

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

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FREE ISSUE

May 1-15, 2001

It's still a quest for 'Singara Chennai'

The quest for 'Singara Chennai' is still on. M.B. Nirmal, the founder of the Exnora movement, has long dreamt of 'Singara Chennai', long before the politicians got into the act. But fulfilment of the dreams of both is still a long way away. Nirmal, in a recent interview, suggested several things that needed to be done in the city. They only indicated how far we still have to go before 'Singara Chennai' becomes a reality.

These are some of the things Nirmal feels need to be done if the dream of a 'Singara Chennai' is to be fulfilled:

- Compostible waste, like green garbage, should go back to the earth in landfills.
- Recyclable waste should be recycled in factories.
- Put all waste to use.
- Treated sewage should be let into the Adyar, Buckingham Canal and Cooum.
- The three waterbodies should be developed as reservoirs.
- Money for maintaining the waterbodies could be raised by auctioning/leasing sections of the river/canal banks to corporate bodies.
- The tanks of the city should be resurrected.
- Stormwater should be channelled into the city's tanks.
- No building should be allowed on tankbeds or on wetlands. Nor should these

waterbodies be used as garbage dumps and landfills as a prelude to building.

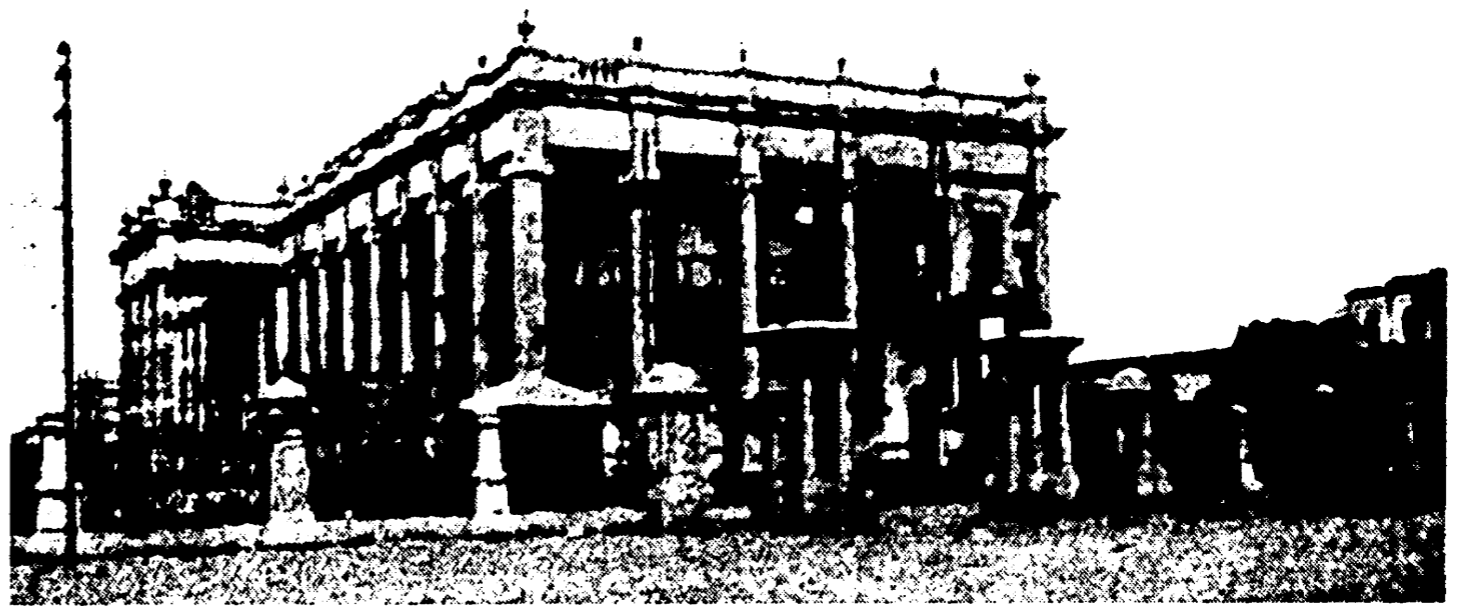
- Two-stroke engines to be banned in the city to prevent air pollution.
- Busy commercial areas to be made walkers' zones and multistorey parking facilities to be built at their ends.
- Compulsory underground or upper level parking facilities to be provided by buildings where the public gather (for instance, marriage halls, shopping malls, office complexes).
- Parks and playgrounds to be leased to corporates for improvements and maintenance.
- Open spaces to be leased out for parking lots.
- Ban all cattle in the city and provide facilities for them — and their owners — outside the city.
- Ban amplifiers in the city.
- Launch campaigns against vehicular noise.
- Prohibit ALL hoardings.
- Encourage multistorey construction ("conquer sky-space, not agricultural land").

No doubt, there are many other suggestions Nirmal could have made, such as improved traffic and pollution control, stricter law enforcement,

(Continued on Page 7)

• by
A Staff Reporter

Also see Pages 2 & 4



Endangered Railway buildings

Our OLD and the PRESENT this fortnight raise several questions — and we have found no one with any definitive answers. We nevertheless decided to go ahead with publishing the pictures in the hope that some answers might be forthcoming from readers.

Our OLD is a picture from the Southern Railways' Golden Jubilee Exhibition (see Page 7) and was captioned 'Headquarters of Madras Railway Company, 1856'. It is a fact that Madras Railways was headquartered in Royapuram, but where was this building in that locality? It certainly does not exist now — and makes Madras Musings wonder who would have wanted to pull down such a magnificent building and when that could have happened.

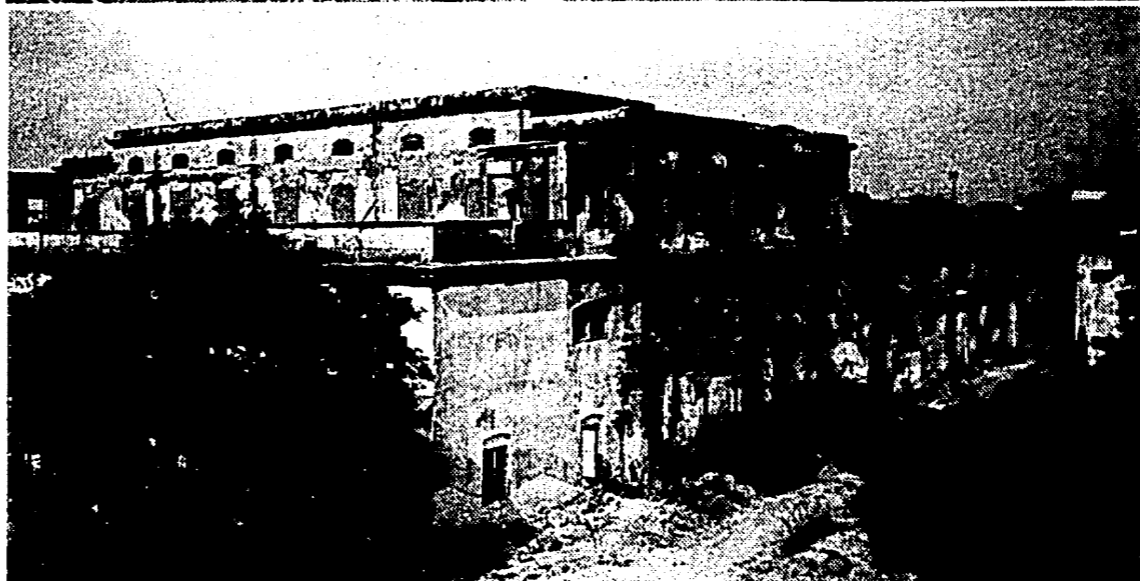
Our PRESENT, the building below, is of the Royapuram Railway Station in the sad state it exists today. When inaugurated in 1856, it was the first railway station in the South, and the first railway route in the South was laid from it to Arcot. There was a rather similar looking block to its right till the 1970s, when that block was pulled down. Were they an adaptation of the headquarters

building seen in our OLD — or were they three separate buildings?

The other picture from the PRESENT featured here today is across the tracks from the Royapuram Railway Station. One school of thought, which Madras Musings is rather doubtful about, is that it is all that is left of the headquarters building. The better maintained portion in the foreground is the present Divisional Office. The near-century-old rear, Madras Musings learns, is under threat; orders for its demolition were, it is learnt, given, but the wrecking contractor soon found the effort required too much for him and vanished from the scene. And so the building survives.

With the Railways these past couple of years proclaiming its determination to preserve its heritage, it is perhaps only fair to expect it to pay greater attention to conserving and restoring the buildings associated with its founding. And there can be no symbol of that in the South more significant than the Royapuram Railway Station — and, to a lesser extent, the building they could not pull down. While the Railways are mulling over that, Madras Musings looks forward to readers coming up with answers to our posers.

...& THE PRESENT



One final thought: A careful look at the right extreme of the OLD shows a bit of a building suspiciously like the endangered 'Divisional Office'. If it is indeed that building, then the OLD could well be the original shape of the remnant portion pulled down in the 1970s and the tiny bit of building seen to the left of the headquarters could be the station building. All this speculation would make the road in the foreground the Royapuram extension of 1st Line Beach, just past Clive Battery. (Photographs: The OLD courtesy Southern Railways; the PRESENT by RAJIND N. CHRISTY.)

Will more intense building create a 'Singara Chennai'?

That the city is fast losing not only its open spaces but also its waterbodies, everyone is aware of—and no one does anything to prevent these losses. Tanks are built over, wetlands become garbage fills and are then built on, protected areas are opened up for a plethora of construction, permission is given for building in every conceivable bit of open space. And all this is permitted with no commensurate addition to the infrastructure—and a blind eye to the loss of existing infrastructure through redistributing what there is among a much larger number.

In stating this, *The Man From Madras Musings* is not stating anything new. In fact, MMM is only repeating what this journal has been stating for the past ten years and particularly since 1994. A recent interview given by that indefatigable campaigner M.B. Nirmal, the founder of Exnora, however, reminded MMM of all that's been said over the years and the little that has been done.

While agreeing with much that Nirmal suggested in his interview to make Chennai a 'Singara Chennai', MMM notes with some concern a couple of suggestions of his. His suggestion to build multistorey buildings is one of them. MMM takes his point that spreading the city further gobbles up agricultural land. But there is much of that available for use without affecting the agricultural needs of the State for years to come; on the other hand, the present trend of building high in the city is only concentrating more people and activity in a limited area, stressing as a consequence the infrastructure. The present highrise development in the city, MMM is afraid, has only made the city short of water, power, road space, open space and overloaded the stormwater and sewage drains. More highrise will only make that situation worse—and that frightens MMM.

As this journal has said often enough, the only answer to a 'Singara Chennai' is to call halt to all building in the city, force new construction to the suburbs (preferably to the furthest reaches of Greater Madras) and develop the infrastructure for both, first in the suburbs, and then improvements in the city. A preferred alternative this journal has often enough advocated is moving the administrative capital out of the city to a more central location in the State and, while making Chennai the commercial capital, control its growth in the manner suggested in the earlier option.

The other concern MMM felt was the suggestion to corporatise the banks of the Adyar, Cooum and Buckingham Canal. MMM wonders whether Nirmal means development of parks, gardens, recreation facilities, low level shopping stretches etc., or is he thinking of high-rise? MMM will buy the former; the latter will be a disaster.

While all this can be debated, there are two things that need to be done forthwith, MMM feels. And one is the introduction of a course that will create civic sense, an environmental awareness and a heritage consciousness throughout a child's ten years of schooling, with a degree of 'public service' in the next two years. The other is a sustained call for the enforcement of the laws of the land, particularly where infrastructure and development are concerned. MMM would welcome Exnora launching a sustained campaign to ensure that both these become a reality.

Save that marsh

The Vandiyoor Tank in Madurai is a place where migratory birds from central Asia and Russia congregate seasonally, *The Man From Madras Musings* is informed. During the latest season, it attracted over 2000 birds, including Garganey teals, pintail ducks, shovellers, and whiskered terns. 28 species of water birds were spotted. The place is a breeding point for coots, common purl moorhens, pheasants, tailed jacanas and dabchicks, point out naturalists, who have been making attempts to get it declared a bird sanctuary. MMM is glad to hear that the response from Forest and Revenue Department officials has been positive.

MMM only wishes a similar response was there to events in our own backyard. The Pallikarainai marsh in the suburb of Velacheri is home to a large number of migratory birds; yet it has become endangered by considerable building activity, with the green cover in the area reduced to a minimum. MMM urges the Chennai Corporation and the Tamil Nadu Government departments concerned to declare what's left a sanctuary for winter birds. The marsh is a regular haven for migratory birds and it is necessary to recharge the water in the area, with summer closing in.

Not far from this spot is IIT Madras where, near the oxidation pond, about 450 open bill storks and 200 night herons, white breasted water hens and Indian moorhens were spotted this season. That's the kind of scene, the Pallikarainai marsh once offered; it's still not too late, MMM feels, to make it happen again if only the authorities would show a little more commitment.

They also make cars

The *Man From Madras Musings* was happy to learn that something that had earlier made him wonder over its wisdom had proved a success of a sort. MMM is referring to the Ford Corner at Lifestyle, that mega clothes store in Chennai, whose initial 30-day trial run was extended by another thirty days.

On sale were Ford-marked memorabilia, including caps,

bandannas, jackets, umbrellas, miniature Ford models, posters, mugs, T-shirts, pens, postcards, wallets, folios, car accessories and sunglasses. Predictably, there was a Ford car booking counter amidst all the goodies on display, with a touch-screen providing the car's vital statistics for the benefit of prospective buyers as well as the merely curious.

Ford, MMM hears, is now assessing whether the success warrants repeating and if it decides 'yes', the auto major is likely to consider setting up permanent Corners, selling in other leading stores throughout India to keep the Ford logo in the public eye. And why shouldn't it? After all, what was tested out at Lifestyle was only something that had become a permanent Ford feature in Harrod's of London.

Better times

Trends in the property market seem to have taken an upward turn with the demand

**SHORT
'N'
SNAPPY**

for luxury accommodation on the rise and house rents in general showing an increase over recent months, *The Man From Madras Musings* learns. According to a survey conducted by developers, quality residential properties in the price range of Rs. 7-15 lakh are finding ready buyers. Independent houses priced at Rs. 50 lakh to Rs. 1 crore are also receiving serious inquiries.

Sale of residential properties in the suburbs is, in particular, MMM learns, picking up. Improved infrastructure, including better roads and connectivity, as well as simplifying procedures for NRI investment, have been responsible for this, it is stated. The preferred areas in recent times include Velacheri, Madipakkam, Nanganallur, Chromepet and Tambaram. Valasaravakkam and Porur in west Chennai and Tondiarpet and Korattur in the north are also fast becoming well-developed areas. MMM also learns there has been increasing demand for plots in parts of T'Nagar, Raja Annamalaiapuram and the Boat Club area.

Two things of significance have, however, made the property business a whole new ball game, MMM learns. One is possibly due to the NRI interest in owning a second home here—and that that interest translates into greater interest being paid to the interiors and maximum utilisation of space. The other is the

growing faith in *Vaasthu*. According to a real estate magazine, *A Guide to Chennai Real Estate*, "Most developers are consulting experts (on *Vaasthu*) from concept to implementation". And even after building according to the principles of *Vaasthu*, many an individual buyer throws more money in the developer's way requesting alterations to suit the requirements specifically advised by the buyer's own *Vaasthu* expert.

MMM notes that the *Guide* referred to—a glossy, colourful journal—is running a series on '*Vaasthu* and Astrology'. With Astrology likely to become a university subject, it wouldn't surprise MMM to find *Vaasthu* becoming part of the curriculum in schools of architecture.

While the revival of the housing market is welcome news, what all this development is going to do to the ecosystem, the groundwater resources of the city suburbs in particular, is what worries MMM. A representative of one of the country's biggest builders recently pointed out that, with the anticipated growth, "the city will have to get ready to improve its water supply and sewage and transport systems." In fact, he envisages that even the Metro won't be adequate for the city in 15 years and it will have to look at an underground transport system. MMM can only say that all this growth will only make the city an unliveable place. All you have to do to see the future is to note what is happening to the Quibble Island—Adyar Estuary area.

Tourist potential

The recent conference in Kochi that brought the South's states together to discuss the possibility of all these States and Union Territories teaming to marketing the South in its totality has received much favourable comment. *The Man From Madras Musings* himself has not been averse to the idea.

A travel agent MMM recently met has other ideas. He agrees that the South has huge potential as a homogeneous package, offering as it does an exciting diversity of culture, climate and flora and fauna, as yet unknown even to many Indians. But promoting the South as a whole, adopting a common marketing strategy in place of the separate individual efforts by the States, could dilute the whole exercise and even work at cross-purposes, he feels. While joint promotion may be ideal for comprehensive tours like Chennai-Mysore-Kochi-Madurai-Chennai or Chennai-Vizag-Hyderabad-Mysore-Kochi, intense exploration of local destinations, like Madurai-Thanjavur, Mysore-Halebid, Kochi-Kottayam-Periyar or Hyderabad-Vizag, could lose out.

—MMM

Chennai's water woes

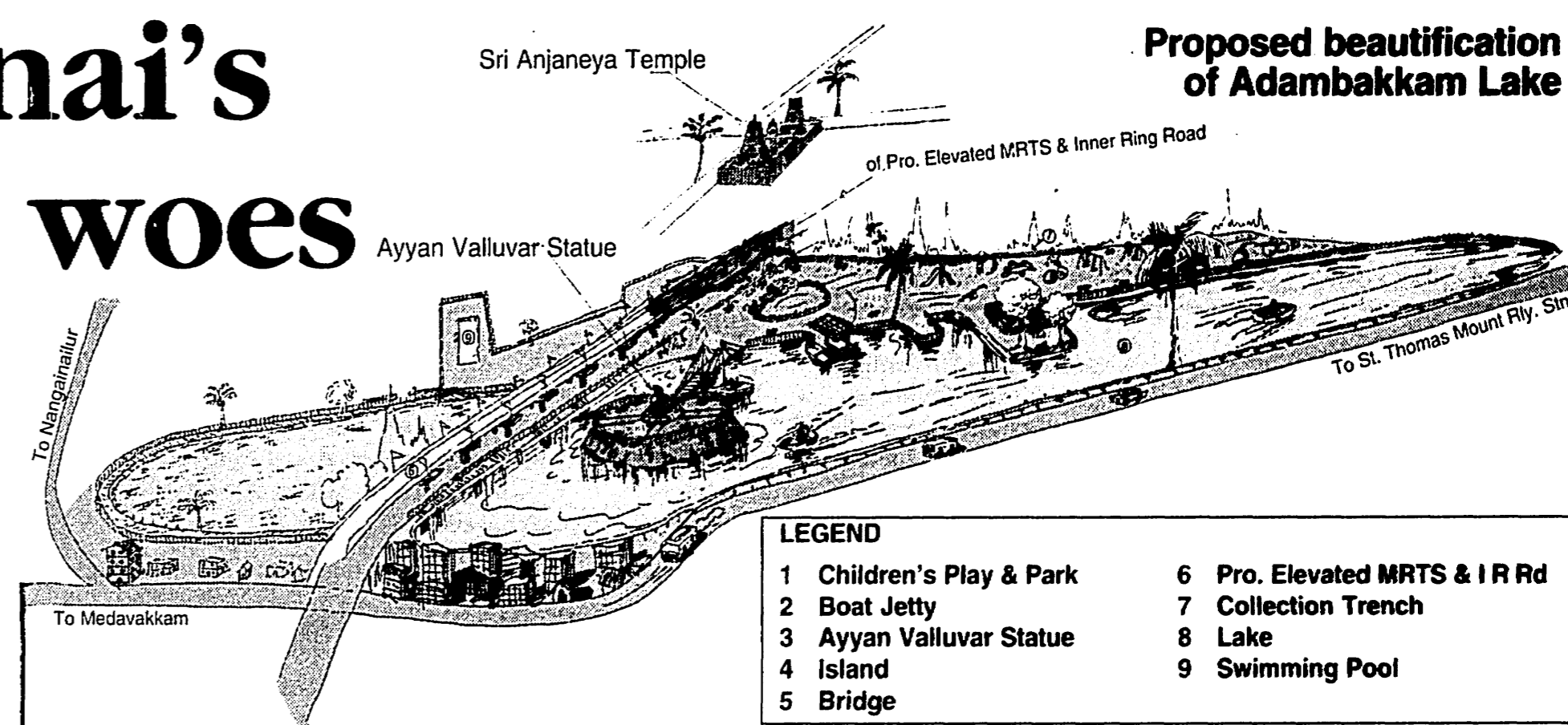
Chennai. IT city, one of the four major metropolises of a giant democracy. The seat of culture, commerce and learning, intelligence has been a regional characteristic of its people. Education, tradition and intelligence have taken its citizens to every part of the globe. Yet the residents of this wonderful city have been obsessed with a major problem since Independence. Water.

Red Hills was a natural reservoir and a famous picnic spot for schools and colleges. Amidst picturesque surroundings, its regular inflows kept the city supplied with water augmented by wells and ponds within homes. Rains brought up the ground water level as water could permeate through the gardens and unconcreted land. Came development with many houses cementing their gardens into concrete spaces to counteract the need for expensive gardeners and maintenance. The burgeoning population and insufficient water supply added to this and soon blocks of apartments in a concrete jungle began to replace virgin land.

Porur and Chembarambakkam lakes were harnessed to supply water to a thirsty city. The groundwater on the sea coast near Palavakkam and Kottivakkam began to be tapped for sweetwater supplied through tankers to various parts of the city. This became big business, and the water lobby with political clout became a harsh reality.

The Veeranam lake, beyond Neyveli, was identified as a good source of sweet water and a huge scheme was drawn to build a stretch of pipelines to bring water to the city. Huge concrete pipes were placed all along the highway from Veeranam up to Chengalpattu. The scheme was aborted when the government changed and there was talk of corruption, substandard work and implausible planning. Today those concrete pipes lie abandoned and forlorn on the road or are used, not very successfully to halt erosion. They are also used as rubbish bins, 'residences', surfaces for poster sticking and animal shelters.

Many governments have come and gone. Many schemes were formulated, begun and dumped. The city continues to reel under an acute shortage of drinking water. Even today water tankers are plying, carting water to Gopalapuram and Poes Garden the residential areas of the Chief Ministers, present and former. Every few showers, any time of the year, people



A suggestion to save a lake

Referring to the comments made by *The Man From Madras Musings* on the water shortage, water harvesting and temple tanks, in his column of April 1st, V. Kuppan, Secretary of the Exnora Innovators' Club of Adambakkam writes:

"We too share MMM's concern and feel the lakes should be restored to their original state. We enclose a report on the beautification of Adambakkam lake. Would Government take up this project as a model one and extend the idea—to all urban lakes?"

We publish today excerpts from the Club's suggestion. While we might not agree with the artist's vision—particularly on huge statues and bigger island pedestals being considered beautification—there is nevertheless much to commend the Club's proposal not only in the particular but in the general as well. We only hope there's some way to make it become a reality.

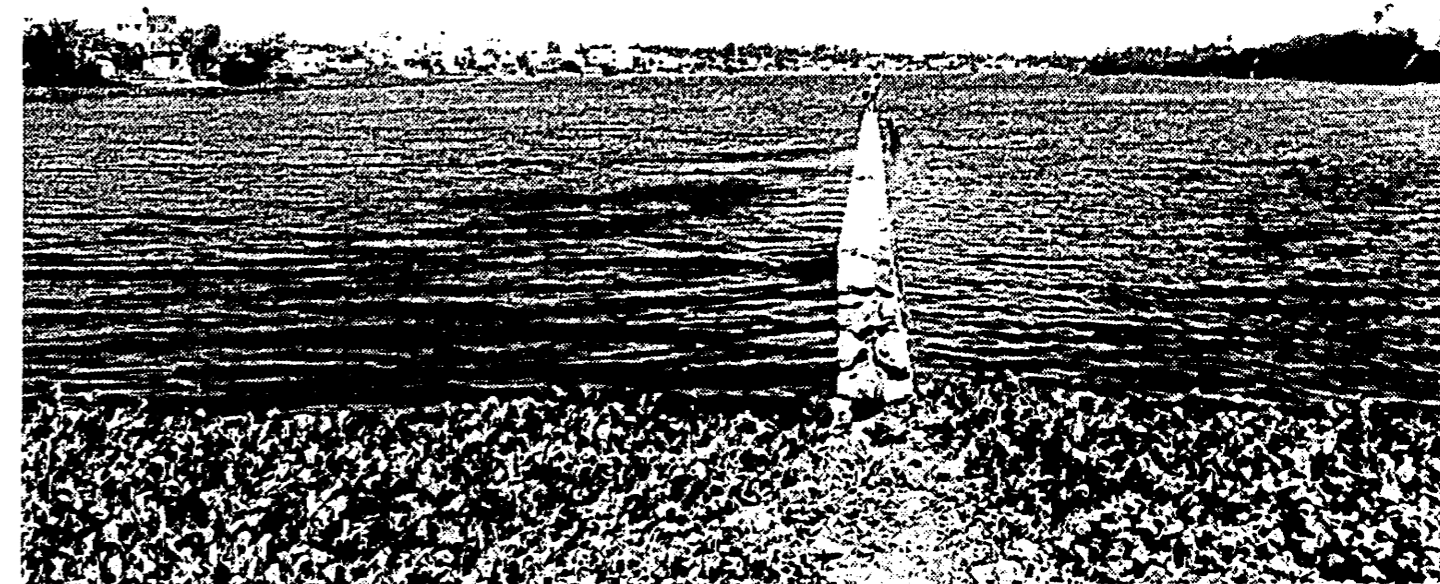
—The Editor

* * *

There are a number of lakes in the suburbs of Chennai. They were formed by our ancestors not only for irrigation purposes but also to prevent flooding of habitats and to maintain groundwater levels during summers. But today, we see almost all these lakes being misused by encroachments. The foreshores are dump for garbage and debris while sewage and industrial effluents pollute the lakes themselves. If we do not stop this, the

anxiously scan the papers for an update of the amount of water in storage in the main reservoirs of the city. Brave statements are issued by the Water Board claiming availability and supply of water for the next few months. In a few days statements are again issued claiming loss of water through seepage, evaporation etc.

Conservationists are trying to educate the public about water conservation, rainwater harvesting and other methods of using water resources judiciously. The *teppakulam*s or the water tanks in front of temples like the Mylapore Kapaleeswarar temple, Valmiki Nagar



A part of Adambakkam Lake that's still water-rich. (Photograph by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)

lakes will slowly disappear and this will affect the eco-balance of nature. To prevent this happening to the Adambakkam Lake, we suggest the following:

- Deepen the lake.
- Form a bund along the foreshore.
- Construct a compound wall along the lake bund.
- Provide a collection trench in the foreshore.
- Construct an island for Ayyan Valluvar statue.
- Provide the Ayyan Valluvar statue and other decorative work.
- Provide boat jetties.
- Providing children a playground and park.
- Landscape the entire area.
- Provide a swimming pool.

The rough cost of this work will be Rs. 67 lakh. The cost of

Marundeewarar temple have dried up over the years due to crass neglect and blocking of inlet sources. Neighbourhood NGOs and activists are trying to revive these natural water reservoirs through remedial methods that would resume inflow of water into these tanks.

Announcements have been made by the government about setting up de-salination plants to harness the sea water but Chennai continues to suffer from an acute water shortage. This year the rains have failed. Come May/June there will be talk of re-opening schools and colleges later. Daily water level announcements will be made in

desilting and providing a collection trench could be met from PWD funds or by the Central Groundwater Board, Ministry of Water Resources.

As the lake is in the thickly populated suburban area of Adambakkam and Nanganallur, very near the well-known Anjaneyar temple, a crowd will come to the lake when it is developed in this fashion. Hence, providing Ayyan Valluvar statue and island, boat jetty, children's park and playground and other landscaping work could be done from the Tourism Development Fund. Since the wide Inner Ring Road and the MRTS pass over the lake providing easy accessibility this could become an ideal location for watersports etc.

This project could be taken as a model one and the same can be done in respect of all the lakes in the suburban areas. For

large-scale schemes, even World Bank Environmental Development Funds assistance could be sought.

The advantages of this project will be manifold:

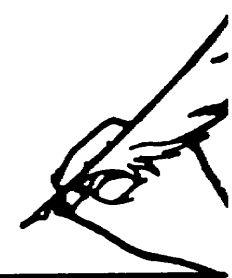
- Help rainwater harvesting during the rainy season.
- Maintain groundwater level during summer.
- Avoid water pollution, stagnation and the mosquito menace.
- Promote sanitation in the surroundings.
- Avoid encroachments.
- Provide lungspace for the entire population of Adambakkam and Nanganallur.
- Serve as an entertainment place.
- By using it for boating and watersports, the project could be made self-sustaining and revenue-earning.

Chennai is like Draupadi waiting with her arms raised in supplication and to surrender to Lord Krishna to save her. The flow of grace is yet to materialise significantly.

Chennai continues to thirst for water.

Padmini Natarajan

OUR READERS WRITE



Where have they flown?

Not long ago, mornings in Chennai were welcomed by the chirruping of small brown birds called sparrows. They used to fly around, chitter-chatter, peck at grains and insects, dance up and down balconies and trees, sip water from the small water bowls left by children, splash if there was more water and, by evening, fly away after their daily 'musical meet'.

It seems that the arrival of the 21st Century has not been favourable to them. Very rarely do we see them now in our city. Where have they flown?

The large-scale felling of trees and too much pollution of soil, water and air have chased these common birds away. Does this not warn us? Is it not an indication that we should be careful? Let us do our best to protect what we have and not plan to produce new 'animals' by genetic engineering, cloning and hybridisation.

Sultan Ahmed Ismail,
Director,
Institute of Research in Soil Biology
and Biotechnology,
New College, Chennai 600 014.

In black and white

I refer to V. Ramnarayan's report on the Chennai Test and his comment regarding Cammie Smith's attitude towards Indian players (MM, April 1st).

It is obvious that ICC has one set of rules for the white players and another set for the not so white! During the Mini World Cup at Nairobi, Roger Telemachus of South

Africa got suspended for butting into the opponent who was taking a run. The commentator Ian Chappell (the most important of them all) had said that Glen McGrath had done it five times so far and got away every time!

Indian match referees are no better. Our own Hanumant Singh had penalised the Sri Lankan players far more than the Englishmen during the recently concluded series in Sri Lanka.

I am surprised that it has taken so long for any cricket writer to bring this into the open.

B. Srinivas
S. K.B. Dasan Road
Alwarpet, Chennai 600 018.

Missing name

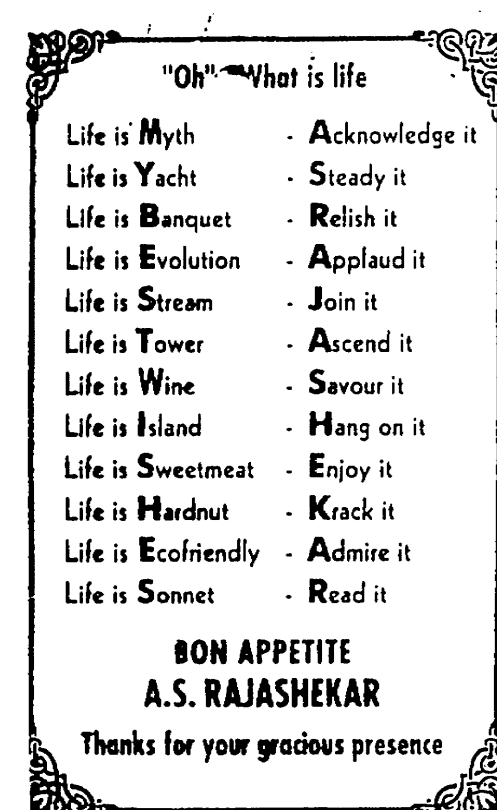
In "Remembering Rukmini Devi in pictures" (MM, April 1st), mention has been made about the doyens of the arts who have been accommodated by her in the Kalakshetra and there is absolutely no doubt that they formed 'a galaxy of stars.' It may not, perhaps, be out of place to mention that she had also brought in Melattur Sri Balu Bhagavathar, who was a repository of the great tradition of the *Melattur Bhagavatha Mela* — a system of dance drama by Melattur Sri Venkatarama Bhagavathar, a contemporary of Tyagaraja, to acquaint her students at the Kalakshetra with this form of art. There are more than a dozen such dance dramas (all in Telugu) and every year at the time of Sri Narasimha Jayanti in May/June a few of these dramas are meticulously enacted at Sri Varadaraja Perumal Temple in Sannidhi Street

of Melattur. Harishchandra and Pahlada Charitam would necessarily be enacted and the female roles are donned by male members who are adept in the art of Bharata Natyam. Balu Bhagavathar was a recipient of the President's award but sadly he lived a poor man's life eking out his livelihood in his last days by 'unchavriti'. But for him, the Bhagavata Mela tradition would not have survived!

T.M. Sundararaman
19, Nallappan Street
Mylapore
Chennai 600 004.

Food for thought

I hope you will be able to publish this card that an enterprising marriage catering contractor hands out to all those he serves. On the reverse side A.S. Rajashekar describes himself as "A to Z marriage catering contractor".



He appears to offer food for both body and thought.

T. Kaleswaran
5, 7th Cross Street
Mahalaxminagar
Chennai 600 088.

People vs. Mosquitoes

We in Nandanam live in hope that the Adyar river and Mambalam Canal will be cleaned in a couple of years. We also hope that Metrowater will rescue us from our present plight of no water supply when bounteous rain falls. But, the mosquito problem is not likely to be solved in the next fifty years, unless a mosquito elimination project is implemented.

I have made my house 'mosquito-proof' but mosquitoes manage to enter my house and I have to sleep under a mosquito net. Swarms of mosquitoes can be seen to be resting in various places during the daytime. With the water shortage as it is, I have engaged a jobless handyman to pump about 100 litres a day in a period of about two hours from the Metrowater mains for a measly payment of Rs. 500 per month. When I found that water is delivered at a faster rate at about 3.00 a.m. I suggested that he try to pump water at that time

so that his work would be easier. He told me that though he used a repellent, mosquitoes prevented him from sleeping until three in the morning. Forty lakhs of Chennaites suffer from mosquito bites like this man. Some of them contract malaria and others, filariasis.

Some 60 years ago, long before the advent of DDT, a project called the Wynad Colonisation Scheme was implemented. One of the important components of the project was malaria control. Dr. Henry Moses, a fresh graduate of Madras Medical College, was believed to have successfully controlled malaria by attacking the breeding places. Chennai Corporation, instead, spends a colossal amount on fogging, which at best is a temporary palliative.

A judicious, scientific project to control mosquitoes is the need of the hour. The project management should be held responsible for results. The project should

identify the breeding places and install permanent breeding control measures. In addition, whatever is necessary by way of adult control must be got done. The people's participation should be an essential feature of the project. They have to control the breeding places in their properties and also control adult mosquitoes by spraying.

The people of Chennai seem to have lost the capacity to influence the political and administrative powers who only seek to manage their day-to-day affairs but refuse to formulate and implement meaningful projects that produce a lasting effect.

Will the various associations in Chennai sit together and chart out a strategy in collaboration with the authorities to rid Chennai of mosquitoes?

M. Susikaran
8, First Street,
Nandanam Extension,
Chennai 600 035.

One way traffic

Now that almost all the flyovers in the city have been declared open for use, it is time the traffic authorities started reviewing the continuance of one-way traffic in many places in the city.

In several cases, to cover a very short distance of a few yards, unnecessary detouring is required, wasting valuable time.

Setting right these anomalies would save a lot of precious fuel too.

Anant V. Prabhu
134, Montiel Road
Egmore
Chennai 600 008.

Flyovers cracking up?

An upward view from below the spot where a branch turns off into L.B. Road at the Adyar flyover reveals an irregular gap, an inch or so in width, running right across at the bottom. Apart from that, all along the sides, gaps of varying width are visible between the 'strips' which form the outer edge and the structure below the roadway. At least at one zone some rough cement patchwork is in evidence. I don't know whether such gaps existed from the beginning, but have a layman's apprehension that vibrations from the traffic overhead can result in chunks of concrete crashing down at some point of time.

Perhaps the experts will reassure us that everything is quite OK and we will have to believe them, at least until a mild earthquake hits Madras and puts the matter to test. One often hears horror stories, always off the record naturally, about the sort of shortcuts and compromises which are routine in construction work of any type, public or private, and we can only listen and become more cynical. In the case of the flyovers, as in many other big jobs of this sort, quite apart from the question of their usefulness, there are probably different agencies concerned with various technical aspects like making the specification, design, material supply, construction, inspection, certification, and whatever else may be involved. So in case some lapse is subsequently discovered, they find it easy to commence the game of passing the buck around.

The L B Road turn-off is anyway too narrow for large vehicles, whereas even two-wheeler riders claim it is scary taking a sharp turn to the left when the main two-lane traffic is curving to the right. There is no warning of the need for sudden braking, and quite a few vehicles have reportedly skidded or hit the railings at the 'V'. In fact some partial exercise of blending the curve seems to have been attempted at as an afterthought at the construction stage, judging from the ugly extra projections at the sides of the supporting columns. The Alwarpet flyover only seems to have added to the congestion in whatever road space has remained at that six-way junction, because only a small proportion of the total traffic seems to be interested in using the two-lane facility for curving into CPR Road from TTK Road.

Thomas Tharu
4-A-7, Kasyap
Nehrunagar Fourth Street
Adyar
Chennai 600 020

Calling all phone users

Telephone subscribers are made to undergo several hardships by the Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd. (BSNL) right from the time they apply for a telephone. A deposit ranging from Rs.3000 to Rs.30,000 is collected which is retained and refunded only at the time of surrender of the connection. The connection is given only after several months/years and seniority is overlooked on the pretext of cable distribution not being available and connections are finally given only after a deal is struck. Exchange names are wrongly entered during registration and the subscriber's address is wrongly entered in bi-monthly bills leading to delay in receipt of bills. Even minor complaints are attended to only if reported at the highest level or in the Press despite the Communications Minister's assurance of attending to minor faults within three hours of reporting. Rental rebate for the failure period is not given automatically even though time and date of failure and restoration are recorded, shifting is permitted only after 1½ years and takes several months, the subscriber's meter is installed in BSNL premises instead of the subscriber's premises. The number of free calls has been reduced by two thirds, from 200 calls x 5 minutes to

150 calls x 3 minutes, the bi-monthly rental charges have been hiked by Rs.120 from Rs.380 to Rs.500 on the pretext of providing short distance dialling up to 200kms. used by only a small per centage of subscribers. Even during minor agitation/strikes the telecom staff tamper with subscriber lines and no rental rebate is given to the subscribers though other PUs refund charges.

Telephone subscribers with grievances can meet telecom officers only two days in a week (Tuesday/Thursday) and that too for two hours only (14.30 to 16.30 hrs.). Against all these deficiencies, BSNL is the only organisation that earns an assured rent from all subscribers apart from call charges above 150 whether phones are in use or not (dead or alive), whereas other PUs charge only for the actual usage or consumption and no rent.

I feel the issue of collection of bi-monthly rent, apart from call charges collected by BSNL, should be challenged and I suggest that per call/unit charges be collected as by the Electricity Board, so that service provided is linked to revenue earned.

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Where has 'Singara Chennai' gone?

(To the tune of *Where have all the flowers gone?*)

*Where have all the roads gone?
Gone to potholes all of them.*

*Where have all the pavements gone?
Gone to yield to bridges/shops all of them.*

*Where have all the bridges gone?
Gone to nowhere all of them.*

*Where have all the pedestrians gone?
Gone to hospitals, victims all of them.*

*Where have all the traffic rules gone?
Gone to dogs creating chaos all of them.*

*Where have all the police gone?
Gone on VIP duty all of them.*

*Where have the polluting vehicles gone?
Gone to get round the RTO all of them.*

*Where have all the taxis gone?
Gone out of business all of them.*

*Where have all the autos gone?
Gone to take riders, for a ride most of them.*

*Where have all the municipal taxes gone?
Gone for anything but Chennai, all of them.*

*Where have all the politicians gone?
Gone to beg for votes all of them.*

*Where have all the sceptical voters gone?
Gone to get chiding ID cards all of them.*

*Where have all the party workers gone?
Gone on processions, blocking roads, all of them.*

*Where have all the roads gone?
Gone into oblivion all of them.*

Padmini Natarajan

Neglected environment — at what cost?

Dr. Anil Agarwal of the Centre for Science & Environment and Dr. R.K. Pachauri of Tata Energy Research Institute have said in recent articles that the budget has neglected the environment. I agree and list a few environmentally and economically beneficial activities which the budget should help to promote.

Rural transport

Rural transport is a major element of the Bhagidari or unincorporated sector which according to Prof. R. Vaidyanathan of the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, contributes more than double what the entire corporate sector does to our country's GDP.

Bullock carts, even today, transport the bulk of rural produce to hubs from where it is transhipped by trucks and trains to urban markets. It represents a substantial volume compared even to the railways and perhaps exceeds what trucks carry. The import of petroleum (which bullock carts thereby save) must

amount to thousands of crores of rupees. Rural transport provides employment for millions in rural India from where the exodus of the unemployed to cities has reached staggering proportions. Any attempt to curtail bullock carts would seriously harm rural and urban economy. Improving their design would benefit both.

The steel-rimmed cartwheels transmit a high load over a small cross-sectional area, which cuts ruts on tarmac roads, later eroded by rains and further damaged by heavy truck traffic. This greatly increases maintenance costs of roads which are usually in a state of disrepair.

The improvement of bullock cart design was fervently advocated nearly twenty years ago by Prof. N.Ramaswamy who was the director of IIM, Bangalore. Unfortunately, the corporate sector showed little interest and after a few ineffectual attempts, the development stopped. It needs to be revived and all companies interested in increasing their share of the rural market should consider improving the

rural economy too. Such development provides an opportunity for partnership between companies and NGOs.

Environmental transport

The article in *The Financial Express* of March 6th 'Agra's rickshaw-pullers are picture-perfect now' should interest environmental societies which advocate the banning of polluting forms of transport in hill stations, sanctuaries and tourist resorts. Cycle rickshaws and electric vehicles would provide an environment-friendly form of transport and create employment for the local people. Several interesting designs, including motorised versions, have been reported over the years. Cycle and automobile manufacturers should consider it for the environmental market. They could sponsor a number of NGOs to work on such development.

There must be many more such activities which the Government should promote through the Budget. But above all, it is essential for everybody to understand that no business is sustainable if the environment which is our life support system is neglected as it seriously is.

Water management/ bio toilets

Bio toilets conserve much water and reduce plumbing expense

required for flush toilets. Further development of composting toilets should be encouraged including ones for urban use. They would save the country enormous infrastructural expense while conserving water which is getting alarmingly scarce. The huge pollution problem which sewage has become could be turned into a valuable source of organic fertilizer, reducing our dependence on petroleum derivatives and imports.

There must be many more such activities which the Government should promote through the Budget. But above all, it is essential for everybody to understand that no business is sustainable if the environment which is our life support system is neglected as it seriously is.

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'Changing Chennai'

I came to Madras in 1943 for my college education and stayed on till 1950. Those were days when we had trams with very nominal fares running criss-cross all over the city with their clattering noise. And the hackney carts, the inevitable horse-drawn coaches of imperial style. There were only a few cinema theatres featuring English films. Minerva and Casino were the favourites among college students. Eating houses serving clean wholesome food like Coimbatore Krishna Iyer's on Pycrofts Road and the 'degree' coffee in the 'Udipi Hotel' near Luz. And of course the Japanese planes flying over Madras and dropping bombs that missed the targets.

The second spell of my stay was during 1955 to 1967, when the whole scenario had changed with no trams on the roads or hackney carts. And high rise buildings had started coming up, particularly the imposing LIC Building on Mount Road, now called Anna Salai. Prices of articles had skyrocketed, and the value of the rupee was going down. 'Baby' taxis were plenty and no auto-rickshaws on the roads. Building activity was picking up.

The third spell was during 1971 to 1975. More and more building activity was there. After a long period out of Madras, I returned in 1985 and have been staying here since then, having retired from service, watching the old haunts disappearing one by one and new areas developing like Raja Annamalaipuram, Anna Nagar, Besant Nagar, Tiruvanniyur, Velachery and many more, the city expanding to the north and the south and westward. The water problem has become more and more acute with so many new buildings coming up and the population increasing by leaps and bounds.

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A Presidency 'Blue'

V. T. Krishnamurthy's letter on nicknames (MM, March 16th) revived memories of Madras cricket and those happy days at Chepauk and elsewhere, where a large crowd would assemble to see MRC play TCC which was virtually a battle of the giants, Ram Singh vs Gopalan.

VTK was my contemporary at Presidency College and also part of that assortment of players who ensured that cricket would drag on till the dog days of summer. He, too, had a nickname and that was "Blue". His brother the late V.T. Ramachandran was "Shaan Blue". How they got these nicknames was a bit of a mystery which was never solved.

VTK was a keeper of superb reflexes and also an opening bat who virtually carved the ball into two halves with his massive squarecut. He had forearms which were broad and hairy — if memory serves me right.

I confess, I too then went under the name of James, not a nickname, but I was rechristened thus because Mother Margaret Mary, principal of St. Williams, being an Irish dear old soul could never pronounce my name "Niranjan". So James I was till I entered college. But there are still a couple of persons who knew me in the earlier avatar — and I think VTK was one of them. I wonder if he remembers helping draw the roller and remove the prickly thorns from our practice ground in Lloyd's Lane, adjacent to the house occupied by Viswanath Iyer, assistant editor of *Swadesamitram* and son of Subramanya Iyer, founder of *The Hindu*. There was a bust of the old man in the hall of Viswanath Iyer's house. Incidentally N.S. Ramaswami, who lived next door, also practised at our nets.

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Desilt now

The bane of Metrowater's water supply system in Chennai is not the erratic nature of the monsoons as it is often made out to be, but the gross inadequacy of the storage capacity of the three reservoirs. The Satyamurthi Sagar in Poondi, the last of the reservoirs, was built in 1941 when the population of the city was a million. Today's population is close to 5.7 million.

In order to meet the growing demand, there was a proposal for building two more reservoirs — in Ramancheri and Thirukkandalam — but due to opposition from the local population and others, the proposal was kept hanging for 15 years and finally dropped altogether two years ago with no alternative sites being considered.

It is true the bunds of the existing reservoirs were raised some time back, adding a little to their holding capacities. But more can be done. The Poondi reservoir and the Red Hills, Sholavaram and Chembarambakkam tanks are now almost dry. This is a valuable opportunity to desilt these tanks at a cost much less than what it would involve to construct new reservoirs. Such desilting would add valuable additional water storage capacity, which will come in handy in the ensuing monsoon a few months from now.

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Corrupting chat lines

Almost all publications in Chennai (except MM of course) now carry advertisements of telephone chat lines. These are just blatant sex lines. More and more youngsters are getting hooked on to these lines. Not only are their telephone bills going up, their morals and values are going down. Not only are the numbers of advertisements going up, the advertisements are

getting bigger and bolder and are offering more explicit sex. They are corrupting our youth. They remind one of the advertisements of massage parlours a decade back. Finally only when it reached menacing proportions did the police swoop down and ban these massage parlours. Why doesn't the police or the Government crack down on these sex chat lines and nip this menace in the bud? Otherwise, we will have a whole generation of perverted youngsters in Chennai soon. Why is no consumer group raising its voice?

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Whose heritage?

This may sound "iconoclastic" "sacrilegious", "irreverent". To my mind heritage connotes enduring monuments, edifices put up by our forefathers, that reflect our culture. To this extent, how could monuments, buildings left behind by Moslem, English, French, etc., rulers whom we painstakingly fought and ejected and representing their viewpoint constitute our heritage? Do they not properly symbolise the imprint of invaders, stamps of slavery and constructions of colonials? What if these fall or are taken by fire?

Cannot we put up elegant, functional and native structures of our own?

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PLEASE NOTE

• All letters for The Editor's attention should be addressed to The Editor, c/o Lokavani Hall-Mark Press Pvt. Ltd., 62/63, Greames Road, Chennai 600 006.
• All business correspondence should be addressed to The Director, Chennai Heritage, 260-A, TTK Road, Chennai 600 018.

Jolly good show by Rovers

Jolly Rovers won this year's Palayampatti Shield for the first division league championship in an emphatic manner. Under the new format introduced this year, they emerged winners in a knockout among the top four in the league, played on neutral grounds, to ensure that no team enjoyed any undue home ground advantage and to nullify points gifted, if any, by friendly rivals in the league stage. That is a sad commentary on the perceptions amidst the establishment on prevailing ethical standards. Every new piece of cricket legislation seems to reveal an increasingly distrustful attitude towards players, who alone among all sportsmen, were once described as gentlemen.

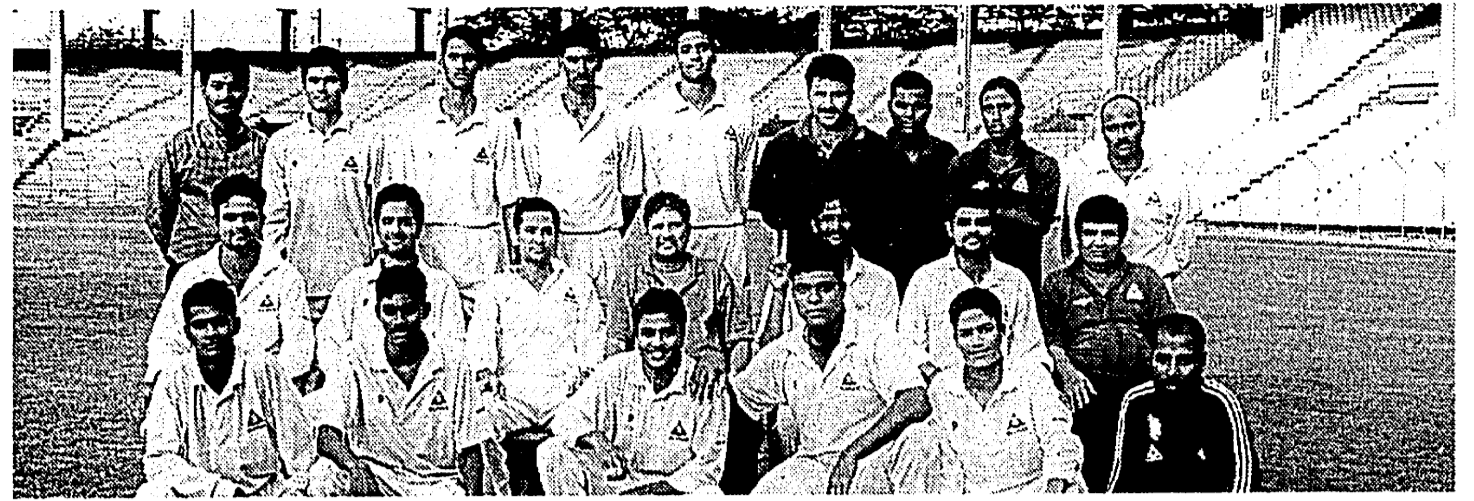
Be that as it may, Jolly Rovers won a hard-fought battle against Globe Trotters in the final at Chepauk, with some plucky batting displays from both teams. Sujith Somasunder, who scored a hundred and Badrinath, who missed one, gave their side a sound start, the scoreboard at one stage reading 280 for 3, but there was a flurry of wickets thereafter, the Chemplast-sponsored holders finishing at 336. Aashish Kapoor took three wickets. Sriram (48), Senthilnathan (43) and Hemang Badani (62) batted well for the MRF-sponsored runners-up, but in the end, Jolly Rovers won by a convincing margin. The captain,

D.Vasu, with his left arm spin, was the most successful bowler, striking decisive blows at vital moments and finishing with 5 for 77.

With this year's triumph, Jolly Rovers achieved a record 12th first division title, starting as far back as the 1964-1965 season, when it was run by members of *The Hindu* family, with S.Rangarajan leading the side and N.Ram leading the batting averages with 310 runs at 51.66 and S.Krishnan batting usefully. The only century maker for the team that season was (Englishman?) P. Filmer

who had scores of zero and 101 not out in the two innings he played for the club. The outstanding performer was medium pace swing bowler V. Rajaram, who claimed 58 wickets at the incredible average of 6.12. Off spinner S.Venkatraghavan, who made his Test debut the same year, supported him well with 25 wickets. Triplicane Cricket Club and Mylapore Recreation Club (six titles each in the early years), State Bank of India, Alwarpet Cricket Club, were the other teams to win the title on several occasions in the past.

It was in the 1966-67 season that India Cements adopted Jolly Rovers. They set about



Standing L-R: S. Arun, S. Badrinath, R. Ramkumar, L. Balaji, Timu Yohanani, B. Arun (Manager), Binmarasan (Scorer), P. Padmanabhan (Physical Trainer), T.R. Arasu. Sitting L-R: Dinesh Mongia, S.R. Ganesh Kumar, D. Vasu (Captain) Bharat Reddy (Administrative Manager) H. Ramkishan, Sujith Somasundar, Abdul Jabbar (Coach). Kneeling L-R: A.G. Srinivasa, M. Deepak, Ajay N. Kudua, Jinju Joseph, L. Purshotman and Chandran (Groundsman, IIT Chemplast).

building a formidable combination in right earnest, and at one stage had some of the finest players the state had produced in its ranks. Its opening batsman K.R. Rajagopal was a prolific scorer and so was P.K. Bellappa, the other opener and wicketkeeper. Both captained the side at different times. Other prominent players included Venkatraghavan in those initial years, Najam Hussain, Dharmalingam, Balaji Rao, K.V.R. Murthy, P.S. Narayanan, T.E. Srinivasan,

buswami, B. Ramesh, Ram-mohan, Venkatakishnan, Prasad, Rajasekhar and others. In the early Eighties came the dynamic wicketkeeper Bharat Reddy, who infused a new aggressive spirit in the side, which won the league three successive times under his captaincy. A whole new bunch of cricketers joined the club in the Eighties and Nineties — Sunil Valson, B. Arun, Abdul Jabbar, L. Sivaramakrishnan, T.A. Sekar, V.B. Chandrasekhar, Robin Singh, Venkataramana, Sunil Subramaniam, Sujith Somasundar, H. Ramkishan, Ajay Kudua, S. Ramesh, C. Hemant Kumar, Dinesh Mongia, S.R. Ganesh Kumar, Siddharth and Satyajit Medappa and, last but not least, D. Vasu, to name a few.

Significantly, in the last couple of seasons, Jolly Rovers set in a process of consolidation, when results were stressed and time and effort were invested in a solid core of players, not necessarily stars, who would stay with the team. They have shrugged off the loss of S. Ramesh and C. Hemant Kumar to other teams at the beginning of the season and still come out on top, largely through the efforts of the captain Vasu and his dedicated support team consisting of coaches Jabbar and Arun as well as Bharat Reddy who

manages the affairs of the team. They have carried the entire team with them.

Badrinath, Sujith Somasundar, Ajay Kudua and Dinesh Mongia were among the runs during the season, while Vasu and fellow spinners Ganesh Kumar and Ramkumar did the job with the ball.

Taking a keen interest on behalf of the Sanmar management is Vijay Sankar, grandson of Chairman Emeritus K.S. Narayanan, who started it all more than thirty years ago. Over the years, Narayanan's sons N. Sankar and his younger brother N. Kumar respectively Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Sanmar group, have been the inspiration behind the success of the team. Rarely in the history of corporate sponsorship has a business group made such a substantial long-term commitment to the support of cricket.

An important factor in Jolly Rovers success in recent years has been the superb IIT-Chemplast cricket ground and the excellent practice facilities available there for the team — and the other clubs sponsored by Chemplast. This is, of course, true of a number of first division teams in Chennai, but the IIT-Chemplast ground is indeed special, both in its delightful ambience and its first rate pavilion.

● by V. Ramnarayan

George Thomas, B. Kalyanasundaram, and A.K. Vijayaraghavan. The team won the Palayampatti Shield for three consecutive years from 1966-67 to 1968-69, repeating the feat in 1970-71 and 1971-72. It won three times in the Eighties and again in 1990-91. There was a decade-long gap after that and Jolly Rovers had to wait until last season to finish on top of the table.

There was a fresh wave of recruitment in the mid-Seventies when the team came under the management of Chemplast Sanmar. A number of talented youngsters came in to the side — Moses, Vijayakumar, Bharath Kumar, Ashok Tham-

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