board and Senior Ex-



The 182-metre (597-foot) bronze statue of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, first Home Minister of India, will be built on the Sadhu-Bet Island, approximately 3.5 kilometres south of Sardar Sarovar Dam at Kevadia in the Narmada District of Gujarat. Once completed, the statue will be the tallest of its kind in the world.

L&T's assignment will include design, engineering and construction of the statue along with an exhibition centre at its base; a memorial garden; a designer bridge connecting Sadhu

executive Vice-President (Infrastructure & Construction), said, "Purely from an engineering and construction perspective, the Statue of Unity poses some unique challenges, and we possess the requisite credentials to construct what will be a monument that is sure to evoke nationalistic pride in the heart of every Indian." Turner Construction, which built the world's tallest skyscraper, Burj Khalifa in Dubai, will act as consultant to the Gujarat project. (Courtesy: *Our Building & Construction*)

– Achal Narayanan

MADRAS MUSINGS ON THE WEB

To reach out to as many readers as possible who share our keen interest in Madras that is Chennai, and in response to requests from many well-wishers – especially from outside Chennai and abroad who receive their postal copies very late – for an online edition. *Madras Musings* is now on the web at www.madrasmusings.com

THE EDITOR

The city and sobriety

It is the season of celebration and Land cheer and everything other than water is flowing in the city that we all love so much. The police force, whose task it is to see that the citizenry sticks to the safe and narrow and does not come to a sticky end through wayward driving, has taken upon itself the responsibility of weeding out from the roads those who have made merry rather freely. Unfortunately, in its view, *The Man from Madras Musings* is also one of them.

And in this the police force errs for MMM's abstemiousness is a byword among those who know him well. In fact this is what keeps MMM from receiving invitations to bottle parties for it is an open secret that the only use that MMM is of on such occasions is that of a driver to drop home the more spiritually uplifted among the attendees. However, the gendarmerie does not share this sentiment. In its jaundiced view, MMM has the looks of one who on the milk of honey hath fed and done so rather only too well. Perhaps it has to do with the way MMM's eyes

of checking out those on a high is faulty to the extreme. What is the purpose in a whole posse of policemen descending on a single vehicle as though it contains a dangerous extremist armed to his teeth? One man should do the task but here a strict hierarchy ensures that several are provided employment – a higher up indicates the car to be stopped, the next lower down taps on the window, a third explains why the halt was necessitated and a fourth, invariably the junior-most, receives the full blast of the bad breath and at times the foul language of the driver. All the while, other vehicles, no doubt driven by people who are well above the safe limit, are all whizzing by.

Moreover, this preliminary check by blowing is hardly foolproof; for any drunk can eat food filled with onion and garlic and then get behind the wheel. Also the logic on the basis of which cars are stopped defies any er...logic. Women drivers are never questioned. Men with women and children in their car are given the go by. MMM is told that those with

it all aside before sinking into a deep and refreshing sleep. On arrival at Chennai, the idol was woken up by the attendants with the gentleness of someone brushing flies off a sleeping Venus while the rest including MMM were prodded in the ribs. The star was of course the first to leave the aircraft. MMM was not far behind and more or less kept pace till he came upon a welcoming party. This group bowed and scraped to the star who limply handed over passport and other papers before being whisked through a special doorway no doubt to a waiting limo.

The rest, including MMM, were not so fortunate. Everyone was stopped midstride by a woman wielding what appeared at first glance to be a gun. Conceive of MMM's horror when this was pressed to his temple. He had just commended his soul to God when the woman released him from a vice like grip. It was, she explained rather cursorily, a temperature-measuring device to see if MMM was afflicted by the dreaded Ebola. She was

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

are structured or it could have to do with his general deportment but there it is, the police stops MMM repeatedly and having informed him that it is only a random check, asks him if he would kindly step that way.

MMM never argues with the law enforcers. He meekly follows and does whatever they tell him to do. The first of these is to blow his breath on to their faces. Here again MMM does not complain but the manner in which the party at the receiving end shields its face when MMM breathes out what he always considers a healing zephyr is nothing short of offensive. MMM's breath is of the best, nurtured as it is through the most superior of toothpastes, brushes, mouth-washes and fresheners. But the police force, as MMM has said, shies away in a startled fashion. It then invariably apologises for having suspected MMM of being drunk and disorderly and waves him on his way. Thus far MMM has not been asked to blow into a balloon but in his view the day is not far off.

There is much in this whole process that is most inefficient. Firstly, the spots where this rabid dry brigade hangs out are well known. So those who imbibe rather freely avoid these routes as far as possible on their way home. Secondly, the *modus operandi*

religious symbols on their faces are also respectfully waved on. So the next time you want to make merry and still drive your vehicle, you know what to do.

Examining for Ebola

It was the last thing that *The Man from Madras Musings* expected to happen to him. He is not alluding to Ebola the dreaded virus but something that he fears even more – being away from Chennai during the thick of the music season. But it came about and MMM was whisked away to foreign and extremely cold climes, mercifully for a period of just about ten days. While returning to his beloved city, MMM had thrust into his hands several of the usual forms that needed to be filled. He then noticed one more – a self-declaration – to the effect that MMM had not travelled to any African country in the past fortnight and that he was not coughing, having headaches, or suffering from a fever. Being of a robustly healthy disposition (though always believing to the contrary), MMM filled in a 'no' to all the clauses.

It was while writing all this on the form that MMM noticed a fairly well known name from the Tamil film industry sitting two seats away in the aircraft. This name, or shall we say, star, filled the form in a most perfunctory fashion and then kept

happy she said, to inform MMM that he was healthy and so could he please move on to finish other formalities.

Seeing that she had thawed considerably, no doubt on realising that MMM was Ebola-free, MMM made bold to ask her as to why the star was not subjected to the same test. Pat came the answer that the personality was a public figure and so could not be subjected to the kind of tests that common folk went through. It made MMM wonder if film stars were immune to the virus and if the cure to Ebola lay in everyone becoming a matinee idol. But he chose not to stop and ponder. Already a queue was forming behind him comprising passengers to be tested with the laser gun and he could detect a certain restlessness in their attitude to MMM's queries.

On the flip side, if there is an Ebola outbreak in the city, you may know whom to look for.

Tailpiece

The Man from Madras Musings takes time off from the usual tailpieces to wish every one of his readers a happy and healthy new year. MMM will desist from hoping for any major improvements to the city because they may not happen, though he lives in hope.

– MMM

**OUR
READERS
WRITE**



Disfiguring walls

Chennai is getting increasingly disfigured with wall posters of every hue and dimension splashed all over the city. Is there no way the Hon'ble courts can *suo moto* ban them as they did hoardings? With municipal inaction, the cinema and Chennai's mad mad Carnatic music-crazy guys are having a swell time leaving no wall vacant. I thought Prime Minister Modi's clean India included everything, not merely the litter on the roads and streets.

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(Also see page 6)

Dug wells best

The practice of builders in Chennai is to fill up any existing traditional dug well at a site with the debris from the demolition of the existing building and then dig deep borewells. From my experience over two decades in providing water sources (MM, December 1st) in the residential complexes built by the company of which I was a part, I can assert that it is indeed the traditional dug well

sustained by RWH that will give water security for the following reasons:

1. The soil in Chennai in most parts is favourable for provision of dug wells. I have either retained an existing well or provided a fresh one in over 150 residential complexes all over Chennai and these are serving the residents quite well.
2. Dug wells generally yield good quality water.
3. It can be easily charged with terrace rainwater by simply connecting all the down-take pipes to the well directly (in existing buildings also). This is not only economical but also very efficient and requires little maintenance.
4. The terrace should be swept clean, once in May and again in September. If any food is served on the terrace, the spillage should be immediately swept up so that it does not end up in the well.
5. The only long-term maintenance needed is desilting the well occasionally.
6. The water quality is improved by the rainwater.
7. If the water is potable, it can be boiled, cooled, filtered through cloth and consumed

Endangered fishing *kuppams* of Chennai

Something sad is happening in Chennai. An entire neighborhood has been demolished. This is an area approximately as big as 12 football fields. Thousands of people lived here. Some residents have been promised they could reside in flats in the new development, two years from now.

The neighbourhood was/is Ayodhyakuppam (also known as Ayodhyanagar). This is directly behind the Slum Clearance Board building on Marina Beach Road, near *Vivekananda House*, beside the road that becomes Peter's Road.

As has been the case for many years, approximately 30 fishing boats are at the water's edge at the centre of Marina Beach (opposite Ayodhyakuppam). The men who operate these boats lived in Ayodhiakuppam.

Where do they live now?

Just as Ayodhyakuppam is going, so also will go Nochchikuppam, Nochchinagar, Domikuppam, and Srinivasapuram – all the sea-fishing "hamlets", from the University of Madras (Chepauk campus), southwards to the Adyar Estuary.

Already, much of Nochchikuppam is demolished, and four new apartment buildings have arisen in the area.

This is a matter that would establish Chennai's face and soul in the future. Would the "sea-fishing village" aspect of Chennai be allowed to remain in any way?

Does the Government have a responsibility to assist a folk community – in this case, sea-fishing people – to continue to exist? If 'yes', how could this be done? Is it being done?

Back in 2007, a series of workshops were held regarding a possible 'Living Museum' about the heritage of sea-fishing and sea-travel in the Ayodhyakuppam, Nochchikuppam, or Nochchinagar areas. (A 'Living Museum' is a museum in which the objects on display are still in everyday use, and the guides in the museum include members of the community.)

These workshops were attended by members of Chennai's sea-fishing communities, members of the World Storytelling Institute, and others, and were hosted by Department of Geography, University of Madras.

A set of recommendations that came out of these workshops is at www.storytellinginstitute.org/3.pdf

As director of the World Storytelling Institute, I have worked alongside numerous community members on this project, and I would be happy to share these contacts with Chennai print and media people.

Dr. Eric Miller

Director, World Storytelling Institute
www.storytellingandvideoconferencing.com

safely.

8. The area of the open spaces around the buildings is often much more than the terrace area. The rainwater falling there flows towards the gate because of the paving. This can be easily collected and put into the soil by providing a shallow trench between the gate

columns and diverting it to another well or a pit reaching upto a favourable soil layer. This water will travel across the soil to reach the source well and in the process get fully cleaned by the soil.

9. The pumping cost will be lower than what is needed for a borewell.

The government will do well to actively encourage the retention of existing wells and urge provision of new wells. Incidentally, as the well need not be kept open, I have retained several existing wells in the stilts parking area.

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BELIEVE IT OR NOT

(Continued from page 1)

would only like to say that if wishes were horses beggars would ride. Yet another similarly biased rating is the one on public services – the city ranks second after Mumbai and this is based on several projects announced by the Corporation but which are yet to take off. And as to how we can rank high on infrastructure with, among

other things, "being well connected by air" given the apology of an airport we possess, is a mystery.

That we should have fallen low on housing was only to be expected. Chennai is now suffering from very high real estate prices, which are preventing both housing and industrial investment. In fact, a related study points out that high land prices and the

complete failure of the State Government in building land banks for future use will eventually affect the city and the State's performance and development. A related issue is the fall in business performance or as the survey has it – economy. We had carried an article around six months ago on the poor business initiatives of the Government in terms of attracting business investment. This has resulted in other State Governments coming to our

city to canvass investments in their territories. Chennai is clearly in a precarious situation as far as business growth is concerned and the sooner something is done about it the better.

There are, however, some ratings that make you feel proud of being a citizen of Chennai. It is a well-known fact that the Corporation has been doing some great work in the area of education, especially among the aided schools and those that are directly under its control. Over 150,000 students are enrolled in 6,594 schools spread across the city. Some of them have world-class facilities but enrolment of students remains a challenge given the

lure and the upmarket image of private schools.

Similarly, Chennai expectedly ranks high on healthcare. There is no denying that we are the medical capital of the country. But what is interesting is that Pune has pipped us to the post when it comes to being numero uno. We, however, rank a close second.

There is every reason to rejoice in this high overall rating. But it also means we cannot be complacent, for other cities are fast catching up. Chennai has to buck up on several counts and, most importantly, translate several of its plans into reality. If that does not happen, next year's report will not make for good reading.

CHENNAI HERITAGE

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Madras Landmarks

(Continued from page 1)

ment then did some renovation and converted it into a National Gallery for Art. The VTI in the meanwhile purchased 14 grounds of land on Mount Road in 1952 and constructed a new showroom on it by 1956. This is the one that is shown in today's picture. The VTI continues to perform the role for which it was first set up. It is known for its collection of bronzes, woodwork, metal work, Tanjore paintings and several other traditional South Indian artefacts. It also exports these creations to other countries.

READABILITY PLEASE

Dear Readers,

As letters from readers increase, we are receiving more and more **hand written** letters, many of them in a hand so small and illegible or large and scrawled as to be unreadable. Often this leads to our discarding a letter, particularly if some part of it is unreadable. If you wish us to consider your letter for publication, please type it with enough space between lines or write it using a medium hand, clearly dotting the 'i-s' and crossing the 't-s'.

Many readers also try to fill every square centimetre of a post-card space, making reading or editing impossible. Please help us to consider your letters more favourably by making them more legible for us.

– THE EDITOR

Annie Besant's contribution

(Continued from last fortnight)



After the passing away of A.S. Olcott in February 1907, Annie Besant became the President of the Theosophical Society. C. Jinarajadasa states that she entered the political arena in 1913. She started a weekly newspaper, then in 1914 purchased the *Madras Standard*, a daily and, in August that year, changed its name to *New India*. She managed to remove factions in the Indian National Congress and, in 1916, along with Lokmanya Tilak, launched the 'All India Home Rule League'.

It was Besant who recommended F.T. Brooks, a Theosophist, to Motilal Nehru to be tutor to his son Jawaharlal Nehru when he was 11 years old. In many ways Brooks, for a three-year period, influenced Nehru powerfully. Jawaharlal Nehru says in his autobiography, "I decided to join the Theosophical Society, although I was only thirteen then. When I went to ask Father's permission, he laughingly gave it... As a matter of fact, he was an old Theosophist, having joined the TS in its early days when Madam Blavatsky was in India. So I became a member of the TS at thirteen and Mrs. Besant herself performed the ceremony of initiation. I was thrilled. I attended the TS con-

vention at Benares and saw old Colonel Olcott with his fine beard." He goes on, "I worked successfully for Mrs. Besant's League. Her interment added greatly to the excitement of the intelligentsia and vitalised the

● by K.V.S. Krishna

Home Rule movement all over the country." Jawaharlal Nehru often met J. Krishnamurti, protégé of Annie Besant, whenever the opportunity arose, and drew strength from him for managing India.

Even before she entered the political arena, she established in 1909 a printing press just outside the TS compound with equipment brought from England to print *New India*. She bequeathed the press to the Society, and it

was named Vasantha Press in her memory.

In 1916, Dr. Annie Besant was banned from the Bombay Presidency and, in 1917, she was interned by the Government of Madras. As soon as she was released, the popular wave of enthusiasm was such that she was elected the President of Indian National Congress. "The case for India" was the presidential address delivered by Annie Besant at the 32nd Indian National Congress held in Calcutta on December 26, 1917. The 52-page address was given under the banner of the Home Rule League. Dr. Besant believed in gradual constitutional change through dominion status to full independence, while M.K. Gandhi wanted complete independence immediately. Besant fought for India's freedom until her death. She wrote some 300 books during her lifetime.

Education remained a major focus of the Theosophists. Col. Olcott initiated the development of 200 schools and three premier educational institutions in Ceylon with 20,000 students and a few schools in India, including the Olcott School, now called the Olcott Memorial School. Annie Besant established the Central Hindu College at Benares, appointing G.S. Arundale as its Principal. This became the

core of the building with cement plaster. It has said that this kind of slapdash work does not benefit anyone, as new cracks are bound to appear if the exact extent of damage is not assessed. Matters rest here for the time being, with the onus now being on the College to find new premises, which is not going to be easy.

The CMRL in its defence has said that it has been keeping a watch on heritage buildings along its routes and has been taking up repair activities as and when needed. It cites the 'restoration' it has done at the two Broadway churches – the CSI Tucker and the Arcot Lutheran – that it undertook following reports of cracks and water seepage after tunnelling work in that area. But if that restoration was nothing more than covering the cracks with cement, as has happened in the case of the Law College building, it may not serve any purpose.

The problem is that CMRL has not taken into confidence any qualified conservation specialist when it came to problems of this kind. The PWD too is no expert on such matters. And as for the HCC, while its involvement in the present problem is commendable, it is too slow and bureaucratic to do anything much beyond writing reports and filing them. There are, of course, no heritage laws to protect such buildings.

With this, the Law College structure joins a long list of 'structurally unstable buildings that await restoration'. The others include the National Gallery, the Bharat Insurance Building, the *Gokhale Hall*, *Chepaik Palace* and the *Madrasa-e-Azam*. None of these has seen any restoration activity by its owners and, if anything, these edifices have only weakened further with passage of time. Will that be the fate of the Law College building also?

Gandhi and the Theosophists

Gandhiji was only twenty years old when he met two Theosophists. "They talked to me about *Gita*. They were reading Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Song Celestial* and invited me to read the original with them which I did. It is only after some years that it became a book of daily reading. The Theosophists also recommended *The Light of Asia* by Sir Edwin Arnold and I read it with even greater interest than I did the *Bhagavad Gita*. They took me to Blavatsky Lodge and introduced me to Madame Blavatsky and Mrs. Besant. They insisted that I read Madame Blavatsky's *Key to Theosophy*. I was advised to join the Society, but I politely declined saying that with my meagre knowledge of my own religion I did not want to belong to any religious body," wrote Gandhi in his autobiography. Years later, while in Pretoria, South Africa, Gandhi secured the translation of the *Upanishads* published by the Theosophical Society. He had several friends among the Theosophists in South Africa with whom he was impressed as most of them were vegetarians.

On a tour of North India



The young Mahatma Gandhi.

during 1915, Gandhiji visited Mrs. Besant at Benares and told her that he was aware that she was in delicate health. He said, "I only wanted to pay my respects. I am thankful that you have been good enough to receive me in spite of your indifferent health. I will not detain you any longer." In his further campaigns in India, Gandhiji stated that Dr. Besant's Home Rule agitation touched the peasants.

— KVSK

nucleus of the Benares Hindu University, founded by Madan Mohan Malviya. This is now one of the biggest residential universities in India with over 27,000 students. Besant also founded the Besant Theosophical College on July 19, 1915 at Madanapalle. She also approved the shifting of the National School, Guindy, to Madanapalle by J. Krishnamurti, and the renaming of it the Rishi Valley School. When Besant died in 1933, the Besant Memorial School was founded by G.S. Arundale in her memory. Later, Arundale requested Maria Montessori, the Italian educationist, to come to India and

propagate her methods of education. The best of Theosophical education was in practice till the school moved out of *Damodar Gardens* to Tiruvanniyur. 'The School' of the Krishnamurti Foundation is now in *Damodar Gardens* as the T.S. has leased it to them for 15 years.

In 1886, Col. Olcott founded the Adyar Library, which now has 250,000 printed volumes and 20,000 palm leaf manuscripts and receives 225 journals from several countries. It is now a research centre for Ph.D. students of the University of Madras in Sanskrit and Indology.

(Concluded)

OUR ADDRESSES

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No personal visits or telephone calls, please. Letters received will be sent from these addresses every couple of days to the persons concerned and you will get an answer from them to your queries reasonably quickly. Strange as it may seem, if you adopt the ésnail mail approach, we will be able to help you faster and disappoint you less.

ñ THE EDITOR

The Season, 75 years ago

The 1939 Season posed a new challenge to the two major *sabhas* that conducted music and dance programmes in December – the Music Academy and the Indian Fine Arts Society (IFAS). With the commencement of World War II, restrictions were imposed on holding large public meetings in open pandals. The previous year, the two organisations had decided to conduct their conference (morning sessions) jointly and these were held in the garden of the Woodlands Hotel in Royapettah. The Academy held its concerts also at the same venue, while the IFAS had them at *Gokhale Hall*, Armenian Street. In 1939, what with war economies also being in place, the two *sabhas* had to come closer – conference and concerts were to be organised jointly and that meant a new venue, large enough to accommodate members of both *sabhas*.

Gokhale Hall, the IFAS venue, was ruled out as it could not accommodate the large audience regularly turning out for the Season. It was left to K.V. Krishnaswamy Iyer, the dynamic president of the Music Academy, to find a way out. As a member of the Syndicate of the University of Madras, he was able to obtain sanction to conduct the Season at *Senate House*. There were howls of protest when the announcement was made, for everyone, including Prof. P. Sambamoorthy, complained about the poor acoustics in the great hall of *Senate House*. The location on South Beach Road also made it inaccessible to public transport, especially in the late hours of the evening when the second concert would get over. There were also no eateries in the vicinity.

Egmore, Purasawalkam and George Town. Season tickets at Rs. 2-As 4 were also made available for availing of the bus service.

instruments was planned in co-operation with the University of Madras, the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Madras, the Sri Venkateswara Oriental

● by Sriram V.

The Udipi Gopalakrishna Lunch Home, which functioned next to the Academy's registered office on Thambu Chetty Street, the official caterer for the Season, set up a kitchen in the gardens of *Senate House* to take care of nourishment. This marked the beginning of the canteen culture, which is such an integral part of the Season today.

As an additional attraction and taking advantage of the vast amount of space that *Senate House* offered, an exhibition of music works, manuscripts and

Institute, Tirupati, and the Madras Government Museum. Prof. P. Sambamoorthy helped in coordinating this activity along with T.V. Subba Rao. The Academy also put out advertisements requesting private collectors to come forward and participate in the exhibition.

This was also the conference where Travancore royalty took a personal interest. The regency of Sethu Lakshmi Bayi had ended in 1931 and her nephew, Chitra Tirunal Balarama Varma, had taken over as the Maharaja. His



It was at the Senate House that the December Music Season of Chennai had its genesis. The Academy sessions, numerous meetings, dance recitals and music performances were held in Senate House. Above, the 1939 Music Academy conference: Seated 6th from left, Musiri Subramania Iyer, 7th K.V. Krishnaswamy Iyer, 8th Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavathar, 9th 'Tiger' Varadachariar, to be the first head of the University's Department of Indian Music. Standing: 2nd left, Tanjore Vaidyanatha Iyer, 4th Budalur Krishnamoorthy Sastrigal, 10th T.L. Venkatarama Iyer, 11th T.V. Subba Rao.

mother, the Junior Maharani Sethu Parvati Bayi, together with Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer, who in stages graduated from being her Legal Advisor to Constitutional Advisor and finally Dewan of the state in 1937, was the real power behind the throne. The lady had long desired to resurrect and propagate the songs of the composer-king Swati Tirunal of Travancore and, in September 1939, the Swati Tirunal Academy of Music was started with Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavathar as its head. Assisting him was Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, their main task being the identification and collection of Swati Tirunal's songs, popularising the singing of those that already had tunes, setting to tune the songs for which only lyrics were available and, finally, ensuring that musicians featured them regularly in concerts. The Music Academy was happy to help and decided to dedicate December 29, 1939 to the "rendering and exposition of the compositions of the late Maharajah Swati Tirunal by the musicians present."

The conference, it was announced on October 24th, would be inaugurated by Sir R.K. Shanmukham Chetti. The Cochin Royal Family, whose Dewan Sir Shanmukham was, also took an interest in the conference. The inaugural concert was to be performed by Princess Manku Tampuran of Cochin. It was the first time that a woman of royal blood was performing a music concert in public and this generated great interest.

The choice of musician for presiding over the conference, however, raised a few eyebrows and hackles. Musiri Subramania Iyer at the age of 39, it was felt, was too young for the job, though none could deny that he was top draw as far as popularity was concerned. He had a unique style of slow emotive music which, combined with his unusually high-pitched voice, had electrified au-

diences for over two decades.

But, with several seniors in the field not yet honoured, it was felt that Musiri had jumped the queue. Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar, who had been performing from a very young age and was, therefore, senior in terms of career to even Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, was most offended. But with his own disciple Princess Manku Tampuran performing, he had no choice but to attend the inauguration. To add insult to injury, Chembai was asked to felicitate Musiri. In his characteristic fashion the titan from Palghat strode to the microphone and said that he was delighted that the Music Academy had chosen Musiri to preside. He then went on to say that it was his earnest wish that the Academy invite Musiri to preside over the conference every year from then on! Chembai was slated to sing on the 25th and it is not clear if he did. But what we do know is that he refused to have anything to do with the Music Academy from then on till 1945 or so when, through the intervention of admirers, he relented and returned.

Musiri inadvertently gave rise to a minor controversy himself when he was reported to have said in his presidential address that the divide between the North and South Indian music systems was inappropriate and that a synthesis between the two must be arrived at. This was severely criticised and Musiri had to issue a clarification that what he had meant was that the systems must co-exist in a spirit of mutual cooperation.

In keeping with its efforts to propagate dance, the Season's schedule had three performances featuring Lakshmi Sastri, Kalandi Ganapathy and T. Balasaraswati. A new introduction by the Music Academy that year was the duo of Alathur Brothers. (Courtesy: *Sruti*)



The Senate House interior as it was in the 1920s and 1930s.



If you can paint or draw, are artistically inclined and would enjoy the idea of adding colour to a few walls in the public spaces in our city, you may want to consider applying for a community project that Max Mueller Bhavan is floating in our city in January 2015.

There are people who enjoy what is pasted or scrawled on public walls and those who decry the vandalism.

In many ways, the walls along our roads and streets provide spaces where creativity flourishes. These are posters for cinemas and political rallies, posters for the dead and of sex doctors, graffiti for Left rallies and for eulogising slain LTTE

From wall paintings to posters again

leader Prabhakaran, and one-line promotions of local magicians you may want to hire for your kid's birthday party on your terrace.

These walls are like tree trunks – there to allow life to take seed, grow and flower. When the acts exceed the limits, they need to be checked.

A wall space that witnesses a lot of activity is the wall of *Spaces*, the first house on Elliot's

Beach Road and the home of late dance-teacher Chandralekha. It is now a performance space.

The wall space here is used for all sorts of purposes – to protest construction on the Marina beach side, to raise support for a campaign to end encroachments in Guindy Forest, to recall the Bhopal gas tragedy... On some occasions, the images have upset people who shed

their fat on the beach. Some have complained to the local police. But the wall space remains vibrant.

An attempt was made in the past to bring colour and creativity to the massive swathes of mortar of our MRTS rail stations. The idea died.

Our MRTS and Metro stations provide space to allow citizens to get involved. To unleash their creative juices. But getting

the men and women who head these organisations to say OK takes ages.

Chennai Corporation, under a different regime, signed up commercial artists to colour some public walls. The visuals may have been like those on tableaux at 1-Day parades but they did bring some colour. A new regime cleansed that small effort.

Hopefully, the renewed effort makes some impact. And gets a life of its own.

If you want to take a look at the current project, check www.goethe.de/chennai – (Courtesy: *Mylapore Times*)

– Vincent D'Souza

In the early 1950s, college youths were fully charged with an incredible enthusiasm for nationalism and sought to explore rural areas and to interact with the rural people in order to include them in the exciting developmental processes that were expected to take place after Independence. For the students of the Zoology Department of the Madras Christian College in Tambaram, the target ecosystem, along with its poor communities, for such participatory national development projects, was the 6500 years old Pulicat Lake, its 50,000 fisherfolk, and the ancient town of Pulicat itself.

Pulicat Lake is the second largest lagoon in India, with 65 fishing hamlets (*kuppams*) nestling all around it. In them live the Pattinavar community people, traditional fisherfolk, who descended from the ancient Sangam Age (200 BCE-200 CE). Their primitive craft (*thoni/padagu*) and a variety of cotton fibre gear enabled them to bring in prized catches of delicious prawn and mud crab (*Pazhaverkad nandu*).

Pulicat town itself is a unique, multicultural melting pot of eastern cultures – of the Chola, Vijayanagara and Gol-

conda kingdoms – and of the Western cultures of the Portuguese, Dutch and the English, each leaving its cultural footprints on Pulicat's sands and on the lifestyles of its fisherfolk. Despite the fact that Pulicat town was a flourishing international sea-port during the Dutch days (17th Century), there was no good road between Pulicat and Madras until 1957, with the result that even ten years after Independence, we had to travel between Madras and Pulicat by country boats from Ennore using the Buckingham (East Coast) Canal. An Ennore-built wooden boat with a wooden roof, which could carry about 20 passengers, would be dragged with coir ropes from the canal bunds or, in deeper water, steered with long casuarina poles.

Many years ago one day, around 8 p.m. after supper, we boarded the boat at Kathivakkam jetty in Ennore. With us were our bags, scientific supplies and a petromax light. The students also carried their guitars, mouth-organs, flutes, drums, box cameras and snacks, but no books! After the usual

pooja marked by lighting camphor and breaking a coconut, the boat started off, punted by poles across the deep waters of the 400 metres wide Ennore Creek (Korttaliyar Estuary), to reach the Buckingham Canal in the north within ten minutes, thereafter to be dragged by

• Dr. P.J.
Sanjeeva Raj
(rajsanjeeva@gmail.com)

ropes from the canal bunds for the rest of the cruise.

The women students preferred to sleep on the lower deck, but the men students and staff were up on the roof with the petromax light, playing card games, word-building and singing, right up to 2 a.m. The girls could not get even a wink of sleep, not only because of the merry-making on the roof but also because of the hordes of bed-bugs, boat-lice and even cockroaches crawling all over the boat. Pulling or punting the boat, the boatmen would initi-

ate a cultural exchange by teaching their melancholic boat-songs to the students, and the reward that the boatmen got from the students was Gold Flake cigarettes, a rare luxury for beedi-smokers.

As for the study part of our tour, we first stopped by the aerial roots of the mangrove *Avicennia*, where that endangered fish, the mud-skippers, were hopping about on the mud-flats at low-tide, foraging for food as well as chasing their mates. Further up the canal, the expansive but desolate wilderness on the inland bund was betrayed by the distant but incessant chirping cicadas, insects that have attracted the attention of poets, philosophers and scientists of all ages.

The students were amused to learn that it is only the male cicadas that can chirp or sing; as the Greek philosopher-poet Xenarchus observed, *happy are the cicadas, for they have voiceless wives!* Closer to the canal bunds were packs of jackals, howling or wailing, hunting along the water-edge for the huge, weird-looking "Devil Crabs" (*Peyi nandu*), so called because of

their emergence from their burrows only at night. True to our *Panchathanthra* stories, the hunting trick of these jackals is to poke a tail into a crab-burrow, provoking a crab to grab it, whereupon the crab is pulled out by the trickster jackal for a delicious midnight meal.

The tiny Fiddler (Dhoby) Crabs were darting up and down the tide, dancing for a mate as well as for catching their prey. Small Pony Tail or Silver Belly fish were attracted by the petromax light and leapt into our boat, only to be put back into the water. Lonely birds, like the grey heron, night heron, and egrets, stood on one leg in the moonlit waters, waiting patiently for an unwary fish or prawn. The monotony of the cicada-song was interrupted by the occasional screeches of the night jar or an owlet from the scrub.

The approach of the canal-side hamlets and their tea stalls was announced by packs of village dogs with furious, non-stop barking, even frightening the students from alighting from the boat for their long-awaited tea, cigarettes, *murukku* and open-air urinals. The students were also nervous, as they had been warned earlier, about stepping carelessly on to the floating algal mats in coastal waters, under which the dog-faced water

(Continued on page 8)

Our Quiz master V.V. Ramanan is on a busman's holiday. His colour will resume on his return.

• NOSTALGIA

The beginnings of MATSCIENCE

– on January 3, 1962

The story of the creation of MATSCIENCE, The Institute of Mathematical Sciences, is an exciting saga not just in Indian science, but in the world of science. The Institute was a direct consequence of the efforts of Professor Alladi Ramakrishnan, who conducted a Theoretical Physics Seminar in his home *Ekamra Nivas* in Madras during 1959-61. Several eminent scientists and mathematicians spoke at the seminar. They included Niels Bohr, Abdus Salam, Donald Glaser, Marshall Stone, and Laurent Schwartz.

Nobel Laureate Niels Bohr, who was visiting India as the guest of Prime Minister Nehru in 1960, was so impressed that he expressed his admiration for the seminar at a press conference. This attracted the attention of the Prime Minister who, at the urging of the Madras Minister of Education, C. Subramaniam, agreed to meet Prof. Ramakrishnan and his students on December 8, 1961 at the *Raj Bhavan* in Madras. At that meeting, when the Prime Minister asked Prof. Ramakrishnan what he wanted, he said that he desired an institute modelled along the lines of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. Subramaniam was able to persuade Prime Minister Nehru to agree to the creation in Madras of a new institute for advanced research in the mathematical sciences. Thus, within a matter of weeks, MATSCIENCE was inaugurated on January 3, 1962 with Prof. Ramakrishnan as the Director, a position he held for 21 years until his retirement in 1983. Today, the Institute has established itself as one of the major research centres not just in India but in the world.

* * *

My grandfather, Sir Alladi Krishnaswami Iyer, was one of the greatest lawyers of India. He was a member of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution. His eminence influenced many family members to take to law. In particular, after my father obtained a BSc honours degree in Physics, he

attended Law College and secured a Gold Medal in Hindu Law. While Father was a student at Presidency College in the BSc honours course, he heard a lecture by Homi Bhabha in 1943 on Meson Theory. That lecture inspired him. My grandmother, Lady Venkalakshmi, convinced Grandfather to allow my father to pursue a career of his choice.

● The story of the birth of MATSCIENCE, The Institute of Mathematical Sciences, is an exciting saga in the world of science. This series by KRISHNASWAMI ALLADI describes the efforts of his father, Professor Alladi Ramakrishnan, and the role of his Theoretical Physics Seminar in the creation of this Institute in Madras on January 3, 1962. As a background, certain important events in the scientific career of Ramakrishnan, starting from 1947, are described since they served as a motivating force for this famous seminar.

In 1947, Ramakrishnan met Homi Bhabha at a dinner in Delhi. He told Bhabha how that lecture in 1943 inspired him. Bhabha then suggested that he join him in Bangalore to work with him.

Homi Bhabha, after he had returned to India from England in 1943, had set up a modest Cosmic Ray Unit at the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore. Soon after, Bhabha moved to Bombay where, with the initial support of the Tata family, he started the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research. Ramakrishnan moved to Bombay to work with Bhabha as one of the first members of the Tata Institute. When Bhabha approached a problem from a particular angle, Father approached the problem very differently and provided a simpler solution. Bhabha preferred to pursue his approach, and so Ramakrishnan decided to leave the Tata Institute to seek recognition of his work elsewhere. He returned to Madras and decided to go to England to complete his PhD.

He was welcomed by the University of Manchester in 1949 where he was to spend two years and get his doctorate.

While there, his professor, M.S. Bartlett, communicated his initial paper on product densities to the Proceedings of the Cambridge Philosophical Society. Bhabha's paper appeared in the same month in the Proceedings of the Royal Society. Thus it was a positive ending for Ramakrishnan with regard to the timely publication of his important work in a major journal.

Even though Father left the Tata Institute due to lack of recognition of his work, he never expressed anger against Bhabha by criticising him in public or in writing. On the contrary, he admired Bhabha for his brilliance and charisma and, even after leaving the Tata Institute, he maintained good relations with his teacher.

While doing his PhD in Manchester, Ramakrishnan attended several conferences and visited other universities in the United Kingdom. Of note was the Conference on Modern Physics in Edinburgh, Scotland, in the winter of 1949, where he met Nobel Laureates Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg, and Max Born. This resulted in an invitation to visit the Bohr Institute in Copenhagen and Universities in Sweden and Norway. Many of the contacts made during his stay in Europe were crucial in his career, and some of these scientists were to visit him in Madras in later years and lecture at his Theoretical Physics Seminar.

* * *

On the way back to India in 1951, Mother spent a few weeks in Switzerland. In Geneva,

(Continued on page 8)



Once the Rangoon High Court.

● Yangon Heritage Trust cries, like many in Madras...

Save those buildings

In Myanmar (formerly Burma) there is a race on to salvage once-grand colonial buildings – banks flanked by Corinthian pillars, courthouses adorned with limestone lions, and shipping headquarters decorated with dark wood and brass fixtures – before they collapse of decay.

“The conservation of the buildings, laid out on a grid of broad avenues designed by British engineers, would make the city a star attraction of Southeast Asia,” says Thant Myint-U, the head of the Yangon Heritage Trust.

“The future is all about cities,” adds Thant Myint-U, who is trying to convince the government that the old has value and must be preserved. “Having a beautiful downtown will bring investment and give us an advantage over cities like Chennai and Kuala Lumpur.”

During the colonial period, Rangoon served as the capital of Burma. The city had its own particular ethos. In 2005, the government moved from Yangon (formerly Rangoon) to a new capital, Naypyidaw, leaving empty many buildings that had at least been occupied, if not maintained.

● Excerpted from an article by JANE PERLEZ that appeared in *The New York Times* last December.

Among the abandoned structures, the Secretariat, a vast Victorian-era complex arranged around lush gardens that had served as the heart of the government, fell on hard times. The red domed buildings now need an estimated \$100 million in repairs.

The Yangon Heritage Trust has won some victories. The group objected to plans for a major new building of more than 20 stories in the historic downtown area. The government ruled in favour of the Trust, and now there is an informal agreement that new structures downtown will not rise higher than six stories.

There is, however, no legal framework for protection of the buildings, and no discussion on how to protect the people who have been living in hallways, towers and hidden backrooms (of such buildings). The Trust hopes to change that with a master plan that would sort out legal ownership, designate renovation projects, and deal with traffic and sanitation by the end of 2015, said Thant Myint-U, the grandson of the former United Nations Secretary-General, U Thant, and a historian who has written books on Myanmar.

At the heart of the plan will be the idea that downtown Yangon should retain its vibrancy, rather than become another sanitised zone that appeals to well-to-do tourists impressed by expensive hotels and tony cafes, Thant Myint-U said. To preserve a sense of authenticity, he said, there will be efforts to keep residents in some of the buildings, perhaps with subsidised rents, and to limit the number of big, impersonal international hotels that attract foreign visitors but are off-limits to most locals.

The distinctive charm of the teetering colonial-era buildings lies in the street life around them: the bookstalls along Pansodan

(Continued on page 8)



Till January 20: Exhibition by Arts Management Students on *Temples of South India* (at DakshinaChitra).

Till January 31: Exhibition of paintings and drawings by G. Ramana. His style is distinct, mostly depicting rural folk or musicians and all aspects celebrating life. His black and white drawings are well known for their strength and simplicity and his paintings have few primary colours filling in complicated and defined lines filling every bit of the canvas (at DakshinaChitra).

Till January 20: Exhibition on *Forms and Meaning in a Hindu Temple* by Arts Management Students (at DakshinaChitra).

Till March 30: Exhibition of photographs by Anirudh Ganapathy (at DakshinaChitra).

* * *

VILLAGE FESTIVAL at DakshinaChitra

Till January 6: Bonalu dance by Vadappelle Srinivas from Andhra Pradesh.



January 7-12: Goravara Kunitha performance by Puttamalle Gowda from Karnataka.

January 21-26: Ottan Thullal performance by Souparnika institute of Performing Arts, Kerala.

January 28-February 1: Tamil Nadu folk performance by Mohanam Cultural Centre, Pondichery.

January 13-20: Pongal Festival featuring *myilattam*, *poikal kudhirai* and *karagam* by Raju and troupe of Grammiya Kalai Kuzhu.

January 7-March 31: Mela for school children.

January 17-18: Street food and Garden Show with a variety of delicacies from all over India. You will also get to see rare genre of plants in the garden show. At Dakshina Chitra

* * *

WORKSHOPS

Children's

January 31: Tie and Dye on T-shirt

Adult

January 10-11: Crochet work

January 24: Kalamkari Block

The beginnings of MATSCIENCE

(Continued from page 7)

Ramakrishnan met Sir A. L. Mudaliar, the Vice-Chancellor of Madras University. Sir Lakshmanaswami told him that the University was starting a Department of Physics and that he could apply for a position there. He was offered a Readership (= Associate Professor) in Physics in 1952. The position of Professor of Physics was occupied by G. N. Ramachandran, who was leading a programme on crystallography in the Department. On joining the University, Ramakrishnan began a series of lectures on Methods of Mathematical Physics. Two MSc students who attended his lectures, P. M. Mathews and S. K. Srinivasan, later became the first two of his PhD students.

For nearly a decade after his return from England, Ramakrishnan, by himself and with his students, continued to work at the University of Madras on extensions of the theory of product densities and its applications to cascade theory in Astrophysics, fluctuation problems in astrophysics, and to biosciences. During 1952-57, he published seven papers in the *Astrophysical Journal* (by himself and with his students Mathews, Srinivasan and Vasudevan), all communicated to that great astrophysicist Chandrasekhar (University of Chicago), who was the Editor. S.K. Srinivasan subsequently joined the Mathematics Department at IIT Madras after his PhD and rose to be its Head.

Over the next few years,

many more students in the MSc Physics course at the University of Madras approached Ramakrishnan to do their PhD under his guidance.

In 1953, Ramakrishnan received an invitation to spend a few months as a visiting scientist at the University of Sydney in the rapidly growing Physics Department there. In Sydney, he gave a series of lectures, the notes of which became the basis of his famous article on this topic in the *Handbush der Physik* a few years later.

While in Australia, he spent some time with the famous physicist Sir Mark Oliphant, a former associate of Lord Rutherford. When Oliphant said that he was planning to visit India under the auspices of the Royal Society, Ramakrishnan invited him to deliver the Rutherford Memorial Lecture at the University of Madras.

(To be continued)

By moonlight to Pulicat by boat

(Continued from page 6)

snake and the still more dangerous stinging canine cat-fish eel (*thelimeen*) would be lurking.

After tea, the Sri Lankan students broke into the popular baila dance accompanied by vibrant songs, rhythmic instruments and clapping and yelling by all, with the villagers also, young and old, joining in the energetic dance.

Before long, we got underway again and the exhausted students fell asleep, mindless of comfort, as the boat gently drifted with the tides.

As dawn broke, the boatmen shouted us awake and we sighted our destination, the Pazhaverkadu lighthouse, beaming rhythmically onto the silhouettes of the Dutch relics. And soon it was down to work.

Save those buildings

(Continued from page 7)

Street with paperbacks laid out on the sidewalk and vendors overseeing their wares from little plastic stools; the makeshift food booths selling small snakes in screw-top jars, watermelons the size of several footballs, bright orange papayas and emerald green limes.

In the parts of the city outside the historic zone, the skyline has changed little, though life has become more hectic after decades of somnolence under the military dictatorship. Migrants from the countryside squeeze into crowded apartments; hundreds of thousands more cars, a product of the growing economy, create some of the worst gridlock in Southeast Asia. Some historic buildings have been demolished, including the grandiose 1895 *Government House* resplendent with turrets and gables, and the house where the Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda, lived in the late 1920s as his country's Consul.

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