

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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"Violet-green for all of us"

Hair-raising

The human race's valiant (and sometimes quaintly conceited) efforts to improve upon the charms Nature bestowed upon its members are never-ending. They cut, snip, add, subtract, paint – anything to achieve the Body Beautiful, and get the better of a mischievous fate that, uncaring of personal ambition, invariably, and unkindly, orders that a strong resemblance to an experiment in an old Gothic novel be one's lot.

For a while now, it's been open season on crowning glories, proving that our good citizens too display this naive belief in their ability to outsmart natural law.

The powers-that-be had once decreed that the subcontinent generally grew heads of dark brown to black hair. A decade ago, the prospect of a parrot-green head of hair gamboling up the steps of certain much-respected, age-old centres of culture and tradition, (hitherto only used to dark, sometimes severely oiled, hair juxtaposed with reams of jasmine strands), was unthinkable.

Not any more.

We now have heads of hair displaying a range of colours that runs the gamut of a child's painting box – discreet strands in some cases, thick tumbling locks in others. Multiple contrasting colours share one head with ease, and purple nestles alongside shocking pink or blue, surrounded by natural black.

What now?

Education/workplaces setting rules on 'acceptable' colours? Matrimonial ads adding 'great hair colour' to that strange list of attributes, starting with 'tall, fair, homely', etc?

Ranjitha Ashok

Gokhale Hall: What awaits it?

(By V. Sriram)

What is the fate that awaits another historic building that would be on any Chennai Heritage List if only the city/State had laws to protect such buildings? There is talk that Gokhale Hall, that Annie Besant built in George Town and which became famous as much for oratory as for the classical music heard there, may, at worst, be pulled down to make way for a more modern building or, at best, have its interior completely re-modelled to suit the changing times, leaving the facade intact – if that is engineeringly possible.

Certainly, the building appears to be still structurally sound. That the managing committee of the Young Men's Indian Association (YMIA) (which ironically mainly comprises heritage-conscious senior citizens) would like to develop the building and get some returns from its commercial use is also understandable. But that as a building with a venerable history it warrants preserving the ambience of the times when it was a building of significance, while at the same time meeting today's commercial require-

ments by planning for adaptive reuse, is a thought that cannot be ignored.

The committee appears to have in mind a plan whereby the shell of the building would be maintained but internally it would undergo a sea change. It also wants a car park provided for in the ground floor. How feasible these wishes are and how they would affect the structure of Gokhale Hall itself, which in height rises from the

(Continued on Page 5)



The YMIA Building, Armenian Street, better known as Gokhale Hall.
(Photographs: REFLECTIONS.)

Another threat to heritage?

(By A Special Correspondent)

A threat to some of the heritage buildings in Tirumala has left several heritage-conscious devotees in Madras quite concerned. "Strongly protesting" against plans being drawn up by the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, they have written to the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, the Chairman

of the TTD Trust Board and the Executive Officer, TTD, urging them "to ensure the traditions and *sampradayams* are followed and our heritage is not destroyed".

In this letter, they state:

- We understand a third *prakaara* is planned. Do you mean to say that the original

builders of this temple were not aware of *Aagama Saastras* and they have built only two *prakaaras* and you are rectifying the same by constructing another *prakaara*? TTD publications clearly say that there are already three *prakaaras*; how then can a third *prakaara*

(Continued on Page 3)

NO LONGER 'POSTPONED'?

(By A Special Correspondent)

The on again, off again, on again new Secretariat is no longer being postponed. At least, that is the message a notice in the daily newspapers indicates.

The notice calls for empanelment of "principal contractors" for the "proposed construction of a state-of-the-art New Secretariat Complex and ancillary buildings in Kottur Village of Mylapore-Triplicane Taluk, Chennai." The project is described in these terms: "(A) Complex having majestic tall dome structures with special architectural features clad with stone ... on a land extent of 43 acres on Gandhi Mandapam Road in Kottur Village ... The Building is a reinforced structure of Ground+5 upper floors with a built up area of approximately 2.0 million square feet." The notice goes on to state that the project must be completed "in all respects" and the building ready for occupation in "18 months' time".

So, Government, it would seem, is determined to go ahead with a project that it had committed

itself to, ignoring the views of many a citizen and group who have opposed the scheme. When, immediately after the election results that did not favour the Government in power in the State, it was decided by Government to "postpone" the project, many who did not favour the project took it to mean that, on second thoughts, there was a change of thinking on the project. They buttressed such assessments by pointing out that the withdrawal of several income-earning and cost-saving measures by Government would leave it strapped for cash for such a costly undertaking. Now it would appear that on third thoughts Government appears to have taken the view of 'in for a penny, in for a pound' and so is determined to go ahead with building the New Secretariat, unconcerned about the impact on the exchequer.

But determined as Government is to leave a monumental mark in the city, will it be allowed to have its way unopposed? The next few weeks will tell.



The entrance to Gokhale Hall.

Now another Sethu project report

For nearly 150 years now, there's been discussion about the Sethusamudram Project and, today, we are no further than at any time in the past. Now, the new Union Minister for Shipping, Road Transport and Highways, while promising to see the project through in the next five years, is looking for consultants to prepare a Detailed Project Report (DPR). The Man From Madras Musings wonders what's going to be new in the DPR sought that hasn't appeared in DPRs from pre-Independence days. Are new consultants being invited to reinvent the wheel and put new numbers to the project or are they going to suggest something dramatically different from all that's been repeatedly stated in previous DPRs?

Let's forget the project reports prepared in the days of the Raj. Since Independence, there's been the Sir A. Ramaswamy Mudaliar Project Report in 1955, the Lakshminarayana report in 1983 and the Pallavan Transport Corporation Consultancy report in 1996. The cost has risen from Rs.10 crore to Rs.280 crore to Rs.750 crore. At the rate that cost has been escalating, we'll be looking at something like Rs.2000 crore is MMM's estimate, and forget the mounting consultancy charges. But the cost is not the issue. The issues are: (1) does the project make economic sense, and (2) will the environment remain unaffected?

The 20 km-long, 300 m wide, 12m deep canal - as proposed in the past - cutting across Adam's Bridge, and a 36 km stretch in the Palk Bay dredged to a depth of 12m, are expected to make possible a reduction of 400 nautical miles in the journey for ships going from one coast of India to the other. No more would they have to travel around Sri Lanka. But will there be that much shipping to reflect the quantity of savings necessary to make the project cost effective, wonders MMM. More importantly, will Tuticorin Port provide the kind of efficiency in service that Colombo provides? If it doesn't, what we win on the swings, we might lose on the roundabouts.

The strongest supporters of the scheme believe that the Sethu Project will help the Fisheries Coast hinterland to improve tremendously. But if that is to happen it would call for considerable additional investment in infrastructure such as power, road expansion, accommodation and educational and medical facilities. And after all that, why would industries wish to invest in the area when their markets are further north (unless they are purely export-focussed)? With Indian industry's biggest market being India, what does the Fisheries Coast hinterland offer it by way of advantage over other parts of the South? When, in the 1930s and 40s and 50s, India was less developed and every paisa

counted, new development in the Fisheries Coast hinterland made as much sense as anywhere else - and the potential saving on shipping costs would have been significant for the times. That is not the situation that exists today - and, therefore, an Economic Impact Assessment, it strikes MMM, is as important as an Environment Impact Assessment.

Enviro-impact

An Environment Impact Assessment - *The Man From Madras Musings* is not certain how exhaustive it is - has apparently been carried out by the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute. And its report to the Sethu Project's nodal agency, the Tuticorin Port Trust, is not the most favourable of ones, MMM understands - even if it is from a fellow Government agency.

The report has apparently pointed out that the canal and the dredging will permanently impact

If the situation is so bad, *The Man From Madras Musings* wonders what all the money spent recently in cleaning up the rivers has achieved. The Tamil Nadu Government has been stating that almost 85% of the work is over, that most of the money has been spent usefully on the work, and that the waterways are already much cleaner than they were. MMM wonders where lies the truth between these two diametrically opposite assessments.

But whatever the truth, one thing is certain, in MMM's view. And that is that no major cleaning process can be completed in two years, that it has to be continued for several years and that, thereafter, it has to be sustained to the degree that what has been cleaned remains clean and is kept cleaned. And sustaining such cleaning efforts are the hardest thing in the State.

In this connection, it might be pointed out that the Marina cleaning operation started out a few months ago with a lot of fanfare heralding the magic a new

Spain reflects the thoughts expressed by MMM above. Spain's parched southeast is to get 20 desalination plants to meet its water shortage. These plants will replace a scheme that had planned "to raid the fast-running rivers of the relatively well-watered north." The thinking was that those who might have water at present but can scarce afford to do with less should not be asked to make any sacrifices when alternatives are possible - like desalination plants. And that's the way we too should be reacting, MMM feels.

Private enterprise

There's been talk by both the Government and Corporation of Madras for some years now of building multistorey parking lots. While officialdom keeps talking, the private sector, a trader in the area who saw an opportunity to increase his earnings, has put up a multistorey parking lot not far from Ranganathan Street, T. Nagar, to cope

with what is perhaps the busiest street in the city.

Reinventing ideas

For years the backwaters of Pichavaram and the mangrove wealth of the waterways there have been known to anyone interested in tourism. For years the promoters of off-beat holidays have called for the development of eco-friendly facilities in the area and more up-market facilities a little way up or down the coast, from Cuddalore to Tranquebar. Nothing has ever come of all the suggestions made.

The Man From Madras Musings finds that a college project team has now discovered the potential of Pichavaram and has been recommending that it be developed as an eco-tourism destination. They should do similar studies at Pulicat and Point Calimere and Mandapam - and they'll come to the same conclusions others have many years ago. They'll also discover that no matter how many times you re-invent ideas for such tourism destinations, nothing will happen at the official level because tourism is something this State is least cut out for.

Meanwhile, MMM continues to hear that the coral wealth of the Gulf of Mannar National Park, off Mandapam, continues to be illegally exploited and every day more of the reef is lost. Loss of the reef not only diminishes the tourism potential of an area that could have exploited this wealth as much as the Maldives and parts of Sri Lanka, but could also have an adverse effect on the fisheries, diminishing breeding space. But who cares so long as a quick buck is to be made.

Another area awaiting tourism exploitation is the Nilgiris Mountain Railways. MMM was glad to hear that one or two large groups - even if they be domestic groups - chartered NMR trains and made the Mettupalayam - Udahgamandalam journey a fun-filled five-hour one. Such chartered trips - especially under steam power all the way - are something that could be promoted for groups of foreign tourists. The train's steam power which most of them would not have seen, and the splendid vistas by day and dusk is something that could be sold internationally. But who in tourist circles ever thinks that the NMR has any tourist potential? Anything off the beaten track gets short shrift in such circles. May be the Railways - which shows greater willingness to progress - will make better use of a great opportunity.

— MMM

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

the flora and fauna of the area, both by loss of indigenous species as well as by migration through the channel. This in turn will affect the fisherfolk of the area. The counter-argument is likely to be that the loss of marine flora and fauna and the consequent loss of livelihood of those dependent on sea produce will be compensated by the new opportunities the hinterland will throw open.

The other concern expressed in NEERT's report is the pollution the heavy traffic is likely to cause in the Palk Strait and Palk Bay.

Both these concerns, however, have not made NEERT request the Government to have second thoughts about the project. It suggests going ahead with the project, but at the same time implementing NEERT's environment management plans to curb the degradation of the seas. It, of course, like every Government department is confident of the success of whatever it recommends; it does not for a moment think like MMM does that we have the world's best laws and the greatest of intentions but the worst implementation and enforcement.

Doomed or not?

Predicting that the Cooum is doomed in the near future and that the Adyar faces the same fate not very long afterwards is a study by the Anna University's Centre for Environmental Studies. The Buckingham Canal fell somewhere in between.

imported machine would do. But already there are signs that the effort is less committed than before. And one end of the Marina - near the Foreshore Estate Kuppams - is worse than ever before, with no one taking the time or effort to assess why this is happening.

Water for the city

The latest plan for water for the city is to connect all the lakes and other waterbodies around Chennai. Now that the city has virtually wiped out its 39 water tanks and several other water sources, *The Man From Madras Musings* quite understands the anxiety of planners to reach for other sources of water not far from the city, but do they for a moment when drawing up such plans think of what tapping into those sources will do those dependent on those waterbodies?

With Tamil Nadu being a water-short State during the last few years, water shortage is not just an urban problem. Even the areas around cities are water-short. To tap into their water sources to serve the city is hardly fair or wise, unless their PRESENT needs are ensured in the future too AFTER the linking of the waterbodies. And those assurances are not only unlikely, but if made are even less likely to be honoured.

Despite all the Cassandra-like views on water desalination, particularly on the grounds of its cost, MMM feels that that is the only answer to Chennai's water woes. A recent news item from

with what is perhaps the busiest street in the city.

Now there's talk again of building a multistorey parking lot in the George Town area, making use of the space that has become available after the mofussil buses moved to Koyambedu. But, as usual, together with the talk of building goes the discussion over who is to build a facility that will help decongest George Town to an extent: the Corporation or the Government? Surely it would be easier to stop that discussion and launch a build-operate-and-transfer project?

For years now, *The Man From Madras Musings* has been hearing of various plans to decongest the city, particularly of its traffic. Surely it's time to realise that nothing will happen unless such plans are moved out of the orbit of officialdom and into BOT projects.

No interlinking

The city and suburbs, *The Man From Madras Musings* learns, has scores of small software developing outfits and back office service providers. While most of them are able to keep their heads above water, they are unable to grow to any great extent even though most of them have spare capacities.

Experts in the field tell MMM that these companies will boom if only they link up with each other, say, in networks of 10-15 small or medium-scale units and bid for bigger business TOGETHER and SHARE the business when it materialises.

OUR READERS WRITE

Boats again?

One are the days when transport through Buckingham Canal was very popular. I still remember my trip as a boy scout of Subramania Scout group of P.S. High School, from Luz to Perungudi, by boat to attend scout camps.

I will be very happy if I were to see in my lifetime (for I am aged 72), the revival of this grand form of transport by whosoever is in charge of environment concerns.

P.A. Ranganathan
Old 16, New 24
Vellala Gardens
Mandaveli Street
Chennai 600 028

Valparai queries

I am intrigued by this town called Valparai which I understand lies in Coimbatore District. I'd like to know (1) where exactly it is situated, (2) what are its special geographical or other properties which cause it to enjoy bountiful rainfall, and (3) what happens to this copious rainfall; does it flow towards Kerala or Tamil Nadu and is it properly conserved?

I find that for the month of June alone, Valparai received a total of 883 mm of rainfall, much more than any other place in the South. Whereas we in Chennai see these fat clouds sailing overhead depositing their bounty in the Bay of Bengal - or Bangladesh - here is a place that seems to attract rainfall, much more than Ooty which is also at a high altitude amidst high mountain ranges.

The villages of Madras

Chennai's erstwhile paddy field (MM, June 16th) is not surprising. Though traditionally Thanjavur District was considered the 'granary of the South' because of the river Kavery, the lands in Thondaimandalam area commanded fancy prices when compared to Thanjavur. Such was the fertility of the lands and excellence of water management, with not even a drop of rainwater being wasted judging from the number of lakes in Chingleput District, in and around Madras City.

These lakes have been formed keeping in mind the natural gradients of the land, so that the rainwaters just flowed into them. The city itself is a conglomerate of villages and even now if you look at the revenue records, places like Mylapore, Triplicane, Nungambakam, Mambalam are mentioned as villages. Each village was formed in and around a temple and its tank and in between the villages were the paddy fields.

Though the paddy fields are no longer there, it would have been better if these lakes had been maintained properly so that they would serve as reservoirs for the surrounding colonies. Unfortunately even the lakes had been turned into housing colonies without any thought of water resources. At least now care should be taken to preserve whatever is left to save the citizens from water crisis year after year.

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

Street answers

The letter about a street that has been encroached on, in MM, June 16th, presents a vivid picture of what is happening to urban streets in Tamil Nadu. But will it make the authorities act to redress the citizenry's grievances?

The letter highlights several problems involving various authorities. Could we form citizens' associations to survey such problems in particular streets of Chennai and present them at meetings to which all the authorities involved are invited to attend?

If a mechanism for such joint meetings is evolved by a nodal authority like the Corporation and then implemented, it will bring about a remarkable change in the



Preserve that family picture

Reader T. Kaleeswaran of 5, VII Cross Street, Mahalakshminagar, West Velacherry, Chennai 600 089, writes: I refer to the articles and pictures in MM, May 16th. To induce other families to preserve their heritage, I send you this picture taken in Madras in 1927 of three generations in a family. This family picture is a prestigious possession in our family circle. I request you to publish this picture so that it may be catalytic in getting readers to preserve such possessions for posterity.

There was nothing out of the ordinary about this family, but everyone contributed his mite in his way without pomp or publicity. Their success in whatever they undertook was mainly due to their devotion to the joint family system, based on mutual trust and a give-and-take attitude.

S. Thiagarajan, sitting on floor, 4th from right, became a sub-postmaster but was better known in photographic circles as a portrait-photographer. He authored many books on photography and Mumbai educational institutions prescribed them in their syllabus. Recently, he has written books on Videography also. He has also compiled in book form a comprehensive family genealogy.

with photographs of various important family occasions. Now in his 90s, he is still active in retirement in Bangalore/Mumbai. He is the only living person in this photograph.

K. Rajagopalan, M.A. (standing third from left) was a popular Mathematics Professor at National College in Trichy. Mary a student still reveres him for his teaching. Standing 6th from right (with a cap) is T.S. Krishnamurthy, who was venturesome enough to start an automobile business: The Auto & General Supplies, in General Pater's Road. It has now completed 50 years. Its office is in the Bharat Insurance Building.

S. Thiagarajan, M.A. (standing 2nd from right) served as a sub-registrar in the Registration Department almost throughout Madras State. A meticulous and conscientious official, he even went to the length of personally satisfying himself about the bonafides of the documents presented for registration by Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Mut. He was suitably rewarded by no less a person than Sri Sri His Holiness Chन्द्रasekarendra Swamikal, who took great pains to teach him the nuances and the purpose behind verification of original documents.

life of Madras that is Chennai, I assure.

Shyam Sunder
Sri Aurobindo's Action
Pondicherry 605 002.

Railway memories

Railway Minister Laloo Prasad's idea of introducing kulhards is not new.

After Itarsi-Jhansi, in days gone by, travelling by Grand Trunk Express - now laid to rest - it was quite common to hear tea vendors with a kettle and a basket of kulhards crying out "Hindu Chai", "Muslim Chai". This had no religious connotation; it was just that the tea was flavoured in a different way. Muslim Chai, if I remember right, was flavoured with cardomom and Hindu Chai with a little jeera or other condiment. Can't imagine such a cry these days.

When you had a stop-over at Itarsi, you could order a North Indian thali or a Madras thali, the latter only Madras in name for if you had tasted good South Indian food, there was no comparison. In those days, all people down South were termed Madrasis!

Just some musings of yesteryears.

Anna Varki
21, Kilpauk Garden Colony
Chennai 600 010.

Beyond Chennai

The recent State election results in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh have raised doubts about urban-biased economic reform and development strategies, which have focussed on the State capitals, Bangalore and Hyderabad.

In Tamil Nadu also, the bulk of the investments in the infrastructural, industrial, service and educational sectors has been made in and around Chennai in the last 5-10 years. The State Government should reorient priorities to look beyond Chennai and disperse industrial and developmental activi-

ties to district and rural centres and create employment opportunities in the districts and check migration into Chennai.

A new technological university may be set up in Trichy or Madurai (Anna University has become unwieldy) to upgrade technical education and industrial research in the interior and southern districts. A medical and health university at Madurai and an agricultural university in the southern region may also be considered.

J.W. Thomas
9, Ritherdon Road
Chennai 600 007.

THREAT TO HERITAGE?

(Continued from page 1)

be constructed? If it becomes a fourth prakara, it cannot be constructed as that will be against the sastras. This must be stopped immediately.

Do not destroy such heritage buildings as the Veyyikaalla Mandapam, Anandalwaan house and garden, Golladaani Mandapam and Maada veedhis. These structures should be restored in their original places.

If the ropeway project is still being considered, it should

not be implemented. Tirumala must be maintained as a pilgrim centre and not a picnic spot.

The letter goes on to draw the attention of the authorities to two other matters: (1) The way the TTD staff treat (or, rather, ill-treat) pilgrims, and (2) the laddus given as darshan prasad not being those prepared in the temple.

The devotees in Madras are planning to follow up this appeal with a signature campaign.

• Subsequent to reports in *Madras Musings*, this news story by SAM RAJAPPA, *The Statesman's* veteran Madras-based correspondent, appeared in the Kolkata paper under the headline 'Sacrilege in the Basilica'.

The diggings in the Basilica

Defying an order of the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority, the nave of the San Thomé Cathedral basilica, wherein lie buried bishops, is being dug up to make an underground passage to the tomb of St. Thomas. The basilica is one of the most important international monuments of not only Christianity but of world heritage. Of the 12 disciples of Christ, churches have been built over the mortal remains of only two: St. Peter in Rome and St. Thomas in Mylapore. While churches of less antiquity, like St. Mary's in Fort St. George and St. Francis in Fort Kochi, have been declared protected monuments by the Archaeological Survey of India, San Thomé somehow escaped attention.

The last time any excavation was done in the San Thomé church site was in 1923, but it was carried out under the overall direction of Sir John Marshal of the Archaeological Department and the direct supervision of Hirananda Sastri and I.J. Kanaka of the same department. S.N.A. Subramanian was the official photographer. A complete inventory of antiquities discovered in and around the church was recorded in Rev Fr Hosten's monumental work, *Antiquities from San Thome and Mylapore*. This time, the excavation was left to insensitive and reckless construction workers. Immediate intervention of the Archaeological Survey of India and the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) is called for.

S.K. Misra, chairman of INTACH, has written to Lakshmi Pranesh, Chief Secretary, Government of Tamil Nadu, seeking prevention of further damage to the historical church. Pending action by the Archaeological Survey of India to declare San Thomé Cathedral

a protected monument, he suggested that the Municipal Corporation of Chennai and the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority take immediate steps under local laws to prevent the church authorities from carrying out changes contrary to accepted conservation principles. The State government should also consider introduction of heritage regulations on a priority basis, he said in his letter to the Chief Secretary. The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 defines ancient monuments as "any structure, erection or monument, or any tumulus or place of interment, or any cave, rock-sculpture, inscription or monolith, which is of historical, archaeological or artistic interest and which has been in existence for not less than 100 years".

That the San Thomé Basilica needs immediate attention, nobody denies. During the monsoon last year rainwater was found seeping onto the altar. The lime and brick plaster is cracking and falling. There is damage to the priceless stained glass in the windows behind the altar, incorrect use of plaster for minor repairs, ageing wood on windows, badly decaying plaster inside the church and recurring dampness caused by leakage in the Mangalore-tiled roof over timber trusses.

Instead of focussing on the restoration, contractors have been busy digging the nave to construct a tunnel, threatening the structural safety of the cathedral.

The Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority's Enforcement Cell in its order calling to stop work immediately, said: "Your construction at the site under reference was inspected. No approved plan has been exhibited at the site or produced when called for. Therefore, you are requested to produce a copy of the approved plan in original for verification and if no approved plan is available or the construction is in deviation to the approved plan, you are requested to stop the work immediately and confirm in writing the fact of having done so... If you fail to comply with this notice, this Authority will be constrained to take legal action against the construction under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1971". The church ignored the letter and the work goes on.

When church authorities began talking of restoration and launched a funds collection drive, the Forum for Catholic Unity, an NGO, had appealed to the Archaeological Survey of India to declare the basilica a national monument. There has been no response to this.

• With legendary Principal KURUVILA JACOB's birth centenary to be celebrated shortly, old boys of Madras Christian College School have begun recalling their *alma mater*. Here, one of them remembers the Kuruvila Jacob era.

Happy days at MCCS in George Town

I joined Madras Christian College School in 1942 onwards. My elder brother was a student from 1936 to 1942 and I used to visit the school (when it was in George Town) for the annual Meston Fund Drama which was held in the main hall.

The school was in the building which later housed the administrative office of M/s Rallis India Ltd. Just opposite the school were two leather firms where tanned leather used to be pressed by hydraulic presses which could be seen from the school gate.

During 1942, the school worked in three different places due to the war conditions and the evacuation of the city. One branch was in George Town. Another was in Chetput where K. Kuruvila Jacob, the Headmaster, had his office. This branch was on Spur Tank Road, near *Muktha Gardens* (the residence of V.R. Ramanatha Aiyer, proprietor of the then prestigious Ramakrishna Lunch Home). The third branch was in Tambaram on the Christian College campus.

In 1943, the branches came back to George Town and the school was back in its old premises. The playground was beyond the harbour (near Springhaven Road) before 1940 and later the Law College grounds. In our days, we had very good cricketers in the school and many of them later became Ranji Trophy cricketers. C.D. Gopinath went on to play for India.

Kuruvila Jacob was a leader 'par excellence'. He was also actively connected with many social and quasi-Government associations and served on many Government Committees. He was for long an active member of the Film Censor Board.

Among the staff, there was the Rev. R.S. Michael who was for a long time an Assistant Headmaster till his retirement in 1942 or 1943. Even after retirement he used to visit the school to conduct the community singing classes. It would be hard to find such a jovial person today. Then there was a serious looking

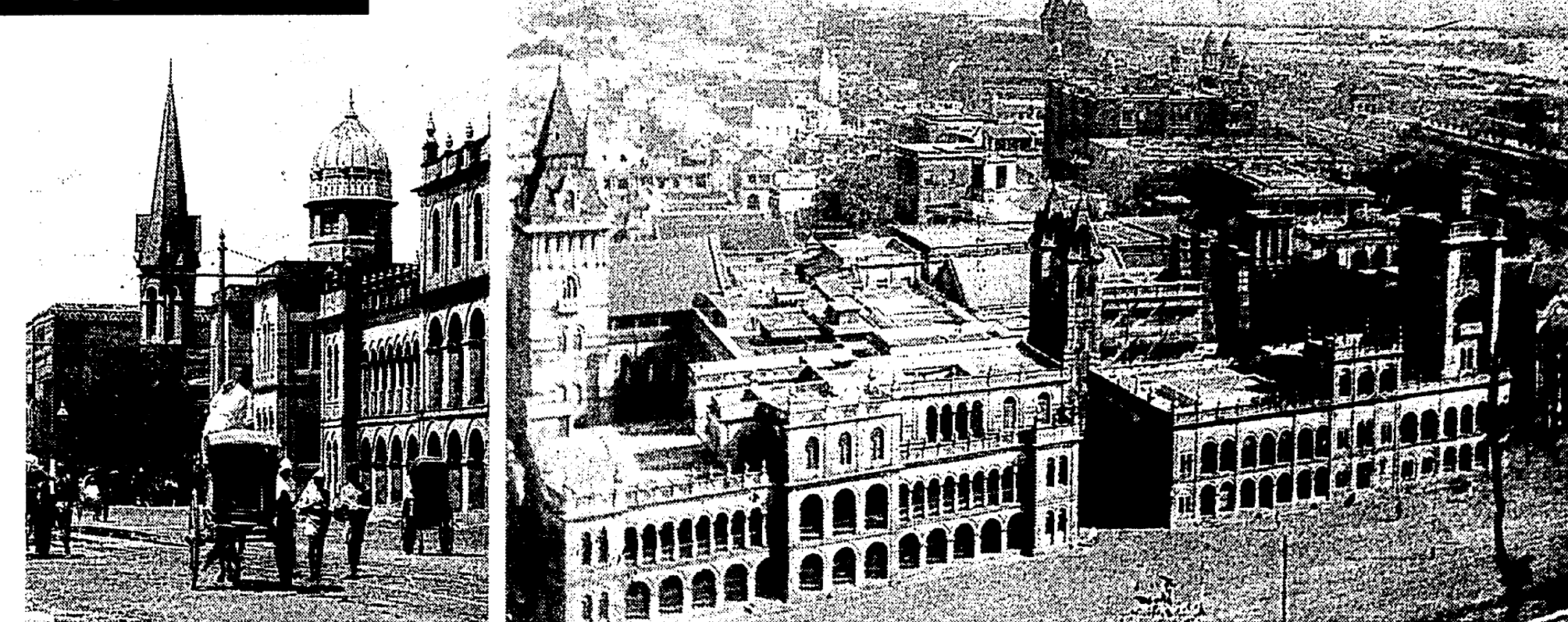
disciplinarian, E.C. Bhagiam. Some of the more popular masters were Subramania Sarma, Purushothaman, Pushparaj Wellington, A. Kalasthri, A.K. Athithar, Rowlands Muthiah, Justin, V.R. Narayana Aiyer, R.P. Joseph, Theodore, V.D. Manthira Murthi, C.A. Bhagianathan, V.D. Paul, C. Jacob, George Yesudian, Paul David, Parmeswara Aiyer, Henry, and D. S. Mathias — the architect of the school hostel who later retired as Headmaster.

Selling confectionery and tiffins was the famous Naidu Shop in a secluded corner on the ground floor. Nestlé's chocolates (those days, only the imported kind), Topps, Wrigley's chewing gum and a variety of hard and soft sweets of high quality were sold here. Nestlé's chocolate packs used to contain pictures and we used to collect them and paste them in the respective albums (Aeroplane sets, Cars set, Film stars set, flowers set, bridges Ramakrishna Lunch Home set etc.). When filled, we used to send them to Nestlé's headquarters and in turn they would cancel the album and return it with three large pictures for framing. If I remember right, the Nestlé's chocolates were priced at two annas a pack.

For lunch, if we didn't bring lunch from home, we used to go to nearby Ramakrishna Lunch Home, Arya Bhavan, Hotel Esplanade, Modern Cafe or Indra Bhavan. Students preferring non-vegetarian food used to visit the Moore Street Mazda branch. Mazda was a chain of restaurants then famous for its non-vegetarian food. There was also Harrison's for non-vegetarian students. The quality of the food was excellent and the restaurants were kept clean and hygienic.

After lunch we used to haunt the old bookstalls near the Chartered Bank entrance and the Swadeshi Emporium entrance (on the main China Bazaar, near the Armenian Street turn). Comics like *Dandy*, *Beano*, *Film Fun* and detective periodicals like the *Sexton Blake* serials were our favourites. New copies were priced eight annas and nine paise

NOSTALGIA



Our OLD, in the pictures above, show, from right, the buildings of Madras Christian College on the Esplanade (NSC Bose Road in George Town) which also housed the MCC School. In the picture on right are College House (right), the hostel of the College, and on left, the main building of MCC which was built around a quadrangle. In the picture above left are Anderson Hall, which had been the College Chapel (right, and to the left of the main College building) and Anderson Church that had been the College Hall (left). These 19th Century buildings, with stone cladding, towers, turrets, domes, Kerala 'caps', verandahs and arches, were major landmarks on the Esplanade till they, except for Anderson Church, were sold one by one after the College moved to Tambaram in 1937 and the school moved to Chetput in 1950.

THE OLD... & THE NEW

The NEW shows what took the place of these buildings and which still survive. From right, The Tamil Nadu State Cooperative Bank Building built from 1970 and occupied in 1974; the Bombay Mutual Insurance Building (now a Life Insurance Corporation property) built in the early 1950s and occupied in 1955; and the building that the State Bank of Mysore built for occupation in 1957. The Anderson Church, with its striking steeple, alone survives of the 19th Century buildings. To the rear of these buildings there survive a part of the hostels. (The OLD, courtesy VINTAGE VIGNETTES; the NEW, courtesy Madras the Gracious City).

and, in second-hand bookshops, sparingly used copies could be bought for two annas! When American or British warships arrived in the harbour, we used to get a variety of fiction from the pavement vendors. Military service lunch packs were also available at these times, on the pavements near the secondhand book stalls!

These lunch packs contained, apart from the main tinned meat dish, a packet of four Chesterfield brand cigarettes, one thick slab of chocolate and four biscuits. The packs were in well-waterproofed packets with wax coating on the outside.

We had a host of brothers studying in the school who came from different lingual regions and who had settled in Madras. There were the N.T. Patels, the Gaitondes, the Mallyas, the Kinis, the Prabhus, the PCM brothers, the Shiralis, the Chierians, the Vummiadiars, the Jamals, and many others.

During my school days, the OBA's President was the great Sir Mohamed Usman and the Secretary was Dr. A.L. Mudaliar's son A.L. Anantha Krishnan, later known as A.L. Mudaliar in Indian industrial circles.

Many students from wealthy families used to arrive in their chauffeur-driven Rovers, Bentleys, Plymouths, Packards and Buicks. One student used to

arrive in his Rolls Royce. Maintaining large cars in those days of petrol rationing (war period) was a prestigious matter!

A learning scheme Kuruvila Jacob started was to issue every week to all the sections of a particular form a graded abridged edition of a world classic (Blackie's edition). After a week, the students had to write the gist of the classic in their composition notebook. By this method, we were able to study the major works of world-renowned authors!

During lunch breaks, students interested in philately would rush to nearby Fruit Market where a Parsi by name Namazi sold rare stamps. While the school was in Spur Tank Road they used to rush to the then newly-opened Hansa Stores (which was at the junction of Spur Tank Road-Nungambakkam Bridge and the road leading to Chetput station). It was a posh shop at the time and had a variety of general merchandise as well as snacks and soft drinks.

In those days we did not have any specified school uniform and you could find a variety of colourful shirts and trousers. The only condition imposed by the school authorities was that the shirts should be tucked in!

The quadrangle was used for

morning prayers as well as for special functions like magic shows. Farewell photos for the S.S.L.C students would also be taken here.

We had a classroom in a solitary room in the tower which used to be reached by a spiral staircase. We had a IV Form section in this room. Due to its height and the large-sized windows in the room, the sound of the rickety trams would always be heard. But we also had a grand view of the nearby places. From 2.30 p.m., we used to enjoy a good sea breeze.

Most of the schoolmasters came from good families, belonged to different religious faiths and from a wide spectrum of castes. We did not bother about any of this. In fact, as far as school was concerned, we were not conscious of community-wise classifications — all were one in MCCS! The masters, though their pay scales were low compared to other professions, were always well dressed. Masters like Purushothaman, Sanjeeva Rao and Parthasarathy Aiyengar would wear Western clothes along with handsome turbans. The Urdu pundit used to wear a fez cap. Other language teachers wore *dhotis* cross-tied and worn with a coat! All were as conscious about their clothes as they were about their profession and devotion to duty!

V. Theetharappan

Gokhale Hall: What awaits it?

(Continued from page 1)

ground to the topmost storey, is a matter for conjecture.

The committee would do well, as the University and Raj Bhavan have done, to appoint a technical committee with members experienced in heritage conservation of old Madras buildings — like INTACH, Tamil Nadu — and obtain their advice on how the restoration could best be done, keeping in mind functional requirements. Why this has not been done already, given the fact that the members of the managing committee are people likely to be interested in heritage and are also likely to know about conservation organisations, is something that is puzzling.

The YMIA was founded by Annie Besant in association with such stalwarts as Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Ayyar, Sir Pitty Tyagaraya Chetty and Sir V.P. Madhava Row in May 1914. The idea was to provide the young men of India "a political gymnasium as it were, to equip the youth with a strong body, an informed mind and a noble character to inherit and imbibe the country's glorious tradition and to take their rightful place as leaders of the future". Her dream envisaged as gymnasium, reading rooms, an oratory, a canteen and also rooms for students who came from outside Madras city to pursue higher studies. She planned the YMIA building as a consequence and acquired land in Armenian Street for the purpose.

The foundation stone of the building was laid by C. Jinarajadasa of the Theosophical Society and the construction was managed by Rao Saheb Subbiah Chettiar. By the end of 1915, the stately edifice came up and, right from its inauguration, it was the oratory, named Gokhale Hall after Gopala Krishna Gokhale, that became its lifeline. At that time, large auditoria in Madras were rare and the Hall was used as a venue for many political meetings and Carnatic Music concerts. (For further details please see MM dated June 16th and July 1st 2002.) Recently, the re-publication of Monica Felton's *I meet Rajaji* brought to light again perhaps the best account of a political meeting in Gokhale Hall.

Somewhere in the 1950s, the YMIA building began losing its lustre. Its Golden Jubilee Celebrations in 1964, presided over by Sir CP, were almost the last great event that was held in the Hall. Ever since then, the YMIA has been going steadily downhill.

The Association still continues to follow the principles laid down by Dr. Besant, but this is more in letter than in spirit. Thus, the gymnasium has become the focus of the Association, with body-building competitions and karate exhibitions. But what of the mind? The reading room has a collection of old books locked away in glass cupboards. These are available to members for reading and borrowing, but a quick glance will show that not many really are interested in the books. Many books were disposed of after they became unreadable with age and yet a sizeable collection of antiquarian books remains.

The hostel rooms are devoid of much maintenance and none but the most intrepid would venture to use the toilets. The Gokhale Hall has not been put to any cultural/political use except for a concert that took place two years ago. In addition, there are two committee rooms that can be fitted out for meetings by corporates, but at the moment they lack infrastructure. The Palmar Restaurant operated in the ground floor until it was evicted by legal action. A lasting legacy of the restaurant was a wholly illegal and unplanned effort at raising the height of its space, which caused subsidence in the upper floor, thereby rendering one half of the building unusable. There is considerable seepage in the walls and floor of this unused wing.

Gokhale Hall is a victim of the general apathy that surrounds civic planning in George Town. No organiser wants to use the Hall as it lacks parking space. An event that would have even ten cars driving up would choke Armenian Street. The closest parking space is by the High Court compound but this would result in most visitors risking their lives in crossing NSC Bose Road. The Hall has no chairs as the fixed wooden seats were removed a long while ago. Plastic chairs are brought in as and when events are held.

A third of the Hall has been cordoned off for the gym, which moved downstairs after cracks developed. The gym equipment is old and has none of the facilities that modern fitness centres possess. Holding events in the Hall while the gym is in use would mean having to hear the grunts and groans of the weightlifters as they go about their business.

So where do we go now? I hope with a team effort, the ethos of Gokhale Hall can be resurrected.

Quizzin' with Ram'nan

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

1. A simple one to begin with. What spectacular astronomical phenomena, last seen in 1882, happened on June 8th?
2. Between which years did the recently deceased Ronald Reagan hold the office of U.S. President?
3. Who is the new Cabinet Secretary?
4. Which Indian cueist was crowned Asian snooker champion recently?
5. Which loveable, rascally Disney character celebrated the 70th anniversary of his film debut on June 9th?
6. What major 'earthy' change to railway catering has been brought by the new Minister?
7. Another easy one. Name the new French Open singles champions.
8. Which popular singer-actress is the bride of popular singer Marc Anthony?
9. The diamond jubilee of probably the most famous World War II offensive was observed on June 6th. Name it.
10. Which country's beauty was crowned the new Miss Universe in Ecuador on June 1st at the annual pageant?

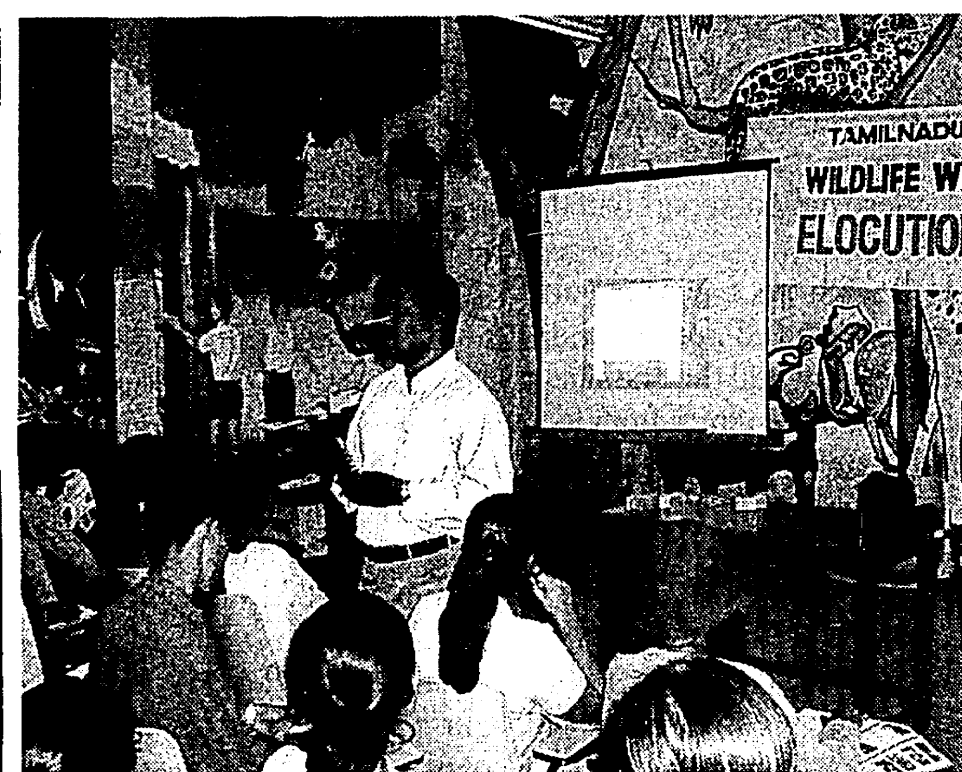
11. To which god is the Velleeswarar Temple in Mylapore dedicated?
12. What is the connection between one of the Maharajas of Bhavnagar and Madras State?
13. Name the project launched recently by two Anna University students to bring the latest headlines to mobile phones free of cost.
14. Where is the Tamil Nadu judiciary's new 'Judicial Academy' located in Chennai?
15. What is the Tamil re-make of the Hindi superhit, *Munabhai*, MBBS called and who plays Sanjay Dutt's role?
16. A major, longstanding demand as regards Tamil linguistics was met when the President, Dr. A.P.J. Kalam, made an announcement recently. What?
17. Another movie question. Which film-maker plays the 'villain' in Mani Ratnam's latest offering, *Aayutha Ezhuthu*?
18. Name the natural scrub forest located between Tamabaram and Velacheri in Chennai.
19. Lord Willingdon, once Governor of Madras, is credited with the introduction of which deer species in the city?
20. Name the hills in the Eastern Ghats, near Tirupattur, which are a tourist destination noteworthy for having no crows!

(Answers on page 8)

A zoo focussing on 'the natural'

Raman, Lakshmanan, Bharathan, Sugrivan, Aishu, Sashi, Kavi... Vaanga, vaanga" ("Come, come") cajoles an ebullient Shankar Kumar from our special van, where every one of the 30 occupants (from ages 4 to 70) is sitting bolt upright and wide-eyed. The seven who respond indulgently to these calls, in between lolling around their spacious enclosure, are the most amazingly beautiful lion cubs I've seen. And we are all on the Lion Safari at the Arignar Anna Zoological Park (AAZP), Vandalur, the second largest zoo in the whole of Southeast Asia, encompassing an area of 602 hectare. It is also the only Indian zoo that has a Zoo School, a full-fledged centre that offers teachers and students education on fauna and flora conservation.

Our escort breaks off to call loudly, "Kanna, odiyaa (Kanna, come running!), Deepika vaa maa (please come, Deepika dear)". We search midst the bushy undergrowth for the lion and lioness we've already been prepared for as he continues, "Ippo naam koondukullai irukkom, singam vellilai" ("Now we're inside a cage and the lions are outside"). However, only a dour Kanna obliges us with his appearance. The Lion Safari, about ten years old and extending over an area of 30 ha, is well protected by chain link fencing. The population of lions has now increased from 11 to 17.



Zoo classrooms like this one are popular.

Shankar has been around the AAZP for the last 20 years and obviously loves every minute of his job. And as Director, AAZP, P.C. Tyagi, IFS (during whose tenure many positive changes continue to happen at the zoo), affirms, "The AAZP's excellent record in zoo management

has been possible mainly because of the dedication of the staff".

The AAZP's mission statement states: *To encourage people to develop a caring attitude towards flora and fauna; to serve as a dynamic conservation centre by promoting breeding programmes for rare and endangered species of the Western and Eastern Ghats, and to offer excellent public service, recreation, eco-awareness and education.* Hailed as "one of the most modern zoos in the country... (one) that has made great strides in the realm of providing near natural environment to the captive animal population", the Zoo's mid-2003 statistics show a holding of 45 species of mammals, 81 species of birds, 29 reptile species, 72 amphibian species and 265 species of fish, a whopping 1816 'individuals'.

Says Tyagi, "The AAZP's primary mandate is the conservation of endangered species, of

by
SHOBHA MENON

which we have the largest collection, in number and species, and we'd like to provide more opportunities for research in these species. An optimal number of animals maintained to preserve the naturalness of the habitat according to the carrying capacity of the enclosures.



Lions at rest in the Safari Park.

agement, in order that genetic variability is maintained among animals, cannot be overstressed. Our zoo education programme for teachers and

help visitors plan which way to go, or which species you'd like to spend the most time observing.

The Walk-through Aviaries, Nocturnal Animal House and the Prey Predator Enclosures (where the Lion, Nilghai, Tiger and Sambar are positioned in adjoining areas on the same slope in a way that neither the animals nor visitors are aware of the separating factor) attract many visitors. Says Deputy Director Dinakar Kumar, "Our focus is on an animal-friendly, ecofriendly ambience right from the kind of dustbins provided to the visitor facilities in the forest atmosphere. It is, however, a matter of regret that a large part of the public are not very sensitive to animals. Often they demand to see animals as a matter of right. While we try to keep the extended size of enclosures to be as close to natural norms, some visitors object to that because they feel "the enclosure is so large we can't see the animals"! Even the concept of the walk-through aviaries was put on hold for a while because people started to cause great disturbance to the birds."

The main circular path is about 2.5 km long and will take around two hours to complete. Kumar says, "I find many trying to 'finish' seeing the whole Zoo 'in one shot', and getting quite exhausted at the end of it all. The idea is to come and see different sections, spend more time observing particular animals at different points of time, maybe once in six months. Then you get to enjoy the zoo better."

(Continued on Page 8)

TN rugby making a mark

After the Tamil Nadu Rugby Football Union (TNRFU), affiliated to the Indian Rugby Football Union (IRFU), was established a few years ago, Chennai has not only witnessed the return of rugby after several years, but Chennai teams have also made a mark in national tournaments. A lot of that success is due to Patrick Davenport, Secretary, TNRFU, who has amply demonstrated that it is possible to bring professionalism to even a minor sport in India.

Taking the lead, TNRFU has been playing a proactive role in Indian rugby. One of the best things to have happened is the appointment of Willy

Heteraka as the national coach of the Indian team. Heteraka was a selector for the New Zealand All Blacks and is one of the world's most respected coaches. Heteraka started by training the Indian Army team and within three months it steamrollered a Sri Lankan Air-

by
SASHI NAIR

lines team in the Castle Lager Sevens Tournament recently. In the tournament, three Chennai teams, for the first time, made it to each of the three finals - the Cup final, Plate and Bowl championships.

Heteraka keenly watched the performance of some of the players and he was heartened by the display put up by the Chennai players. In the Cup final, the Chennai Cheetahs played brilliantly and were leading till the last few minutes when Bombay Gymkhana rallied to win, against the run of play; in the Plate category, the Tamil Nadu Police won, defeating Calcutta Police 30-10; and in the Bowl championship, the Chennai Irish team gave a valiant display before losing to the Delhi Rugby Football Club.

Seven Tamil Nadu players were invited to a selection camp in Ahmednagar, that followed this tournament. The camp was held to pick the Indian team to play Sri Lanka and Thailand in a Tri-nation Tournament that has just concluded. Of the seven players - Emil Vartazarian (also the Technical Director, TNRFU), Vinayagumurthy, Sateesh Kumar, Gopinath (all of them coaches as well), Madesh, Gnana-prakash and Bhaskar - Vartazarian, Vinayagumurthy, Kumar and Madesh made it to the final squad. "Although the camp lasted too long and we had to juggle our coaching schedule, the boys under Heteraka learnt a lot," says Davenport.

In the Under-19 Tournament held at the Calcutta Cricket and Football Club in May, eight teams participated, two from Chennai. While the No. 1 Chennai team made it to the semifinals defeating La Martinere Old Boys and St James before losing to Future Hope, the other team lasted till the quarters. "The tournament was a learning experience for the players. We recognise that we have a role in terms of youth development. In fact, Tim Grandage (founder of Future Hope, Kolkata, one of the best young rugby teams in the country) and I share identical views on rugby, especially with regard to focussing on the youth. India has a lot of natural talent and the thrust must be at the grassroots level," Davenport is convinced.

For the first time, India will be participating in the Under-19 Seven-a-Side Issipathana Tournament in Sri Lanka, in August. In December, the Indian Under-19 team will leave for Kunming, China, to participate in the Asian Rugby Football Union's 15-a-side under-19 tournament. "We need to have as many domestic tournaments as possible to enable us to pick

Spread the gospel of rugby

The Tamil Nadu Rugby Football Union (TNRFU) is in charge of the National Under-19 team. Realising its responsibility, the TNRFU is working closely with the Sports Development Authority, Tamil Nadu (SDATN), to bring rugby to schools and catch them young. "SDATN has the most progressive, professional, organised and proactive approach to identifying talent in schools. As there is no better sport than rugby for character building, SDATN, too, is in favour of starting rugby in schools," points out Patrick Davenport of the TNRFU. Eighteen school teams have been formed so far; a total of 25 teams is likely by the year-end. "We are slowing down a little, as we consolidate. Our goal is to expand youth rugby and to replicate the Chennai success elsewhere in South India," stresses Davenport.

The TNRFU, which has been particularly focussing on the development of rugby in South India, has appointed coaches in Hyderabad, Bangalore and Pondicherry. A coach in Kerala will be soon appointed. A South Indian Rugby Football Union (SIRFU) will be formed soon; it has applied for registration. The SIRFU Board will comprise the TNRFU founder members: Mohankrishna, President, TNRFU, Shyam Nagarajan, Vice President, Davenport, and Gerald Prabhu, member. Prabhu is also a member of the newly formed Karnataka Rugby Football Union, which has the popular cricket moderator Charu Sharma (also a rugby buff) as President. Efforts are on to rope in Harsha Bhogle, Davenport mentions, to provide a PR fillip to Indian rugby.

Meanwhile, the TNRFU is trying to get funds to put up lighting at the SDATN grounds so that games can be played late evenings when the temperature is cooler. The Union wishes to establish a national rugby academy, such as those in Australia, England and New Zealand, to focus not only on sport but also on academics. "We need to identify individuals who are very talented and establish an excellent education programme for them. Of course, we need government and corporate support. We need to set up a corpus fund. At the end of the day, you require money to raise the profile of the sport. Unfortunately, there seems to be too much ego in sport in India and, with the exception of cricket, most sport does not receive the support it deserves," he bemoans. Writer's, The Park, Nittany Decision Services, Brilliant and Cairn Energy have supported TNRFU's activities so far.

The interest in rugby is catching up with women in Chennai too. The Tamil Nadu Commandos, a special wing of the Police, is now being trained in the sport. It was Vartazarian who worked magic with the TN Police team, tapping and honing the players' skills, making them the best Police team in the country. However, compared to Sri Lanka, where rugby stands on an equal footing with cricket as a national sport, Indian rugby has a long way to go. Colombo, for example, has 18 women's teams; rugby is played in more than 1,000 schools. Fans come in the thousands to watch first division rugby matches - and that's more than what cricket matches, other than one-day internationals, get. Even a small club match draws spectators in excess of 6,000. Will this happen in Chennai one day?

S.N.

the best players. We plan to hold a selection camp in Chennai in July and, after the team is chosen, it will be taken around the country to play as many matches as possible," Davenport says.

Twenty teams from across the country, including three from Chennai, one from Pondicherry and two from Bangalore, are expected to take part in the William Leybourne Callaghan (he helped found the Indian Rugby Football Union in 1971) Cup scheduled to begin on July 23rd at the Sports Development Authority, Tamil Nadu (SDATN) grounds in Chennai. It will be the qualifying tournament for the annual All India and South India event to be held in Kolkata in August. This year, the All India will feature the top teams from each of the four zones, the first four in the Callaghan Cup and one team each from Pakistan and

Sri Lanka. In case one of the foreign teams drops out, the fifth-placed team in the Callaghan Cup will go through. Last year, the Chennai team lost to the Sri Lankan Police, the eventual winners, in the semis.

Overall, changes for the good of rugby seem to be happening nationally. The rugby calendar for the year is getting filled up quickly. That certainly is a welcome sign. And perhaps nothing seems more symbolic of the feel good factor in the sport than the Telugu film, totally devoted to rugby, which is now being made. Not surprisingly, the TNRFU has scripted the action sequences for *The Challenge*, with 12 players from the Chennai Cheetahs, Chennai Sharks and Chennai Irish, led by the handsome Vartazarian, doing the acting honours. A Hindi version is also likely. Exciting times indeed, for the TNRFU!

Subscriptions and contributions

As readers are already aware - and hundreds have responded positively - we have no other alternative but to price *Madras Musings*. From April 16th (Volume XIV, No.1), *Madras Musings* has been priced at Rs.5 a copy, ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION: Rs.100/-. Please make out your cheque only to 'Chennai Heritage' and send it, together with the COUPON BELOW, to CHENNAI HERITAGE, 260-A, TTK ROAD, CHENNAI 600 018 or C/O LOKAVANI-HALL MARK PRESS PVT. LTD., 122, GREAMES ROAD, CHENNAI 600 006.

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If in the coming year Chennai Heritage receives repeated support from those of you who have already made contributions, and if many more supporters join the bandwagon, we will not only be able to keep *Madras Musings* going, but also be able to continue awareness-building exercises on on-going projects as well as undertake one or two more such exercises.

Therefore, please keep your contributions coming IN ADDITION TO YOUR SUBSCRIPTIONS. If, say, you send in a cheque for Rs.500, we will treat Rs.100 of it towards subscription to *Madras Musings* for 2004-5 and the remaining Rs.400 as contribution towards the causes Chennai Heritage espouses.

We look forward to all readers of *Madras Musings*, and those newcomers who want to receive copies, sending in their subscriptions. We are indeed sorry we can no longer remain a free mailer.

- The Editor

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THE 'NATURAL' ZOO

(Continued from page 6)

The AAZP has consistently made every effort to be a plastic-free environment. As a precaution, every visitor is screened at the entry point for any form of plastic litter that he might be carrying – like biscuit and wafer packets. The plastic covers are removed and the contents are neatly repacked in newspaper before being returned to the visitor. Says an official, "Otherwise irresponsible visitors drop litter any and everywhere, even after repeated instructions to protect the sanctity of the area. Even at the Aavin outlet inside the Zoo, ice cream wrappers are removed by salesmen before they're handed over to buyers."

45 ha on the southern slope of the Vandalur Reserve Forest, adjacent to the existing Lion Safari, has been developed as the Deer (inaugurated in April this year, and shortly to open for the public) and Bison Safari (work is still in progress). This is a natural watershed and has rich vegetation of dry evergreen forest with rocky patches. The upper slope of the area provides a picturesque view of the AAZP

and other places around the zoo. A watchtower-cum-rest-shed has been constructed here.

In the Rescue area (a project funded by the Central Government), the number of big cats like tigers and lions is now about 60. Endangered animals that have bred during the last year are the Wold Dog, Lion Tailed Macaque and the Nilgiri Langur. The Amphibian House and Butterfly House have been renovated and refurbished. Recent developments include more enrichment work going on according to the needs of the animals. A partner for the lone male bison was acquired from the Mysore Zoo, besides the introduction of four Barasingha (Swamp Deer).

The Zoo, which is still predominantly with dry evergreen forest species and shrub, is now under a comprehensive rainwater conservation and utilisation plan, where rainwater from its catchment area has been channelised into the percolation pond and Otteri Lake inside the Zoo. Every effort is being made to impound the water of the Zoo catchment and also water flowing from outside into the Zoo so as to increase the recharge of

groundwater. The total requirement of fodder for the Zoo is met from the 4 ha fodder plot which produces 1500-2000 kg of fodder a day. During the monsoon period, the plots are maintained, replanted and rejuvenated so as to produce a sustained supply of grass throughout the following summer.

A well-equipped and fully functional hospital caters to all animal healthcare needs. It has a modern diagnostic laboratory that assists in timely diagnosis to treat affected animals well in advance. Continuous upgradation of skills and knowledge of the animalkeepers is also a regular feature at the AAZP through periodic workshops.

Regular Animal Exchange Programmes involve simple exchanges of animals between zoos and sometimes on breeding loan. A latest pair of Giraffes from Alipore Zoo, Kolkata, was obtained April 2002 and a Capuchin, Nilgai and Hippo acquired from Trivandrum Zoo in exchange for a Zebra and Grey Pelican. AAZP also has acquired a number of exotic animals from foreign zoos. In 1993, a pair of black and white ruffed lemur was got from Malaysia. In 2002 a Mouffon and a Binturong Jungle Cat were acquired from Singapore. Switzerland gave a Hippopotamus free of cost, inclusive of air transport.

Last year, Dr. Sukhdev, IFS (then Chief Wildlife Warden), said, "This Zoo has become a model in the country for its animal collection, breeding, animal house architecture, zoo landscaping, establishing and maintaining a versatile zoo vet hospital and providing visitor amenities." We agree.

Plants that cure ailments

Ethnobotany is the study of inter-relationship between plants and people. From the beginning human beings of all cultures and races have been utilising plant material for their various needs, not least for medicines for almost any type of disease from the common cold to cancer.

The hunt for new plant medicines is going on all over the world. Because of various developmental activities, more and more habitats that are rich in biodiversity are threatened. Scientists from all parts of the world are struggling to identify new plant species to find out their traditional uses before they are lost forever.

A few plant species that are used in curing some common ailments are :

Thulasi (<i>Ocimum sanctum</i>)	It has got several medicinal properties. Consumed together with pepper and <i>vallarai</i> , it cures fever and the leaves may be chewed when you have a cold. It can be used as an insect repellent also, as it keeps away, when planted ground the house, mosquitoes and other insects.
Pepper (<i>Piper nigrum</i>)	Pepper is taken with <i>vallarai</i> and <i>thulasi</i> for fevers. It can also be mixed with <i>thippili</i> and ginger and consumed to cure coughs.
Ginger (<i>Zingiber officinale</i>)	Ginger paste is applied on the forehead to cure headaches. It is consumed with <i>thippili</i> and pepper for coughs.
Keezhanelli (<i>Phyllanthus niruri</i>)	The mashed leaves are mixed with curd and taken on an empty stomach to cure jaundice.
Adaathodai <i>Adathoda</i> (<i>vasica</i>)	The leaves are made into a paste and used to treat respiratory tract ailments.
Nitya Kalyani (<i>Vinca rosea</i>)	The dried roots and leaves are powdered and used for treating various types of cancer.
Chinchona (<i>Chinchona</i>)	The bark of the tree is used to make quinine, which is used to treat malaria.
Siriyangai (<i>Polygala grineris</i>)	The raw leaves may be consumed as an antidote for snake venom.

As we distance ourselves from the natural world by disturbing fragile habitats, we are also disturbing our own traditional values and knowledge. With the ongoing developmental activities, somewhere along the line we have lost our links with Nature by manipulating it for our own greed and benefit. — (Courtesy: CPREEC Econews.)

P. Sudhakar

Answers to Quiz

1. Transit of Venus across the Sun; 2. 1981 and 1989; 3. B.K. Chaturvedi; 4. Alok Kumar; 5. Donald Duck; 6. Use of earthen cups to serve beverages; 7. Gaston Gaudio and Anastasia Myskina; 8. Jennifer Lopez; 9. The D-Day landings; 10. Miss Australia, Jennifer Hawkins.

* * *

11. Velli/Sukra/Venus; 12. First

Indian Governor of Madras State and first occupant, as Governor, of (the present) *Raj Bhavan*; 13. 'News Nuts'; 14. Greenways Road; 15. *Vasool Raja*, MBBS, with Kamal Haasan playing the lead role; 16. It has now been given a 'Classical Language' status; 17. Bharatiraja; 18. Nanmangalam Reserve Forest; 19. *Black Buck*; 20. Yelagiri Hills.

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