

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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No, No ... It says 'Most Recent Photo'!

Voices from the 21st Century

Heard about the Keo, the friendly neighbourhood satellite, all set to be launched end-2003 or early 2004, filled with millions of messages, and destined to orbit the Earth for 500 centuries before returning in fiery splendour bearing messages from the past... which is, of course, our own present?

(Is your head throbbing? Well, pain invariably accompanies thought.)

You have to applaud the optimism of a group of people, ably led by Jean-Marc Philippe who, serenely unimpressed by all the evidence pointing to Mankind's fervent desire for self-destruction, actually believe that the world will still be around 50,000 years from now.

Their mission is to connect people through the centuries.

You know the best way to achieve this?

Through Soap Opera plots.

Seriously – pack a bunch of soap opera plots from around the world and I am willing to bet when these old parchments from the past are lifted out tenderly and read, there will be rejoicing through the land. Storylines will be recognised, and people will learn that shenanigans were intrinsic to their ancestors' lives too, and parents, children, cousins, business partners, friends and neighbours cheated, stole, lied, loved, laughed, cried, were violent and, invariably (and endearingly), managed to mess up the simplest of situations.

Unchanging Human Nature is your connection, and proof that people will always be people.

(Optimism is obviously infectious.)

Ranjitha Ashok

Ennore Port promises...

A commitment to sustain eco-friendliness

In MM, August 16th, in the Ennore-Pulicat Environmental Protection Forum's plea for an eco-heritage site, it is mentioned that the location of Ennore Harbour has been the chief cause of environmental and human tragedies and that, consequent to the construction of the harbour, the Ennore Creek has got clogged. It has also been stated that there has been considerable beach erosion to the north of the port, at Korai Kuppam and Sattan Kuppam. The following information would put these issues in the correct perspective:

A perusal of the records of the TNEB would show that the clogging of Ennore Creek has been a recurring feature much before Ennore Port was constructed. This is part of a natural coastal process. 'Littoral Drift' is quite common on the east coast of India, north of Point Calimere. The accretion and erosion occur depending upon the wind and wave directions and the currents. It is possible that the construction of Ennore Harbour might have resulted in additional clogging, but this can only be confirmed by appropriate technical studies. Therefore, it would be incorrect to state emphatically that clogging of the Ennore Creek is a direct consequence of the construction of Ennore Harbour. Nevertheless, Ennore Harbour is planning a constructive response to the problem. It is proposing to construct four groyne walls, which would arrest the sand movement towards the Creek.

Beach erosion

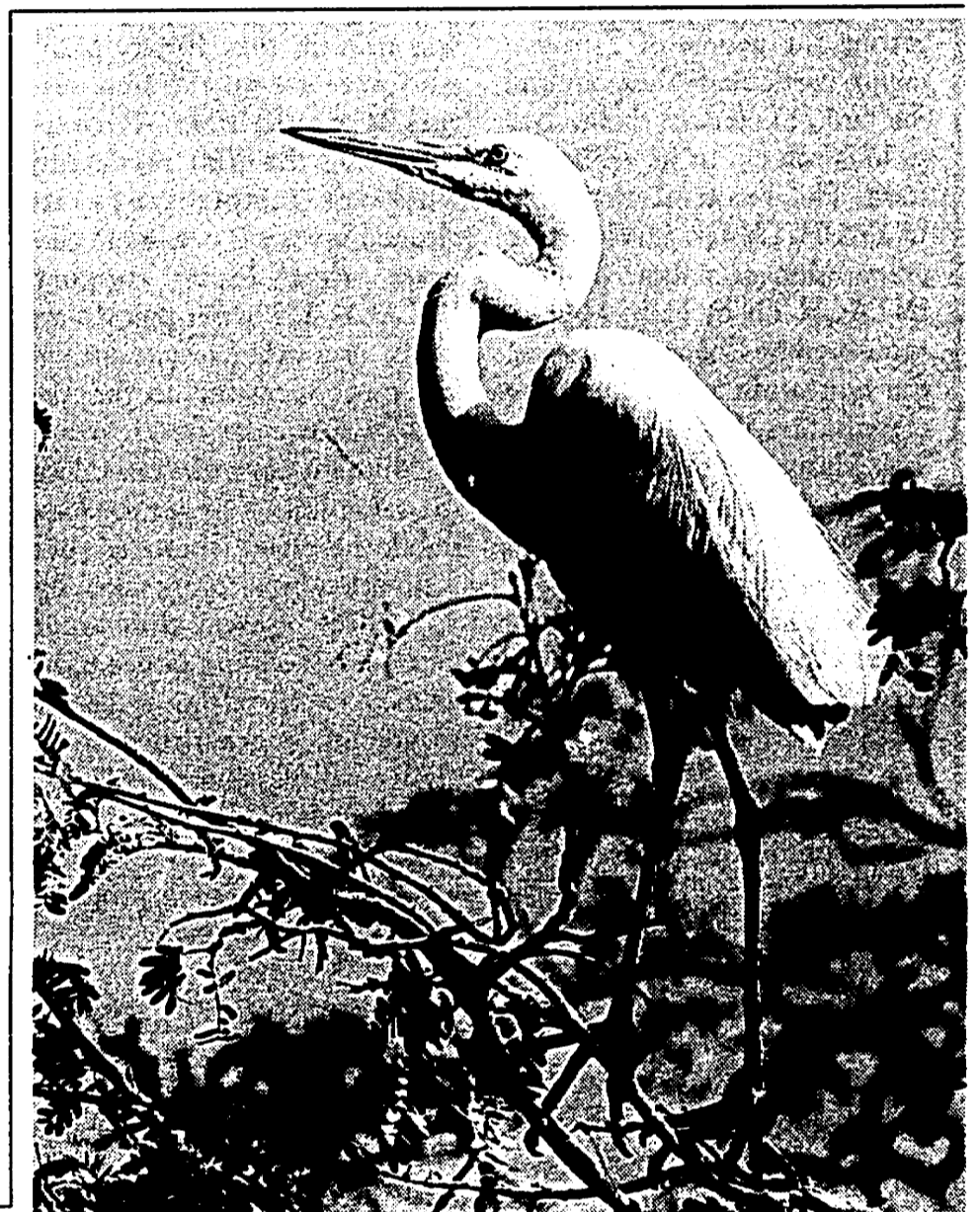
Even during the construction of Ennore Port, as part of a conscious decision, the Company dumped nearly 4 million cu.m. of dredged material as beach nourishment in the areas north of the port. This will be a

continuous process, more or less on a yearly basis. The dredged material from the port would be deposited on the northern side as a contribution to beach stabilisation and would arrest beach erosion, if there is any.

Ennore Port, aware of its social responsibilities and what it owes to environment and society around the port, is committed to a green and clean port. Some of the measures undertaken by the Port in the last few months to protect the ecological balance and save biodiversity in and around it are:

- As part of its environment management plan, the Port

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Portrait of a lone egret. (Photograph P. RAMANAN.)

Requiem for bird habitats

Early in 1990, a continuous tree canopy over a theological college campus and adjoining residential complex that spilled along Kellys Road over to the Telephone Exchange provided an ideal attraction for Night Herons which used them only for roosting during daytime. After the first serious study-oriented sighting made by Raghavan of the Madras Naturalists' Society in November 1996, there has been noticed in succeeding years a considerable increase in the number of wetland birds using the area as breeding sites. It was a classic pattern of colonisation by a considerable wetland bird population — Night Herons, Little Egrets and Little Cormorants. But from late 1998, NO birds have been seen here.

In retrospect, it was a typical situation that represented a conflict of interests — human concern for health and wetland birds' ecological necessities. At

the Kelly's college, rumblings of discontent surfaced and touched a peak every time a sharp shower drenched the tree canopy (since bird droppings and fish remains undergo hydrolysis in rainwater, releasing ammonia and phosphine). About which, says naturalist and bird-watcher V. Gurusami, "Only a dyed-in-the-wool bird addict could take the cocktail stench in his stride. The genuine grievance of residents, centred on the impact of bird refuse on children's health, forced the campus authorities to initiate remedial measures. They promised to carry out, in consultation with naturalists, the removal of peripheral branches only after the birds dispersed after the breeding cycle. Unfortunately, unforeseen circumstances caused the tree chopping to be advanced to January 1998, when all the nests in the axed branches were occupied by flightless nestlings".

Newspapers, alerted by several people and many versions of the episode — grounded in a lack of knowledge of the ecology of the birds, along with the residents' apprehensions — blew the whole story out of proportion. But the adverse publicity left the college authorities shaken. Their faith in fair-minded naturalists plummeting, their willingness to give free access for even serious study waned. By August-September 1998, when the bulk of the birds had dispersed, the 'vexing' problem was thoroughly solved by eliminating all the nesting trees to preclude all chances of future colonisation and later conflict!

Questions Gurusami, "Would a positive write-up in media before the tree-felling episode have motivated the campus authorities to preserve the ecosystem? Would events have taken a different turn had

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The Police, an integral part of the public, are in fact citizens, acting on behalf of fellow-citizens and, therefore, entitled to the full support of the citizenry. Equally, Police success cannot be achieved without public support and cooperation.

In order to secure and maintain good public relations, the Police must establish satisfactory contacts with the individual citizen and also seek to influence the large majority of the people with whom it may not be possible to come into personal contact but whom it can contact through the Press.

But is the Police Force which has the best Press Relations the most popular or has the Police Force which is popular with the public achieved that position by maintaining good relations with the Press?

For example, the British Police, without doubt, enjoy the greatest amount of public support and goodwill. Is this due to maintaining excellent relations with the Press? The answer is 'yes' and 'no'. Good Press Relations is only part of the answer.

Why then is the British Police so popular with the public? A historian has suggested that they are popular because they are kind and helpful. It is true that the British Police have a long and splendid tradition of patience and courtesy, but that does not satisfactorily explain how the British Police can afford to be kind.

The truth is that the popularity of the British Police is due to it enforcing laws acceptable by and large to the majority of the people. This, in turn, is due to, firstly, the laws having been enacted by a democratic process in a country where the common man understands what is being legislated and, secondly, the Police not enforcing unpopular

The Police, the Press and the Public

laws, such as Fuel and Price Controls, the enforcement of which is undertaken by special officers of the Ministries concerned. The third reason for the popularity of the British Police is that the British are law-abiding and have a fairly high sense of social responsibility.

Thus, good Press Relations alone is not the answer to the issue of popularity. But it is a very important factor. As the mass media can be used to influence the large majority of the public with whom the Police may not come into contact and as the Press has a tremendous capacity to mould public opinion, it is necessary for the Police to cultivate the Press consciously and continuously.

Nothing whets a newspaper reader's curiosity more than the stories of human interest uncovered by the Police. They are the stories of plots, incidents, feuds, successes and passions of mankind. Criminal offences occur in all social and economic classes. In their investigations, the Police lay open the secrets of private lives for the curious and morbid public to feed on. These are the dramatic stories which boost circulation. Every newspaper reader feels he has a right to such stories and it is this thirst for news which produces the characteristically aggressive and competitive nature of the Press. And so, in its search for news, the Press always keeps a close eye on the Police and its reporters try to establish contact with the Police at all levels.

But should Police news be purveyed to the Press and how

should it be channelled? Should a beat constable or an investigation officer be permitted to answer questions or release information about a Police incident? It is felt universally by Police administrators that they are not sufficiently qualified to deal with representatives of the Press. The Press for its part is reluctant to accept this point of view for the following reasons:-

— Such a policy prevents reporters from obtaining a first-hand account of Police incidents.

• by **F.V. Arul**
Former Inspector
General of Police,
Tamil Nadu

— It prevents the reporter from getting the correct answers to all his questions.

— It causes the reporter additional work and very often keeps him from getting the story on time.

— It often causes the reporter to give the credit for good work to a supervising officer, when actually the credit is a subordinate's.

— Many good stories of human interest are lost to the Press because they are matters of official record and the sources of such stories have been blocked.

These disadvantages to the Press may result from the policy of prohibiting the lower ranks from communicating with the Press. On the other hand, it results in the policy of top officers of the Police Department being

safeguarded. It is not my case that wrong acts or mistakes should be hushed up. Any remissness on the part of the Police should certainly be taken note of and disciplinary action instituted where necessary, but publicity tending to adversely affect the whole Department, in turn hampering public relations, should be avoided.

There is, thus, in the field of crime investigation, an inescapable conflict of interest between the Police and the Press. The sole business of the Police is to trace the criminal and bring him to justice. They are not concerned with the popular taste for sensational stories. In fact, public interest may often be a hindrance rather than a help. The reporter's business, on the other hand, is to secure stories, the juicier the better. Competitiveness amongst papers and reporters is keen. A reporter's success is judged by the steady supply of information he gives the public on a sensational case. He must watch the movements of the investigating officers. He may sometimes interview relations and friends of the victim. He is even sometimes tempted to do a certain amount of investigation on his own. This inevitably embarrasses the officers on the case who have to expend energies and ingenuity in eluding the attentions of the reporters when they should be concerned solely with the case. A more important point, from the Police view, is that a certain degree of secrecy is necessary in many instances, to prevent a criminal trying to evade capture finding out what line of enquiry

the Police are following, what places they have visited and who they have questioned.

We must at the same time acknowledge the great services rendered by the Press both to the Police and the public, both in the matter of prevention and detection of crime. Quite recently, a woman travelling to Bombay by train was found murdered when the train reached its destination. Neither her identity nor the culprits' was known. The Bombay Police sent a photograph of the deceased woman to the Madras Police who gave copies to the vernacular papers for publication. Within 24 hours, the relations of the deceased woman, who were in Salem, identified the photograph. This helped a great deal in the investigation. But for the quick identification of the deceased, a number of valuable clues would have been lost. There was another case of murder in Dindigul and once again the identity of the deceased person was not known. No sooner the vernacular newspapers published photographs given by the Police, some relations identified the deceased. This helped solve the case.

Thus, the Press is of great service both to the Police and the public. It also renders great help in preventing crime. When a cheat is at large adopting a particular *modus operandi* or there is a spate of crime of a particular kind in a certain locality, publication of the information that the Police have gathered enables the public to be alert and to avoid becoming victims. There is, therefore, no doubt that by close co-operation between the Press, the Police and Public, the good of the community at large can be promoted.

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