

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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FREE ISSUE

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"So what if you are a
journalist?!"

You have to have your pupils
dilated to see the doctor!"

The healing touch

On March 18th, a local newspaper carried a story which succeeded in raising fresh bogeys in the minds of already sorely-tired Chennai-ites.

Apparently, a reporter went to the ophthalmic unit of a certain hospital just to meet a doctor, when an enthusiastic, but slightly misguided, matron, mistaking him for a patient, squirted dilating liquid into the reporter's eyes.

You applaud the lady's firm unswerving devotion to duty, although as a result of a difficult working day, she appears to have started seeing patients everywhere. But you have to wonder. Didn't she hear the reporter's plaintive protests?

Anyone who has ever undertaken the awful task of squirting eye-drops into someone else's eyes knows how difficult it is. You battle someone who suddenly sees you as a murderous adversary. Panic sets in. Arms flail at you. The head pulls away. Eyes remain stubbornly shut, in spite of repeated entreaties to "keep your eyes open and don't move". It gets really challenging with children. So how did the matron succeed?

It could have been worse.

The reporter might have been on his way to see someone in the vital-organ transplant section.

What next? I.D. cards to distinguish visitors from patients, or colour-coded corridors?

Who'd have thought that even the most innocuous of visits to hospitals, to meet friends and family, are now fraught with danger?

Ranjitha Ashok

Vandalised murals

INTACH
reports on
Padmanabha'm
Palace
& elsewhere

(By A Staff Reporter)

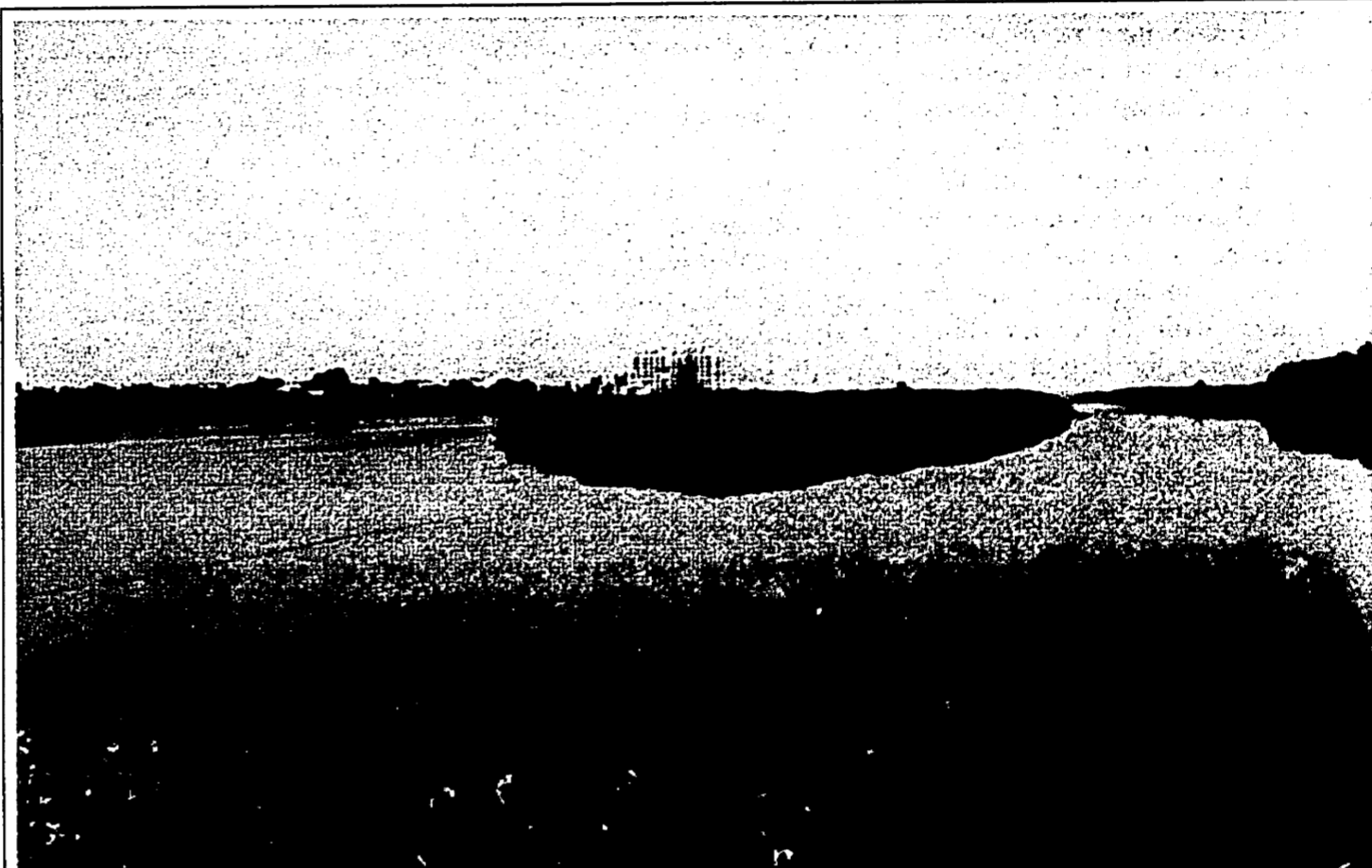
The paintings in the Padmanabhapuram Palace in Nagercoil District are showing signs of general deterioration, according to the Mural Painting Conservation Research and Training Centre (MCRTC), established by the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage in Thrissur, Kerala, in collaboration with the Department of Archaeology, Kerala. There are also scratches on the murals caused by human vandalism, according to a report by the Centre on the temple which is famous for its Mural Pagoda.

The murals on the walls of a room on the top floor of the three-storeyed Palace, which was constructed for meditation, are also in need of conservation, it is reported.

Other INTACH activities in recent months include the Charles Wallace Institute for Conservation Research and Training, Lucknow, preparing a report on the conservation status of the collection, storage conditions, environment etc. in the Saraswati Mahal Library, Thanjavur.

The Library, located in the palace complex of the Maharaja of Thanjavur, is a single storeyed building comprising a big hall with about 4000 sq.ft. floor space. The Library has a good collection of about 46,000 paper and palm-leaf manuscripts in different languages, like Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi and Hindi, besides about 52,000 books and some paintings, drawings, sketches, maps, etc., some of which are quite rare.

(Continued on page 10)



The Adyar Estuary looks lovely in this picture after a few days of rain last January. How long more will its banks remain green, free from construction in all its variety, after a recent Supreme Court decision? (See Reader Tharu's letter on Page 3.)

Summer treks to save the Nilgiris

To celebrate the International Year of the Mountains, the Save Nilgiris Campaign (SNC), an NGO committed to conserving and preserving the Nilgiris, is planning a number of treks in the

area. The treks aim at kindling interest among the participants in the unique eco-system of the region.

The treks, organised in association with the Forest Department, will be for groups of 15 to

20 people and will cover the eastern ranges of the Nilgiris. Trekkers will wend their way through a range of scenic landscapes — dense forests, sholas,

(Continued on page 4)

How do we protect pedestrians?

(By A Staff Reporter)

Suraksha, an active road safety organisation, concerned with pedestrian safety on Chennai roads, recently engaged the Transport Engineering Division of Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, to carry out a study of the factors affecting pedestrian safety in the T.Nagar area and recommend measures to ensure the safety of the pedestrians. Suraksha intends that once the measures are implemented in T.Nagar by the authorities, and the benefits seen, they could be replicated in a phased manner to cover the entire city.

In a project such as this, the stakeholders — in this case, a cross-section of the community in T.Nagar — are considered important as their whole-hearted participation is essential in implementing the solutions. The stakeholders' inputs will there-

fore be a valuable supplement to the findings and recommendations of the IIT experts.

It has therefore been proposed that a workshop on "Pedestrian Safety" be held in a suitable auditorium in T.Nagar in the first half of April '02.

The primary objective of the workshop is for the IIT experts to present their findings to a cross-section of the public in T.Nagar and stimulate a healthy discussion among the participants centring on an issue which affects their safety. The responses will be taken due note of by the IIT experts in finalising their recommendations. The report will then be submitted to the authorities for suitable action. As the report will include not only the findings of the experts but also the proposals from the citizens, it will enjoy a value which cannot be ignored by the authorities, feels Suraksha.

Will we get some classical restoration now?

The Man From Madras Musings understands that Government intends to allocate something like Rs. 125 crore for the repairs and maintenance of important Government buildings in Chennai and the district headquarters. Hooray for the Government! It's time important Government buildings, most of them heritage buildings, began to get a new life and the Government's decision to help in this is a commitment that pleases all at Madras Musings no end. But now may we see this money put to best use?

And for the money to be put to best use in repairing old buildings, Government needs to set up a heritage cell with engineers and conservators trained in heritage building conservation and an advisory committee with official and unofficial members with expertise in restoration techniques. Together they could do wonders with the money allotted. It's not the largest sum of money that conservationists would have liked, but it is still substantial and can do a world of good to such buildings as the Secretariat, Chepauk Palace, General Hospital, the Ophthalmic Institute campus, the Museum complex, Senate House, Queen Mary's College, College of Arts and Crafts, the DPI Campus, Teachers' Training College, Pudukkottai (Palace) Collectorate, Chengalpattu Collectorate, and several others.

MMM hopes that the funds will, as earmarked, be used only for repairs and maintenance — which includes restoration — and not be used to pull down old buildings at the slightest pretext and build tasteless new ones in their place.

While welcoming Government's largesse, MMM sounds this note of caution because a recent visit to the Secretariat revealed some appalling attempts at renewal. A main lobby gleamed with maroon and black polished granite that made a dignified office entrance look like the entrance to a nightclub, and a large waiting room not only stank as much for it being airless as for the perfume it used but also was furnished in a manner totally out of tune with the historic building. Quite in contrast to this was the tasteful manner in which a senior Civilian had done up her room, making it not only elegant but also compartmentalised for office space, meeting space, secretarial space etc. Perhaps she should be let loose on Government space to be repaired and maintained with the funds allotted. MMM is sure that such a Civilian will ensure that Chennai once again has buildings to be proud of and which will, as in the past, attract the attention of visitors.

A growing city

With long stretches of the Old Mahabalipuram Road being upgraded and with hitech industrial growth along it,

WE COULD LOOK BETTER, OFFER MORE, IF ONLY...

During the past couple of years, Madras Musings has occasionally brought out 10-page issues when events or the topicality of articles warranted it. We have also, more rarely, brought out issues with a page or two in colour, when the details in pictures demanded it. This issue, which brings to a close our 11th year of publication, features not only ten pages but colour as well. And we are quite sure readers are going to say, as in the past, why don't you give us more pages, more colour and greater frequency.

Madras Musings, with no staff to speak of, cannot think of greater frequency. But with the enthusiastic commitment of contributing writers and with photography almost totally in colour these days, we could certainly offer more pages fortnightly and more colour. BUT we can do that only if we re-

The Man From Madras Musings predicts this is the next area of growth, particularly along the western banks of the Muttukadu backwaters and the Buckingham Canal. For that to happen, all that is needed is the creation of the Taramani-Sholingallur stretch as an equally developed highway. And that is the case with the East

ceive more support than what we have at present.

We once again thank all our dedicated supporters for the generous help they have given us during the past few years. Without their help Chennai Heritage could not have brought out Madras Musings REGULARLY, with a bit of splash from time to time as well. But if we are to have more pages and more colour, there's that aforementioned BUT. If only some of our old supporters join us once again and if some new ones join us in caring for Madras that is Chennai, then we'll be able to overcome that BUT and give those on our 16,000 and growing mailing list 12 pages and colour every fortnight.

Madras Musings during the last decade has been in the forefront of creating a new awareness about heritage and environment in Madras that is

should be. Given this uncertainty, no matter how much and how fast the suburbs develop, MMM sees no hope of anyone calling a halt to construction and jerry-built residential and commercial encroachment in the city.

Just take one example, that wide open space of not-so-long ago between Foreshore Estate

Chennai. It has also been catalytic in getting much of the media to pay a little more attention to the City. A bigger and brighter journal could, perhaps, help it to do both better. Certainly a bigger and more colourful paper would meet the requests of hundreds of regular readers. Could we, then, look forward to old supporters returning and new supporters joining in, in helping us to focus on a better Madras that is Chennai?

To our regular supporters, we once again say a big 'Thank You' for seeing us through difficult times and for continuing to support us through better times. We only hope that any little success Madras Musings achieves in making Madras that is Chennai a better place will justify your wholehearted support.

— THE EDITOR

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

Coast Road, where even greater residential development will take place once the Injambakkam-Tiruvanniyur stretch of highway is made as good as the further reaches of the road. That such development necessitates tolls and that Indians, no matter how rich they are, will always object to tolls, while demanding benefits, is another matter. The fact is that if such road development takes place and transport infrastructure follows, these areas will fast develop and lead to a modicum of decongestion in the city.

But how can decongestion occur, *The Man From Madras Musings* wonders, when more and more space in the city, particularly its lungs, its parks, its waterfronts, even its tanks are constantly under threat from builders getting official and unofficial permission and developers doing just as they please? With the courts taking an ambivalent attitude in such matters, one court ruling no further construction and ordering the removal of the sandfill intended for that planned construction and another court approving major construction in the same area where it was hoped a forest reserve would be decreed a sanctuary one day, it would appear no one is very clear about what the future of Chennai is to be, or

and the Adyar Bridge. Highrise, not-so-highrise, offices, water storage facilities and a variety of other activities have established themselves in five years and with the main road bisecting the area made a major thoroughfare for mopussil buses and water tankers the area is fast becoming unlivable in. People who lived rather spaciouly have already begun moving out, others are thinking of following suit. And with permission for highrise now being given freely in the area, all vacant space here will in the next five years be developed as a concrete jungle — without, of course, the necessary infrastructure. And years later, someone can write another piece of nostalgia as an 'in memoriam' to the wide open space Man and Authority have teamed together to destroy.

Mention such dire thoughts to the developers here and even those moving out, and what they tell MMM is that all this is the price for growth and progress and what's wrong with that? MMM presumes there's nothing wrong with converting a wide-open gracious city into a highrise-marked concrete jungle — where slums will in time establish themselves — but he only wonders why many cities around the world that were rundown, congested ones have been making

themselves more spacious and elegant and offering citizens the opportunity to spread themselves out in the suburbs. Could it be because the authorities feel their citizens need a better quality of life — which in our case not only the authorities but the people themselves appear to think as being not necessary, while admiring what's happened abroad?

Waterways again?

Another aspect of plans drawn up for the city's growth is the resurrection of Chennai's waterways. Now *The Man From Madras Musings* hears officialdom talking about boating south of Taramani all the way to Muttukadu and even of possible ferry services on this stretch which was desilted in the last couple of years. MMM has also heard of rather similar plans for the northern stretch heading to Pulicat Lake. But what about the stretches of the Buckingham Canal in the city and the Adyar and Cooum Rivers?

Even as plans are drawn up for them and multicore allocations made, MMM sees MRTS construction clogging whole sections of the Canal, without a protest against such development, Government buildings being built well into the course of the Adyar, far beyond its banks, and the Cooum mouth as shut as ever, ensuring the river remains an enclosed cesspool. Compounding the problems of all three are the settlements on their banks. Apart from the need for the authorities themselves to stop misusing the waterways, there also have to be found realistic solutions for those who live alongside the waterways, in slums or otherwise. And who's going to tackle the latter part of

— MMM

the tangle, given the votebanks the waterway banks have become?

If we don't find answers to these problems of construction and of resettlement, rehabilitation and of renewal, 'Singaara Chennai' will remain a distant dream. More worrying is that it might become a city that's unlivable in, before the decade is out. But do the planners and the developers care? Even when it is pointed out that what they are doing is destructive?

In brief

* *The Man From Madras Musings* hears much talk about the privatisation of bus transport. Whether that will improve matters in a city and a State where public transport is among the best services in the country, yet does not wholly meet the needs of unplanned development, is another matter. But typical of the problems we create for ourselves is the case of the Koyambedu bus terminal which was meant to solve a plethora of public transport and road congestion problems. The giant terminus is built and ready for use. But no one is quite sure who is to inaugurate it and when. Worse, no one is quite sure who is going to run it and maintain it if and when it is inaugurated — something that should have been thought of at the planning stage itself, but which, as usual, was not. And not least, will the vehicles using the terminus pay for usage, particularly as any kind of toll or fee is something we in Tamil Nadu generally rebel against? While we await answers, the elephantine terminus looks more like a ghostly derelict than a vibrant answer to some of Chennai's worst traffic problems.

* A rose by any other name smells just as sweet. But it'll always be a rose is a rose is a rose. Shouldn't this apply to leopards too? *The Man From Madras Musings* raises the question as he prepares for the silly season, Summer. One day the headlines talk about panthers, the next day about leopards. If they mean the same thing, why the use of different names? Surely leopard is the common name for the spotted big yellow cat. True, the Oxford says a panther is a leopard, but it also indicates that it is usually used for the all-black of the species and, in North America, for the puma or jaguar. Do we really need to exoticise the leopard, a handsome enough animal?

* Elsewhere in the city, when a new NGO, Transparency International India — TN Chapter, was inaugurated recently, semantic preference was shown by one speaker for Citizens' Voluntary Organisation (CVO) and Civic Society Organisation (CSO) by another. But whatever the name of choice, those interested in such organisations all seem to be on the wrong side of sixty. Perhaps we should call such organisations 'Keeping Retirees Busy Organisations' (KRBO)?

OUR READERS WRITE

View from the bridge

Not very long ago, when PTC buses used to stop on the Adyar bridge to issue stage tickets, you could look out and see what I am told is the Chettinad Palace, outlined against the eastern sky. Today, it is no longer part of the visual landscape, being completely dwarfed by huge rectangular concrete blocks.

Mercifully, most of the greenery in the islands opposite the Theosophical Society still survives, though the view is marred by the dilapidated remains of the erstwhile Elphinstone Bridge, now carrying an ugly jumble of commercial hoardings at both ends besides some sheds for construction materials, while serving as a public toilet (just like the pavements on the present bridge and innumerable other thoroughfares in the city).

On the western side there have been more drastic changes. A row of large bungalows on an area reclaimed from the river-bed along the left bank reportedly houses senior government functionaries. There is talk of a new major road to be built along the Gandhinagar bank which is now mainly a garbage dump, but it would appear that a very complicated traffic junction will be needed to integrate it with the present alignment of the one-way flyover. I am not able to see what urgent traffic problem will be solved by such a road link to the Kottur bridge.

The landscape on this side has changed altogether, with a systematic destruction of all the trees and shrubs in the entire marsh/island area, driving out whatever wildlife and bird-life it may have harboured. Where once buffaloes and kites or vultures could be seen from the bridge, now only excavators and earthmoving devices drone away on barren denuded soil, giving the appearance of a strip of mining site.

Maybe in course of time some government buildings or an 'amusement park' or a private empire will come to occupy that part of the skyline, and a few diehards alone will bemoan the loss and helplessly wring their hands once more. I

hope things are not as black as painted by my pessimistic imagination.

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

Chennai it is

While the suggestion of Reader Jaiboy Joseph (MM, March 1st) to rename Chennai as Madras hardly merits any consideration, his remarks that it was during the Karunanidhi regime that the name was changed undemocratically and overnight are uncharitable. The change of name was made only in deference to the long-time wishes of the people of Tamil Nadu. Even the anglicised names of towns such as Madura, Tanjore, Tinnevely etc. were rightfully changed to their hallowed Tamil names. There had been no objection worth mentioning to the changes made. And what about the changed names of Mumbai, Kolkata etc.

The name of Madras was the invention of the colonial rulers and used by the English media and in official correspondence. In Tamil newspapers and private Tamil correspondence, the people of Tamil Nadu have been only using the name Chennai for decades.

M.R. Pillai
H 64/5, Central Avenue
Korattur
Chennai 600 080.

Exam still offered

The ESLC exam mentioned by Reader T.M. Sundaraman is still in vogue in Tamil Nadu. Government schools conduct the exam and the question papers set for the exam are distributed to all Government-aided schools, where the VIII Std. students have to take the exam. Certificates for having passed the exam are, however, not given. In the good old days, men who passed the VIII standard exam were trained as teachers. Therefore the certificates were given. Now the candidates aspiring to become teachers (VIII std. passed) are not

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A ten paise deal

I am unable to understand the pricing policy of a premier footwear manufacturer who has sales outlets all over our country. Prices which could be rounded off as Rs. 300 or 500 are tantalisingly shown as Rs. 299/90 or Rs. 499/95.

One of my neighbours who is a know-all of sorts, informed me that it was a psychological gimmick to make the public believe that the prices were only in the Rs. 200 and Rs. 400 range but had not reached Rs. 300 and Rs. 500. I thought it was a poor sales technique and wondered how the top brass of the company could be so naive as to believe that the public would fall for such a ruse! But I may be wrong, for the company has been indulging in this kind of pricing for well over five decades and more. No commercial firm would follow a policy for that long unless it was remunerative.

A few days ago, I visited one of the company's retail shops. The salesman there was very obliging. He spread before me a number of pairs to choose from. I selected a pair costing Rs. 199/90. The salesman packed it up for me and I handed over two hundred rupee notes. He took them to the cash counter and returned with the bill and gave it to me. Then he started collecting the chappals strewn around me and arranging them on display racks. When he found that I was still seated, he came to me and asked if I would like to buy something else. I showed him the bill which was for Rs. 199/90. The bill is for Rs. 199/90, I said. "I paid Rs. 200. I am waiting for my 10 paise."

The salesman seemed irritated. "Oh, you want the ten paise! Would you ask if a bus conductor does not return that much change?" I thought the case of a bus conductor was different. The poor soul that he is, has to deal with small change day in and day out. Weighed down with a jingling bag of coins and hands full of ticket bundles, he has to weave through a disgruntled crowd in a rickety bus that jumps up and down in every pothole found in the roads of Chennai. In his harassed

state, he might lose some change. To compensate it he might employ unethical means! I did not say all this, but simply said, "I am sorry, you are equating yourself to a bus conductor. If that ten paise can do any good to you, you may keep it!" With that I rose to leave.

The salesman darted back to the cash counter and returned as I neared the exit of the shop. He stopped me and said, "Here is the change, Sir!" Giving a ten paise coin, he said, "Surely that much cash doesn't go very far! Even a beggar does not accept it!"

"But, I am no beggar!" I said and continued, "You see, I value money even if it is a measly ten paise!"

With that I pocketed the coin and walked out of the shop.

M. Sethuraman
'Sankrithi'
6, Second Cross Street
Mahalakshmi Nagar
Adambakkam
Chennai 600 088.

given teachers' training. The only training offered is for Secondary Grade Teachers, which requires a pass in Plus II.

P.A. Ranganathan
16, Vedachala Gardens
Mandaveli Street
Chennai 600 028.

Danish contribution

Having been associated with the 80 years old Danish Mission HSS as a teacher and now as its Principal, I am, as everyone in Nellikuppam is, proud of its heritage and service to the community. Founded by the Danish missionary Knud Lange, it now has 3000 students and 92 teachers. From its inception, the school has been catering to the educational needs of the wards of employees of the EID Parry sugar factory. Some of the top management staff are alumni of this institution.

The house that "Erik the Dane" built (MM, January 1st) is now my residence. It was renovated with a grant from DANIDA in 1999. The 'Grundtvig Hall' was also built in 1999 and is part of the Lange Block named after the founder.

The hospital mentioned in the article where Viggo was born is the Danish Mission Hospital and it is in Tirukoilur and not Tiruvannamalai as mentioned.

The contribution of Danish missionaries in the then North and South Arcot Districts in the fields of education and healthcare is noteworthy.

R. Daniel Jayakumar
Headmaster
Danish Mission H. S. S.
Nellikuppam 607 105.

Of 'tecs and TEs

Reader T.M. Sundaraman has reminded us (MM, February 1st) of the Tamil detective novels of yesteryears. The books were popular not only in the old Madras

Presidency, but also among Tamils in Burma and Malaysia. I remember reading Arni Kuppaswamy Mudaliar's *Karungil Kundrathu Koli* as a student in Rangoon and found it a fascinating mystery novel. I wish that this and some other books of that era are reprinted. I am sure they will prove popular even today.

In the same issue, Reader K. Krishnan narrated his ordeal at the hands of a Railway Ticket Examiner.

During a visit to the USA some time ago, I went to the Universal Studios in Los Angeles and paid \$21 to the counter clerk for my admission ticket. He looked at me through the counter window and asked, "Excuse me, Sir, but are you by chance over 65 years?" When I told him that I was over 70, he returned \$5 saying that the charge for senior citizens was only \$16. The passenger transport authorities also gave me concessions on ticket fares without asking me to produce proof of age.

What a contrast between the way America treats not only its own senior citizens, but those of other countries as well, and the way India treats its own citizens. Will we ever change for the better?

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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.

Channel burping

No other industry segment is as anti-consumer as the pay channel-multiservices operator (MSO)-cable operator combine in India. Due to a packaging of pay channels, the trio, while not offering subscribers the choice to select their favourite channels, forces them to pay for the channels they do not wish to watch. With some pay channels like Zee and Star having stakes in cable operations, the trio have subscribers at their mercy.

• by
V. Jagannathan

The Chennai-based Consumers Association of India (CAI) has now decided to take up the cable TV subscriber issues by forming a separate wing. "The cable TV user is compelled to pay more every year towards subscription, while in fact he should be paying less as every year passes," says CAI's Managing Trustee, Desikan.

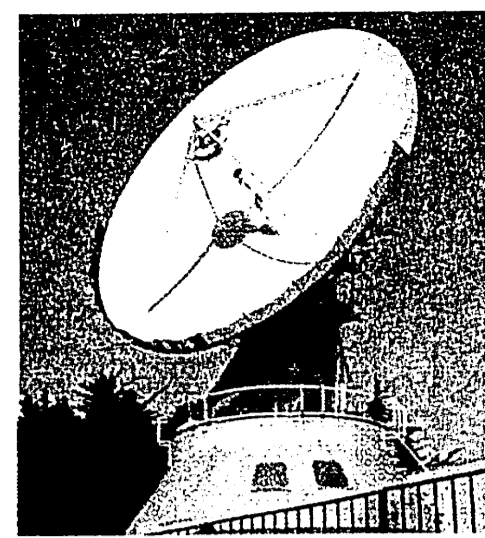
After the Star group of channels, which hiked the subscription rates to Rs. 40 from Rs. 24 over a period of nine months, its rival, the Zee-Turner combine, has also decided to raise its subscription rates. The cable operators opposed this on the ground that they would not be able to pass on the second hike in a

quick succession to their subscribers. And Sun Cable Vision (SCV), the sole multi-services operator (MSO) in Chennai, decided to switch off the Zee-Turner group of channels, like Zee Movies, Cartoon Network and others, till the issue was sorted out.

For SCV, part of the Sun TV network, switching off the Zee channels is sort of a sweet revenge. Years back, when Sun TV head Kalanithi Maran approached the Zee group for using their transponders to beam Tamil programmes, he was snubbed by a junior Zee official.

The sudden withdrawal of popular channels and the forcing of unwanted pay channels by way of packaging have forced many a subscriber to approach CAI for an immediate solution. "We carried out a detailed investigation into the entire cable television business in Chennai and found that consumers are getting a raw deal, while the local body is cheated of its legitimate dues," says Desikan.

The cable TV industry is a three-layered structure. The top slot, occupied by channels and broadcasters, is of two kinds — pay and free-to-air channels. Then come MSOs, who relay the channel signals to the last layer — the cable operators — for



onward transmission to individual households through cables. In small towns and rural areas, where the demand is only for free-to-air channels, it is the cable operator who receives the signals directly from the channels.

In Chennai, there are two MSOs — SCV and Hathway Cable. But, for all practical purposes, it is SCV that calls the shots as the two had signed a non-compete deal some time back.

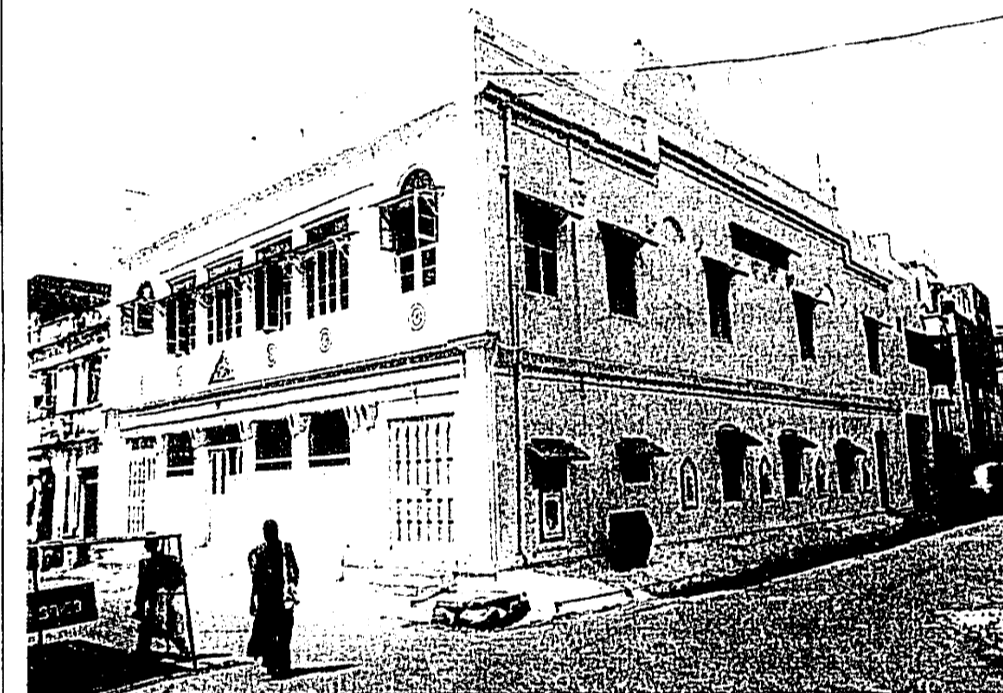
A CAI study says there are around 15 lakh cable TV subscribers/points in Chennai. And the total amount collected by the 900-odd cable operators every month is around Rs. 12.25 crore. The non-refundable deposit on these connections totals around Rs. 35 crore.

Out of their total collections, the cable operators have to pay the MSOs — SCV (Rs. 75) or Hathway Cable (Rs. 85) — per connection for receiving channel signals. "While at an average each cable operator connects around 500 houses, he declares only a minuscule figure to MSOs, and pockets the balance," alleges Desikan.

Also, the cable operators declare a different figure to municipal authorities, as they have to pay Rs. 20 as tax per connection, according to Desikan. "As per our estimates, the Chennai Municipal Corporation should be getting around Rs. 1.8 crore as tax. But it gets a mere Rs. 25 lakh."

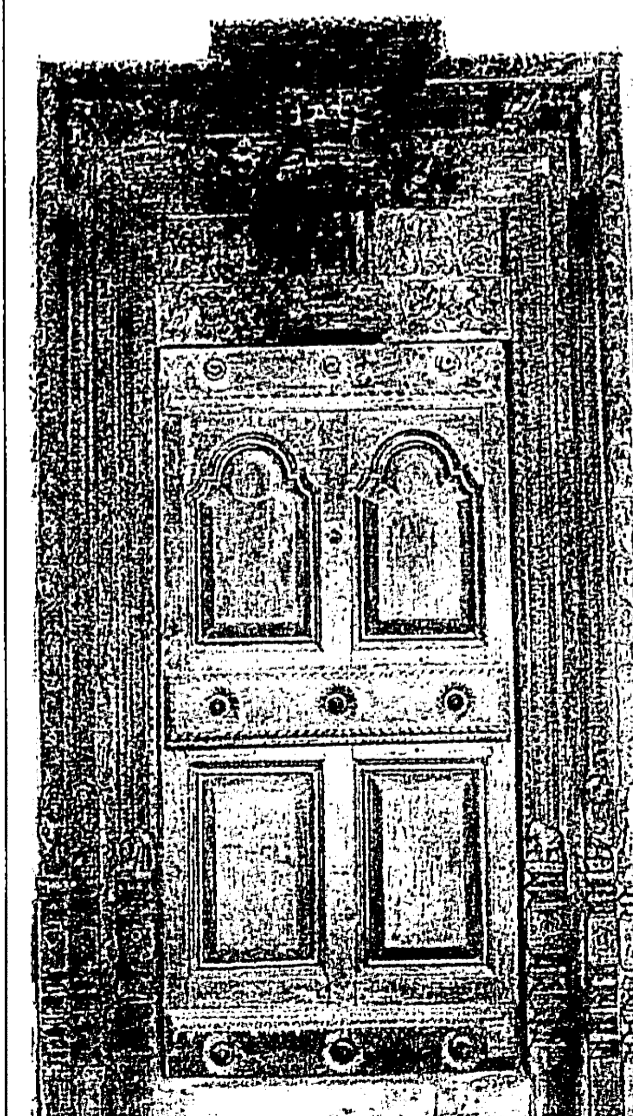
Desikan is advising subscribers to follow a few simple procedures to bring in some sort of accountability on the cable operators' part. "Individual households should demand receipts for all payments made to the operators; they should not pay more than one month's subscription in advance." They should also demand from the operator a written contract and the list of channels he will offer, says Desikan. "It is obligatory on the part of the broadcaster not to package channels. We are convinced of the need for the cable TV consumers to get together and seek and demand value for the money they pay as subscription." As a follow-up to all this, CAI is expected to shortly file several cases against erring cable operators in consumer courts. — (Courtesy: www.domain-b.com)

Nina Varghese



THE OLD...

The OLD is a 135-year-old brick and lime mortar building in Chintadripet, which served as a middle school and residential complex. A ground floor courtyard and a spiral staircase leading to the first floor with Madras terrace and wooden pillars are its striking features. Over the years, lacking maintenance, the building, classically traditional in many ways — with courtyard, pillars, seating platforms etc. — fell into



a state of disrepair. But recently, various legal issues having been settled, its owners decided to restore the ancient building and gave us our NEW this fortnight.

The restoration though not on the strict principles of classical restoration — lime mortar has been replaced with cement — is nevertheless a commendable effort by the Sulochana family — particularly as it had been suggested to them that it would be more profitable to demolish the building and build in its place a multistoreyed commercial complex.

Artisans from Thanjavur helped to restore the wooden structures in the building. The Periya Nilai is testimony to their workmanship. The wooden sculptures on this door — the deities, vahanams, animals, birds, fruits, flowers, angels etc. — that were broken or missing have been replaced. The termite-damaged wood and portions that could be reclaimed have been put to creative use. The complete flooring has been replaced with concrete. Concealed electrical wiring, plumbing and sewage have been introduced. Pillars in the building have got a protective aluminium casing to save them from the damp.

The NEW also has a Vastu dimension to it. The arrangement of the kitchen and other rooms has been planned according to Vastu. The NEW also has two rainwater harvesting tanks. The exterior doors on the first floor have been completely plastered and in their place a cupboard has been designed. The old stained glass windows have been replaced by new coloured glass.

Yes, the new has been brought into the NEW, but numerous vestiges of the OLD remain, making much of its heritage recognisable. And that's a small mercy in these times. The views of the OLD on top of the page show the front and the side of the house before restoration. The sloped roof construction to the rear of the house seen in one of the OLDs has now been pulled down. The NEW looks gleaming, with the religious icons on the side wall expected to prevent the roadside being used as a public toilet. The pictures on the left and right show the Periya Nilai BEFORE and AFTER.



...& THE NEW

The publisher as a storyteller

The world has now talked itself hoarse about the book *The House of Blue Mangoes* and the inevitable additions to publishing lore have grown... of the author's working hours, of the book being sent off first under an assumed name, of it being sold in 11 countries even before the buzz began, and the fact that this is one of the most promising debuts in recent times.

The hitherto quiet settlement of Davidnagar has probably suddenly woken up one morning to find itself famous... and sought after by literary tourists. So too has first-time author David Davidar.

As Penguin India's CEO and head of the country's leading publishing house, his is a name that needs little introduction. However, with a shift in his role, there is a change in perception. All creative efforts inspire curiosity about their essayers.

So, to begin with, the name 'Davidar'.

David Davidar, not exactly known for garrulousness, discloses that the family's original name was a "mere David". Family lore has it that his grandfather, Ambrose Davidar, "a remarkable man", decided that this was way too common, and circulated two variations of the name among the family members, 'Davidal' or 'Davidar'. The majority chose 'Davidar'.

David Davidar's mother, Sushila, was from Nagercoil, but spent her growing years in what was then Burma, while his father was from Trichi and was a planter in Peermadai. "That's where I grew up."

David Davidar attended the Sainik School, Amaravathi, near Coimbatore, then joined Madras Christian College, studying Botany.

He laughs, anticipating my surprise, and explains, "I wanted to be a planter, like my Dad."

Is that where the detailing of plant and tree names in the book... or even the mangoes... comes from? "I suppose so," is the laconic reply.

His path changed course when his father, with what can only be called long-sighted astuteness, and a clear unhampered understanding of his son, told him that, "if he had half a brain, he wouldn't be a planter," following this up with the practical advice to "go, do something else with his brains."

And that's exactly what David Davidar did.

Nineteen-years-old at the time, he headed for Bombay and



David Davidar... a storytelling publisher.

joined *The Times of India* Training Programme. But, "the Botany thing continued to hound me". He was placed in *Science Today* and, unable to settle in, quit. He then joined Rajmohan Gandhi's magazine *Himmat*. From there, he moved on to Dom Moraes's magazine *Keynote*, which lasted only six months.

this was just to make sure I didn't get a swollen head," he laughs.

He's been with Penguin India now for 16 years.

People today talk of Penguin being a star, but this did not happen overnight. The road was a long and hard one in a tough market, and it wasn't as if Penguin received any special leg-ups or breaks, he says.

Is publishing in India booming right now?

"No," he replies, without a second's hesitation. "Only Penguin is." And, so we talk of the publishing business.

You shouldn't really be fooled by the image of more and more shelves in bookshops that appear to be filled, he warns. The question is: How many really make the grade?

A book written here sells on an average about 2000 copies — a frustrating aspect. On the other hand, an exceptional book published abroad, backed by the publisher to the hilt, will probably sell about 2 million copies.

The market here, despite appearances, is still a very small one. India, as far as the sale of English writing goes, is still at least one generation away from international figures, he feels. But he predicts that the really good times are coming. "What we see today is just the first wave."

Does he read every manuscript that comes his way?

"I used to. But not any more. I am more into managing now."

Looking at some of the books that do get published, would he accept that publishing at times appears to be a numbers game?

He smiles enigmatically, then answers steadily, "I prefer to say that commerce dictates that a certain number of books have to be published within a certain period of time. We are a business with a business model, after all."

(Continued on page 9)

• by
Ranjitha Ashok

Saving the Nilgiris

(Continued from page 1)

mountain streams, endless tea gardens, tribal habitations etc. There could be sightings of wild-life and birds on the treks.

The base camp on the treks will be in Kotagiri, the oldest hill station in the Nilgiris.

Sullivan's Trail, which follows the original route taken by John Sullivan, who was the earliest to recognise the potential of Udhagamandalam as a hill station, is for two nights and three days at a cost of Rs. 2,000 per head.

It would include a night stay at Longwood Shola — one of the best-preserved reserve sholas in the district.

There would also be a visit to Banagudi Shola, which has a sacred grove, and the Catherine Falls.

The second package, covering the Eastern low country, will also cost Rs. 2,000 a person.

This trek will pass through natural scrub forests, and elephant, black buck, cheetal and bear territory.

The longest of the Nilgiri treks will pass along the length of the western escarpment, with views of unspoiled country and the Silent Valley. The trek will cut across the home of the Nilgiri Tahr and sambhar. — (Courtesy: BusinessLine)

Nina Varghese

Quizzin'
with
Ram'nan

(Current affairs questions are from the period March 1st to 15th. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

- Which team won its maiden Ranji Trophy, the symbol of supremacy in Indian cricket?
- Who is the richest Indian according to the rankings of *Forbes* magazine?
- In which high-profile case was the former PM, Narasimha Rao acquitted on March 15th?
- Which political figure was killed at Kovvalalanka Village in Krishna District on March 3rd?
- Name Telco's MPV unveiled in Geneva recently.
- With which prestigious UN medal were Indian soldiers martyred in peace-keeping operations, since 1955, honoured recently?
- Which State, which recently went to the polls, was put under President's Rule because of a hopelessly fractured mandate?
- Which literary figure did the Supreme Court jail for a day, for 'contempt of court'?
- Who won the men's hockey World Cup in Kuala Lumpur recently?
- Where was the much-publicised and controversial *shila daan* done at Ayodhya on March 15th?
- Which chronicler of Chennai's heritage was admitted as an 'Honorary Member of the Civil Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire'?
- In the new Jayalithaa cabinet, what portfolios does the former Chief Minister, O.Panneerselvam hold?
- What distinction has Archana Ramasundaram, an IPS officer of the 1980 batch, achieved in the State?
- In the *Navagraha* temples of Thanjavur District, which temples are for Mars and Saturn?
- Which influential global financial institution has chosen Chennai for all its major international back office operations?
- In the recently presented Chennai Corporation Budget, which sector has got the maximum and minimum allocation for capital expenditure?
- What in Chennai is *Cottingley*?
- Name the two AI Umma fundamentalists (of whom one was recaptured within 48 hours) who escaped from Madurai in broad daylight on March 7th.
- Which two districts in the State, bifurcated during the DMK regime, are to be merged again?
- Total trivia. Who came 'face-to-face' in the Legislative Assembly for the first time since March 25, 1989?

(Answers on page 10)

Homing in on discharged prisoners

The sorry state of the arched sign over the gateway to the gloomy silent campus says it all. It's all bustle on Mount Road which the campus abuts, near the SIET College signal, but within the atmosphere is one of neglect, poverty and sadness.

If you hadn't been told what to look for, you would not have been able to decipher that the sign was proclaiming the *Goschen Home*. Finding yourself in the right place, you look around. A little to the right is a rectangular dormitory and, behind it, a huge but dilapidated workshop full of old furniture (and cobwebs and dust). Yet 80 years ago, these buildings were even busier than the Mount Road of the day. They accommodated and rehabilitated discharged prisoners by offering them job training.

This, then, is the headquarters of the Tamil Nadu Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society, set up by distinguished luminaries of the then Madras Province. The first patron of the Society was Lord Willingdon, then Governor of Madras Province. That was in 1921 when, consequent to the recommendation of the Indian Jails Committee, the Madras Government asked Lt. Col. Cameron, then IG of Prisons, to bring to public attention the necessity for the formation of a Society for Discharged Prisoners. Responding to the appeal, prominent businessmen, church dignitaries and administrators of the State met on February 1, 1921 at a public meeting at Memorial Hall, presided over by Lord Willingdon. To the strong and representative Central Committee constituted, Col. Cameron handed over Rs. 1,871-7-6 received from the public in response to his appeal. And so was born the Madras Presidency Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society, known by 1952 as the Madras State Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society and on 25.11.1972 registered as the Tamil Nadu Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society.

The objectives stated in the Society's Memorandum of Association included:

- to give such help as may be needed to persons discharged from prisons, without distinction of race or creed;
- to make efforts to reclaim habitual offenders from a life of crime; and
- to prevent casual and

juvenile offenders from becoming habitual offenders.

The first home of the Society was in a rented building at 13 Bishop's Lane, Vepery, Madras, with its office functioning from Fort St. George. Later, it was shifted to Mylapore and then Chintadripet. By 1928, the Central Committee was able to acquire a permanent home at the present premises, 313 Anna Salai, Teynampet. The 12 grounds of land abutting Mount Road was bought for Rs. 12,725. A dormitory and workshop for discharged prisoners were thereafter built.

Named after Viscount Goschen, the then Governor of Madras, the Society at present owns 11 homes — in Madras, Cuddalore, Coimbatore, Devakottai, Madurai, Salem, Tiru-

nelveli, Tiruchirappalli, Thanjavur and two at Vellore (one of which was solely intended to house prisoners discharged from the State Jail for Women in Vellore).

The help rendered to ex-prisoners included lodging and monetary assistance to carry on petty trade; a subsistence allowance for deserving persons; provision of trade tools, sewing machines etc; money for travel expenses, clothes, spectacles and the like; loans for trading equipment; securing of employment, reinstatement in service; and medical aid for convalescing prisoners. The Homes were manned by paid agents or Welfare Officers working directly under the control and guidance of the Honorary Secretaries of the Society.

Government aid towards working expenses was, in those days, in the form of an initial Rs. 2000 Grant-in-Aid from the then Government of Madras. This has steadily increased over the years. Cottage industries under the auspices of the Central Welfare Board provided opportunities for rehabilitation of prisoners in 1954. The Society's workshop was also recognised as one of the suppliers of furniture for use in Government offices throughout the State. A portion of the outhouse in the *Goschen Home* was set apart for housing juvenile delinquents remanded by Courts in Chingleput, and



A sign of the state of affairs at the Goschen Home.

the Society managed the Remand Homes for Children in districts where there were no Children's Aid Societies, namely Trichy, North Arcot, Salem and Coimbatore.

The Society was registered as a Company Limited by Guarantee under Section 26 of the Indian Companies Act, 1913. "Which is why it still continues to be alive," says Shanta Sheela Nair, I.A.S. (currently Secretary, Municipal Administration & Water Supply, Government of Tamil Nadu) who, as an avid heritage enthusiast, got interested in this "interesting bit of

income), only Rs. 53,159 went to the prisoners themselves — AND to 1329 of them. Of what use? An appalling state of affairs that needs to be corrected. We need to appoint officers who are accountable for proper handling of such matters. Maybe Regional Probation Officers could take charge of this area, as Honorary Secretaries of the Society. Government Officers in select Social Welfare Departments, or retired senior officials interested in honest social service, could help retrieve this situation," he feels:

The Honorary Secretary of the Society for the last ten years, P.A. Daivasigamani, Notary Public & Commissioner of Oaths, however, states, "We continue as before with our rehab work. Our rapport with the District Collectors, who are ex-officio Presidents, has always been very good, and we have no cases (of discharged prisoners) pending. Problems with accounts arose because our Treasurer (in office for many decades) is away in Andhra. But right now our Government audits are okay. Our carpentry workshop, which was an income-generating activity ran into problems after the Government (for environmental reasons) banned wooden furniture. The writing of interview petitions in jails was earlier a source of income for at least a couple of discharged prisoners in each district, but a few years ago even this privilege was withdrawn. The jail staff themselves handle the petitions and charge exorbitant sums for the facility.

"Currently no accommodation is provided for prisoners in the *Goschen Home* premises, because of the objections coming from the women's college next door. Doles are provided through nationalised banks (after certification by Probation Officer) wherever cases are referred by the departments concerned. And as Secretary on the Board of other welfare organisations, I am able to ensure that discharged prisoners are given opportunities in suitable institutions. Plans to construct a multi-storeyed building to generate income through rents are on the anvil."

"Recorded accounts of the Society show that for a particular period of five years, out of the total income of Rs. 14 lakh (from Government grants, immediate assets, donations and other prisoner-generated

(Continued on page 8)

The Rajini mystique

There are giant-size posters stuck all over the city calling Rajinikanth the superstar everything short of GOD. The occasion is the launch of his new film. What is it about this man which inspires so much adulation? It is a Tamil tragedy if he doesn't do a new film each year. After *Padayappa*, his fans have been waiting for the word from their hero about his next move. Now they are ecstatic. Finally, the announcement of the long-awaited new film has put their minds at rest. The superstar will produce and star in *Baba*. He will write the story himself. The film will be directed by Suresh Krishna. As an added attraction, his talented young daughter Aishwarya will assist the director.

Rajini is different. He doesn't do anything according to predictable lines. His life isn't

crowded. He does only one film at a time. At his own pace. His last film, *Padayappa*, was released in 1999. Needless to say it was a superhit. But nothing would make him rush into the next movie. For three years he has kept speculation rife on what his next move would be. Was he going to enter politics? Who was he going to support if he didn't directly enter the political arena? (No Tamil Nadu politician can afford to ignore the 'Rajini factor'.) Or was he going to throw it all up and pursue a spiritual life? That Rajini disappears for months on end after completing a film and spends time with his spiritual guides is well known. Is he fearing rejection as he is now past 50? Does he want to fade away into the sunset?

During the last three years, Rajini has shown a remarkable



Superstar Rajinikanth.

ability to stay in the limelight without actually doing anything. He has shown scant interest in maintaining a public image. He has shown up on various occasions with greying and thinning hair, and uninspiring clothes. But his fans have not been put off. Now, miracle of miracles, photographs and photos show the man back with the leonine mane and an enigmatic look.

The news had started trickling out a few months ago that Rajini had started discussing a new film and that various top line directors were being considered. For a long time, director Shankar's name was banded about. But it was officially announced that, after 'serious' discussions, Shankar could not

wait for ever for Rajini to make up his mind. So he was moving on to other projects. Unofficially, however, it was said that the superstar did not like Shankar's storyline and tried making a couple of corrections in keeping with his image, but Shankar opted out.

Whatever the truth is, it was apparent to his fans that something was happening. Then there were other indications. Rajini went off to Kerala for several weeks, for some ayurvedic treatment. For rejuvenation, declared his fans. Elections came and elections went. No, Rajini didn't give any indication of joining politics. It was back to films, concluded the fans. They were right.

Now, finally, Rajini has launched his new film *Baba*. The distributors and exhibitors are delighted. It's Rajini to the rescue, they say. There has been an air of gloom over the industry now for many months. There have been no hits. If you manage to break even you are considered lucky. But a Rajini film is expected to lift the industry out of its misery. Yes, the film will have that one bit of

dialogue and that one gesture which will become its trademark, like tossing a cigarette, or lines like ... "If I say it once it's like saying it a hundred times".

The cast and crew have been announced. Manisha Koirala from Mumbai will be the heroine. Rajini is also moving with times in other ways. The film is being pre-sold to commercial sponsors like Pepsi and Henkel. Shooting has started in Chennai's Campa Cola grounds. But an air of mystery remains.

No one knows the story. Again, the rumour mills are working overtime. It's about a simple man who gets spiritual powers. It's political. It's going to tackle the ills of society. The buzz goes on. As always, every move and gesture of Rajini is open to a million interpretations. Why did he have a private launch on 23rd and a public launch on 24th? Why did he arrive in a tourist taxi, giving up the familiar white Ambassador? It goes on and on.

Is Rajini an enormously complex, clever man? Or is he just what he seems. A simple man with a perfect sense of timing? — (Courtesy: www.hansazone.com)

Discovering Chettinad

A wedding and a book launch were the inspiration for a recent INTACH-sponsored trip to that part of Tamil Nadu known as Chettinad. The thirteen of us who participated were well aware of the unique opportunity the trip presented: to immerse ourselves, for two days, in Chettiar history, architecture, food and everyday life, with S. Muthiah, Meenakshi Meyyappan and Visalakshi Ramaswamy, the three persons who have documented this culture so well in their definitive study, *The Chettiar Heritage*.

We boarded the Rock Fort Express for the overnight train journey to Trichy. A bus met us there early the next morning for the two-hour drive to Karaikudi. Along the way, we stopped at a Sacred Grove near Pudukottai. A long dirt track, lined with terracotta figures, mostly horses and cows, led through the woods to a clearing, where several large village guardians presided over a space for offerings. The early morning light gave the Sacred Grove an eerie feeling of timelessness. On reaching Karaikudi, we were shown to our rooms in 'The Bangala', a heritage guesthouse, beautifully restored by the Meyyappan family and graciously managed by Meenakshi. Her warm welcome and the hot breakfast that followed were the

perfect introduction to Chettiar hospitality.

After breakfast, we headed off to a Monday morning shandy. On display at the weekly village market were a variety of fruits, vegetables, meats, flours, spices and prepared foods, as well as practical items such as jute rope, baskets and bundles of banana leaves. From the shandy, we visited two temples: the clan temple at Vairavanpatti and the village temple at Ariyakudi. The history of clan temples is believed to stretch back to Pandya times and the temples have served not only as places for community worship, but also as a basis for social organisation.

• by PAT ALTER

Inscriptions date the Vairavanpatti clan temple to the 11th Century, but it is believed to be much older. A 19th Century renovation added the stone and wood carvings, bronzes, wall paintings and tank that make the temple one of the most beautiful of the Chettiar clan temples. In contrast to clan temples, village temples draw worshippers from across the social spectrum. The Ariyakudi village temple has also undergone renovation, more recently, and of a more exuberant nature. Somewhat controversially, its



The cover of the much-acclaimed book 'The Chettiar Heritage'.

wall and ceiling paintings, originally done with vegetable-dyes, have been freshly painted in bright, bold colours.

We returned to The Bangala for a delicious lunch and a well-deserved rest. Refreshed, we set out to explore Karaikudi's market area for sarees and antiques. From the market, we joined Meenakshi for tea at her family home and toured both the ancestral mansion and her house. We marvelled at the rich tilework, marble floors and beautifully painted wood and

stucco detailing on the ceilings and pillars. Back at The Bangala, we gathered in the sitting room for a fascinating talk and slideshow on Chettiar history and culture. The evening came to a close with yet another feast of Chettiar cuisine.

We were warned that our second day would be more strenuous. It was. In the two villages of Kanadukathan and Pallathur, we visited at least ten homes and stopped in front of several others. All shared common architectural features: a series of pillared courtyards, more

lakhshi's heritage home is alive with hopes of preserving Chettiar culture through its handiwork and everyday objects. She has set up a museum to showcase old and new textiles, beadwork, basketry, household vessels and utensils. Almost as a metaphor for her vitality, Visalakshi has claimed the women's dining hall, usually the deadead space in a traditional Chettiar house, as her workroom. There, among other activities, she teaches basket weaving to local village women, updating traditional designs and colours to appeal to the contemporary market.

Mid-afternoon, we returned to Karaikudi for another quick round of shopping. After tea at The Bangala, we piled into vans for the drive back to Trichy. We ate our Bangala box dinners at the railway station, which we were told was the old South Indian Railway headquarters and once had a restaurant with the finest 'butler cuisine' in India, and then boarded the Rock Fort Express for our return journey to Chennai. And so we came to the end of a splendidly organised INTACH-heritage programme that all connected with 'The Bangala' ensured went not only like a clockwork but, with a strong sense of commitment, made every one of us feel good about having had this opportunity to glimpse a bit of a little-known heritage of legendary merchant community. That it was accompanied by the warmth of traditional Chettiar hospitality made the weekend all that more splendid.

Remembering the Mahatma



Gandhi and the young Kalyanaram, a picture from the exhibition

I yet go on saying what I believe to be true."

A newspaper report on Gandhiji addressing refugees at Purana Quila quotes him as saying, 'My heart bleeds for you, I want you to remember there is one God for all and me. To me there are no restrictions of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Parsis and Christians. To me all are one.'

Gandhiji's dissatisfaction with the way the government was functioning was evident even within two months of India's gaining independence, to judge by the critical tone of the articles he wrote for the *Harijan*. "Yet what are strikes and a variety of lawlessness but a deferment of hope — symptoms of our sickness and weakness. In a well-ordered democratic society there are ample lawful means for vindicating justice. Violence veiled or unveiled must be taboo."

These and many other prized reports of speeches and some of the writings of the Mahatma himself were viewed by a fascinated mix of enthusiasts, both young and old, from all over Chennai. The exhibition was organised by V. Kalyanam, a former aide and close companion of Gandhiji, from 1944 until the latter's assassination. He had accompanied the leader on all his journeys, including the last; he was just a few feet behind the Mahatma when Gandhiji was shot.

Another reports probably the last words Gandhiji addressed to the people. In the course of a message to the Hindus of Sind (given to a Prof. Malkani) at 3.30 a.m. on that fateful Friday, he said, "I now say things which do not go home. I know that I'm a back number now or these things would not have happened. But

worst is over and that we are on the road to showing the lowliest of the villagers that it means his freedom from serfdom... it means equality of all classes and creeds, never the domination and superiority of the majority community over a minority, however insignificant it may be in number or influence."

The recently held exhibition 'Spirit of Gandhi' was a truly moving trip into history. It also raised many questions—of what was, and what could have been.

One exhibit, a report in a leading daily of Wednesday, January 28, 1948, carrying Gandhiji's message to a prayer gathering in Delhi on the 26th read, "This day is Independence Day. This observance was quite appropriate when we were fighting for Independence we had not seen nor handled. Now we've handled it and seem to be disillusioned. At least I am, if you are not! What are we celebrating today? Surely not our disillusionment. We are entitled to celebrate the hope that the



One of the panels in the exhibition.

Homing in on discharged prisoners

(Continued from page 6)

Many things are expected to happen, but how and when we'll have to wait and see. Shanta Sheela Nair concludes, "It is more heartening to know what it was, than what it is now. In its heyday, the Society had

very influential members, who've obviously done much in the cause of discharged prisoners. Though Goschen Home still is a part of Madras history, we've forgotten it. Most of us don't even know it exists. What can we do to revive it, is the question."



April 8-18: Exhibition of terracotta lamp bases, masks, table bases, and pots by Smaranika Deo. (At Manasthala.)
April 15-27: Cutwork Embroidery

workshop by Sudha Sivashankar. (At Manasthala.)
April 29-May 4: Bead workshop for children by Suguna Sachithanathan. (At Manasthala.)

The Music Season

15 years at a glance

With the following information *Sruti* updates what was reported in *Madras Musings* last fortnight about the growing madness during the Madras Season.

- Over the past 15 years, the number of organisations conducting festivals during the season has, by and large, increased. In the last two years, however, the number has remained steady at 68, although there have been dropouts and additions.
- With the entry of more and more organisations into the fray, the duration of the season has gradually expanded from a two-month period (December-January) to a four-month period (November-February). The figures for the season in the last six years span this four-month period.
- The figures had earlier reached their peak of 2052 in 1999-2000, but this year the total number of programmes has increased again and touched 2098!

Year	Duration	No. of Organisations	Music	Dance	Total
1987-88	N.A.	17	326	122	448
1988-89	N.A.	21	416	149	565
1989-90	1 Dec-31 Jan	24	572	205	777
1990-91	1 Dec-2 Feb	26	615	227	842
1991-92	23 Nov-8 Feb	31	698	288	986
1992-93	1 Nov-13 Feb	37	853	284	1137
1993-94	1 Nov-4 Feb	36	866	258	1124
1994-95	1 Nov-5 Feb	39	1034	241	1275
1995-96	1 Nov-21 Feb	49	1283	334	1617
1996-97	1 Nov-28 Feb	59	1425	307	1732
1997-98	1 Nov - 28 Feb	64	1671	364	2035
1998-99	1 Nov-28 Feb	64	1614	346	1960
1999-2000	1 Nov-29 Feb	69	1681	371	2052
2000-2001	1 Nov-28 Feb	68	1596	351	1947
2001-2002	1 Nov-28 Feb	68	1703	395	2098

Source: Reports in *Sruti*

Dawn, the Pakistan newspaper's 8-column headline 'Mahatma Gandhi — Martyr to Assassin's Bullets' and report, and other reports of the assassination of Gandhiji and of Kasturba Gandhi's death were also exhibited. There was a medical officer's report issued by the Pathological Laboratory

of the Irwin Hospital, New Delhi, on Saturday January 31st. So were rough drafts for articles scrawled by Bapuji on the backs of old envelopes, and a cheque for Rs. 35 that the Mahatma had issued to Kalyanam while in Patna. "Actually I deposited that cheque on January 29th. When the Mahatma was assassinated the following day, I went back to the bank and withdrew the cheque — it was more valuable to me as a piece of history," says Kalyanam, who helped Gandhiji by writing and typing all his letters, rough drafts of which were always written on the backs of used envelopes.

Also exhibited were many coins and postal covers issued by the Indian Government featuring Gandhiji, from the collection of S.B. Raja Seetharaman, a member of the Madras Coin Society. Interestingly, the only 'Gandhi coin' from a foreign country was from Liberia. The collection also included scores of postage stamps issued by different countries on Gandhiji. An interesting collection from South Africa showed one displaying 'Gandhi — the lawyer' and another displaying 'Mahatma Gandhi'. Says Seetharaman, "All the stamps and coins on show, from the period 1948-2001, have been collected over the last 20 years." All in all, it was an exhibition that captured the attention of everyone who visited it.

Shobha Menon

I sent you a note yesterday... I was able to work but I had to develop and I... I have told the... heralded the... ant... self... between... it even... I...

A fragment from one of Gandhiji's letters that was on display.

LOOKING BACK

The symbol of an era

The 'Hoe' Diary is a century old. The handy Gem pocket diary was used for many years by Dr. Swaminatha Iyer, the Tamil *thatha* (grandfather).

To suit various requirements, while there used to be different types of diaries in its family, now there are seven only. The Colonial Diary is the costliest (Rs. 5.50). The cheapest is the Presentation Diary (Rs. 1.50). Household accounts, milk accounts, interest accounts, servants' and laundry accounts, 'samaan' and lending accounts — you'll find them all in the Colonial Diary, which is of great assistance in household management.

With the closing down of V. Perumal Chetty and Sons at the end of March, an era has ended. One of the most visible signs of that leading stationery company was the Hoe & Co. diary, which stopped coming out a couple of years earlier. This piece recalls that famous diary brand.

The British introduced the diary. But during their administration, there was no diary with Indian information. The diaries available used to come from the U.K. The Hoe diaries were started to meet the local requirements and became very popular.

The diary, which was popular in South India, published a Bengali edition for ten years. For some time, Photographic and Tailoring Diaries were also issued.

Forty or fifty years ago, Hoe diaries were used in small establishments to maintain journal accounts, ledger etc. The diary was then bigger in size. On each page, a blotting paper was kept stitched. In a High Court case, the diary account was taken as valid documentary evidence and treated on par with a stamped document.

Thambi Srinivasan
(This article appeared in the weekly *Murugu* on 23.5.1970.)

With acts of kindness...

I was walking in the Theo-sophical Society, enjoying the "calm abiding" this daily ritual brings me and thinking how fortunate we in Madras have been this year. Rain in January and a little even in February! This blessing from the gods was evident all around me, in the healthy plants, in the beautiful trees, in the lotus pond near my beloved Buddhist shrine, full of clean water.

I turned a corner and to my complete astonishment I was confronted by an enormous black pig, perhaps the biggest I have ever seen close up. He seemed as stunned as I was and eyed me with as much apparent trepidation. After what felt like minutes, but was probably only seconds, he moved off into the undergrowth leaving me to let go my breath. He must have wandered in from the muddy banks of the Adyar river close by.

As I continued my walk, I had a flash of memory of an incident 40 years old, and how kindness can come from the most unexpected places.

I arrived in India from England in January 1962, was married in early February and settled in Cholai Medu. The street was a *cul-de-sac*, small, the road untarred. We lived downstairs in a one-storied house, the upstairs occupied by another family. The wall of the backyard separated us from a big slum and though we could not see anything, we could certainly hear the children, the music, the quarrels, the laughter... and, to my horror, the screams of pigs being slaughtered... slowly! The sound was indescribable.

I had been here only a few weeks, my husband seemed to be always at work and it was raining.

Radha G.

THE PUBLISHER AS A STORYTELLER

(Continued from page 5)

So, yes, there are targets. But sometimes you publish a book in the hope that there is something there; in the knowledge that the author shows promise, and has the potential to emerge as an exceptional writer.

And so to his book...

* * *

The House of Blue Mangoes took ten years to write.

"It isn't easy to run companies and write full time," he says, "but the bulk of it was really written over the last three years." "I started the book when I was 30, and I had no intention of completing it," he discloses. "It was just a nice little thing, puttering along on the backburner."

He already had a career, and the stakes were too high for him to write a book that was perhaps not ambitious enough. Besides, what was he doing, writing and then trying to publish a book, "a little coming-of-age novel", as he puts it, when he himself dealt with the best writers in the country?

Which goes to show that even the star credited with making Penguin India what it is today has his vulnerabilities... and he isn't afraid to acknowledge them.

The work for the next year's diary commences the previous April. In the four States of South India, this diary is used just like a daily and weekly by many families. Our continued effort in this direction is to satisfy the demands of thousands of families, says V. Sethuram, Partner, V. Perumal Chetty & Sons, which owns Hoe & Company.

The book began taking shape and, finally, its present form because of a combination of factors, including his wife, Rachna, who insisted he finish the book, and the support of fellow-author Vikram Seth.

"At one point, I felt I had the story, I had enough material, I saw the shape of it, and then I followed the story like the river to its natural conclusion."

He cites two reasons for having sent it under a pseudonym.

"The noble reason," he says, "was that I didn't want to take advantage of the fact that I'm in touch with some of the top editors the world over."

"The not so noble reason" was simple — fear of rejection.

That old vulnerability again. And having it published abroad?

The CEO of India's leading publishing house admits that "In India, it would have been difficult". There are very few publishers he could have approached... one of them being Penguin themselves, thereby leading to an obvious conflict of interest.

The House of Blue Mangoes is a family saga, set amongst events that span a period between 1899 and 1947.

The reason for setting the framework of a family is simple... it gives you "lots of openings to go in any direction".

It has been said that writers often create circumscribed limits to their fiction so that they can create imaginary stuff within it. A family settlement, like the fictional Doraipuram, core of his book, is really like a parallel universe, and serves the purpose.

Davidar at this point says he would like to correct a common misconception that the novel is autobiographical in any sense, except in the idea of a family settlement.

David Davidar's paternal grandfather, Ambrose, founded such a settlement in Padappai, on the outskirts of Chennai, nearly 50 years ago. The settlement is called Davidnagar, and is "still going strong". There are at least two to three generations living there today. They have a family newsletter, to which David Davidar himself has at times contributed, though not in recent times. But question him closely on Davidnagar, the answers dry up and he says ruefully, "This is embarrassing".

Davidar never lived there, and confesses that he does not possess any intimate knowledge or details about it.

Davidnagar bears no resemblance to Doraipuram at all, except in concept. The place, like the fictional Doraipuram, does keep drawing even far-flung family members back. He has cousins in distant lands who feel the tug of Davidnagar. "They come back for holidays, and some eventually wind their way back here. They feel there really is no place like this."

But Davidar himself has no personal experience of this quality. He also says that he deliberately kept away once the book began to take shape as he did not want to be influenced in any way.

"I didn't want to write biographies", he discloses. "Such books get messy, and can narrow your focus. One's own family as a unit will probably appear boring to everyone else. An imaginary family, on the other hand, offers so much more scope for development and moulding".

And perhaps leave openings for the future?

"Indeed," he agrees. "Yes, I think I will write more..." and leaves it tantalisingly there.

Images of Macondo and *Malgudi* leap into your mind.

(To be concluded next fortnight)

Tamil Nadu gets a Sailing Assn.

Seeing the need for a 'Pure Sailing' institution in Chennai, a core group of yachtsmen and sailing parents have formed the Tamil Nadu Sailing Association which was launched on March 30th. Ramesh Lulla, a former national level sailor, as Commodore of the Association, and Ashok Thakkar, the Vice Commodore of the Association, were instrumental in making it a reality. Lulla brings with him years of sailing experience. TNSA will certainly serve Tamil Nadu and the youth of Chennai as a platform to promote sailing. It is located in the Timber Pond part of the harbour. This is the same location where sailing as a sport began in the city over a hundred years ago. The Port Trust Authorities have given the TNSA what was once the first clubhouse for yachtsmen in Madras.

The aim of the Association is to introduce sailing to students of all social and economic backgrounds and make it affordable to anyone who is interested in learning to sail.

The Governing Council of the Association will comprise the Chairman, Chennai Port Trust, the Secretary, Government of Tamil Nadu, the Naval Officer-In-Charge, Tamil Nadu, and the Chief of Coast Guard. Apart from the Commodore and the Vice-Commodore, the other office-bearers are: Navaz Currimbhoy, Hon. Secretary; Munna Jamal, Captain of Boats;

• by A Special Correspondent

U. Jayraj Rau, Treasurer; Dr. Mushtaq Ali, Official Handicapper & Measurer, and Ishtiaq Currimbhoy and Ajit Diaz, Committee Members.

Sunita Jamal, team manager, will lead a 7-member junior team for an intensive 3-week training camp in Port Dixon in Malaysia, this month. They will return and immediately leave for Mumbai to take part in the Asian Games selection trials in May 2002. The team consists of

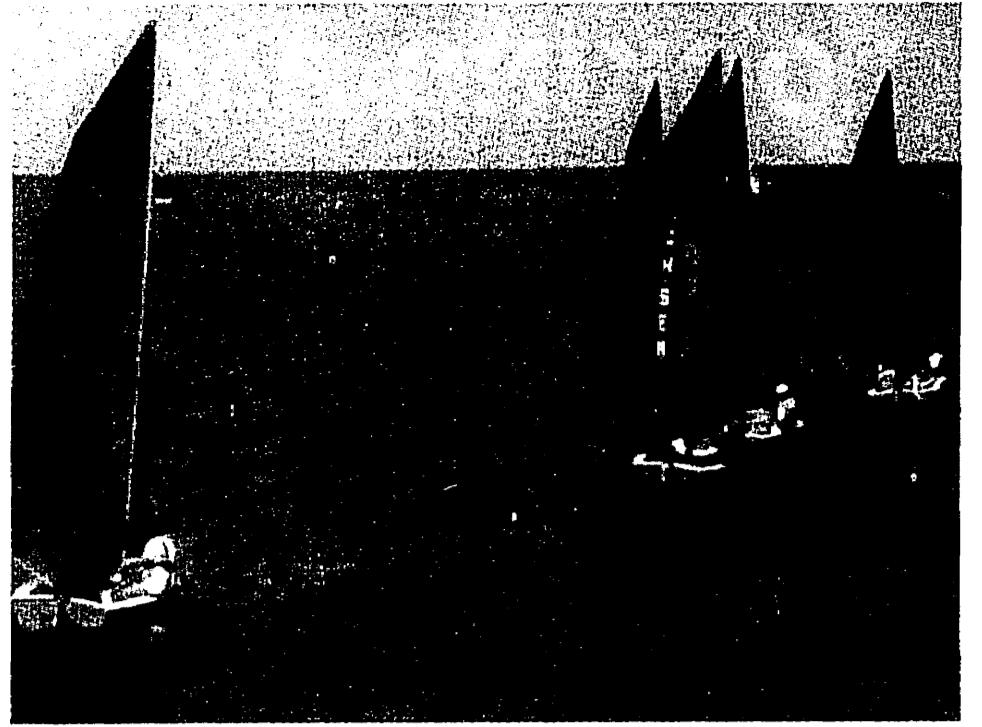
Niloufer Jamal and Rohini Rau – Junior National Champions in the 420 Class, Ajay Rau, Rohit Ashok – Junior National Champion in the Optimist Class, Abhimanyu Nithyanandan, Sooraj and Hamza Bhavnagarwala. Very promising Junior Members are Anusha and 7-year-old Shwetha.

Former national and international level sailors include Navaz Currimbhoy, Ramesh Lulla, Ishtiaq Currimbhoy, Sunita Jamal, Sabitha Currimbhoy and Natasha Jamal.

The TNSA has a fleet of five Optimist boats, two 420 Class boats, four Lasers and three Enterprises. The Association, following the guidelines of the Yachting Association of India, will promote only those classes of boats that are sailed at Asian and international levels. Apart from swelling the present fleet the Association plans to add Radial and Cadet boats in pursuit of this objective.

The Association's ongoing training programme is spearheaded by its Captain of Boats, Munna Jamal, who is currently training and coaching 19 children to sail in the 420 Class of boats, Lasers, Cadets and Optimists.

TNSA encourages children to become student-members at Rs. 50 a month. The Optimist Class is suitable for children between the ages of 7 and 15 years. Coaching and training are conducted by the TNSA inside the boat basin, which is a protected area of the Chennai



Yachting in the Bay of Bengal off Chennai.

Harbour. This is very safe for children. Wearing life jackets while afloat is mandatory. Proficiency in swimming is an advantage and a rescue/coach boat is always near the fleet.

For interested adults and older students, weekend sailing classes can be organised for the Laser and Enterprise Classes.

The TNSA will conduct races every Sunday afternoon from around the time when the wind swings to sea breeze. This programme will conclude around November.

Chennai, where sailing is possible almost throughout the year, has the best possible sail-

ing conditions anywhere in the country. The dark blue waters of Chennai offer the most challenging conditions to any sailor at any level to hone his/her skills.

The Royal Madras Yacht Club, descended from the pioneers of the sport in Madras, the Madras Sailing Club, will continue its sailing and social activities from its own tidy little 1987 clubhouse across the 'pond' from the TNSA.

NOTE: For further details call The Tamil Nadu Sailing Association at 535 3857 or email it at tamilnadusailing-association@hotmail.com

Answers to Quiz

1. Railways; 2. Wipro's Azim Premji with a net worth of \$ 6.4 billion in the 41st spot; 3. The multi-crore Jharkhand Mukti Morcha bribery case; 4. The Lok Sabha Speaker, G.M.C. Balayogi; 5. Indiva; 6. The Dag Hammarskjold Medal; 7. Uttar Pradesh; 8. Arundati Roy; 9. Germany; 10. Digambar Akhara.

* * *

11. S. Muthiah; 12. PWD, High-

ways, Prisons & Prohibition and Excise; 13. First woman Joint Director of CBI; 14. Vaideeswarankoil and Thirunallar respectively; 15. The World Bank; 16. The Roadways (Rs. 75 crore) and Health (Rs. 50 lakh); 17. The British Deputy High Commissioner's official residence in Chennai; 18. Imam Ali and Hyder Ali; 19. Ariyalur and Perambalur; 20. Jayalalitha and Karunanidhi.

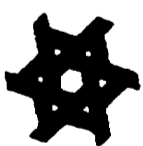
VANDALISED MURALS

(Continued from page 1)

The INTACH Chitrakala Parishath Art Conservation Centre (ICKPAC), Bangalore, has examined about 250 old prints (etchings, lithographs, etc.) belonging to the Ooty Club and prepared a conservation report on these prints.

ICKPAC has also examined the early 12th Century mural paintings (total area about 5200 sq. feet) in the Sri Thyagarajaswami Temple at Thiruvarur, Tamil Nadu, and submitted a report on their state of preservation recommended and methods of conservation treatment.

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