

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS

## MUSINGS

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Rs. 5 per copy

(Annual Subscription: Rs. 100/-)

Vol. XIV No. 20

February 1-15, 2005



Poor fellow, 'Didn't notice that we'd put up a higher road divider last night!

### Flying leap

So you thought being a cop would be like something out of a fast-paced, glitzy TV show? Think again.

Better still, ask those uniformed gentlemen who were recently forced to exchange the heroic for the downright ridiculous, and run after our citizens instead, trying to prevent them from leaping over medians straight into the paths of veritable torrents of traffic.

Does the populace think medians have been placed in the exact centre of busy roads because, after having ordered miles of them on a whim, the authorities didn't know what to do with them?

It's the same questionable thought process that allows people to see, and register, the areas designated 'pedestrian crossings', yet deliberately choose to dart across in an uniquely confused hysterical manner at those unmarked sections of the road teeming with the thickest traffic.

There is this reluctance on the part of our good people to do as they are told. Gypping our rail-ways out of platform tickets, refusing to circle the circle (you know what I mean), ignoring the 'No Horn' sign within hospital compounds — there is something about an established rule that immediately creates an irresistible urge in our citizens to break it.

We who are so justifiably proud of our history and tradition, wouldn't it be great if we, as a people, also learnt to ... well, stand in orderly queues and wait our turn, for instance?

Ranjitha Ashok

# The tsunami – & after

## The experts review diverse views

(by Shobha Menon)

The tsunami of December 26, 2004 and the destruction it caused has given rise to much informed (and uninformed) debate on diverse issues that its impact has raised. There has also been a lot of unnecessary confusion and panic. I met a few environmental experts and scientists for clarification.

Dr. V. Palanisamy, Director, Geological Survey of India, is dismayed "by the media circulating wrong information and creating panic after contacting the wrong people for opinions." 'Experts' even 'predicted' another earthquake a few days later, he recalls and says, "The earthquake that caused the tsunami occurred due to the Indian Plate moving in a northeasterly direction and its subduction under the Eurasian (Burma) Plate. Though weak zones like these can be demarcated by Earth Scientists, the precise time of the tremor cannot be predicted. What we can do is install instruments that transmit warning signals, especially in vulnerable coastal zones. How quickly we can react to them is important. More coordination between the departments concerned is needed."

Dr. J.S. Mani from the Department of Ocean Engineering at IIT Madras says, "The massive tsunami started as a small wave 60cm-150cm in height, about 360 km long, travelling at 200 m/sec. When such a wave meets the continental shelf, the speed is reduced and the height rises. At a 10m water depth, further enhancement happens due to shoaling and refraction (the change in wave direction due to the sea bed). The unstable wave mass breaks at a water depth 1.25 times the wave height, by which time the initial wave has

shrunk to 18 km long. Sri Lanka actually acted as a traffic island to lessen the effect of the tsunami on the Chennai coastline, modifying the direct hit by diffraction (change in wave direction due to a structure). On the Chennai coastline, wherever beaches have been gently sloping, the impact has been larger. Similarly, on Nagapattinam's sloping beaches the crawling effect of the waves has been

(Continued on page 2)



Post-tsunami, what the Government Headquarters Hospital, Nagapattinam looks like. 140 died here, writes R. SOUNDARARAJAN who sent us this picture.

## Needed: flexibility in education and more than academic requirements

• The second part of a two-part article by **Dr. M. ANANDA-KRISHNAN**, Chairman, Madras Institute of Development Studies, and former Vice-Chancellor, Anna University.

Many persons with engineering degrees have occupations that require knowledge of several other disciplines and hence many engineering graduates tend to acquire combinations of degrees. Engineers holding the bachelor's degree may be categorised into four groups: those with engineering degrees only, those with engi-

neering and business degrees, those with engineering and science degrees, and those with degrees in engineering and in any other field.

Among the master's level engineering graduates in the private sector, those who have combined their engineering degree(s) with a degree outside of engineering are more likely to become senior managers at some point in their career. People with a master's degree who have degrees in both engineering and business were twice as likely to be in senior management as people with master's degrees only in engineering.

There are now also engineers without degrees in engineering. While people without engineering degrees are found in all engineering occupations, the largest share is in the rapidly growing and vaguely defined occupation of computer software engineering. These 'engineers' have degrees in all fields — including the humanities. Computer hardware engineers without engineering degrees often have

(Continued on Page 8)

### A reminder to our readers

• It's going to be a year since *Madras Musings* began being a priced journal, offering readers a special annual subscription rate of Rs.100. With that year coming to an end, it is time to remind subscribers to renew their subscriptions and readers who have not yet sent in their subscriptions to do so.

All subscriptions acknowledged by us from January 1, 2005 and subscriptions that we receive between now and April 16<sup>th</sup> will be considered as annual subscriptions for the year April 16, 2005 to April 15, 2006, Volume XV. As for those who have sent in their subscriptions between April 16, 2004 and December 15, 2004, please renew your subscriptions as and when they fall due. *Madras Musings*, unfortunately, does not have any staff, but only a couple of part-time volunteers to help and; hence, is in no position to send you reminders.

When sending in your subscription, please send it to Chennai Heritage together with the coupon that appears on page 7, duly filled in, in full. We look forward to an enthusiastic response from readers old and new.

— THE EDITOR

## The tsunami — and after — the experts' views

(Continued from page 1)

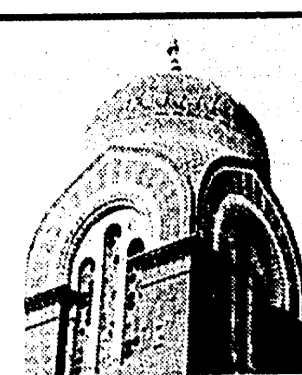
greater. In north Chennai, which is already deeper at the harbour, the destructive wave effect was minimised."

Referring to 'coastal retaining walls' as a protective factor, he feels, "Sea walls, where stones are dumped in the sea, are mainly meant for wind generated waves. It is the nature of waves to carry sediment. Being prevented by a wall like this will just divert the effect to elsewhere on the coast. Ultimately, any increase in water depth will only increase the risk of larger waves. Curved sand dunes are the best barriers, especially artificially reinforced ones. Beyond these, a canal linked to a bigger pond (for draining water from wave deflection) can be provided. Going along with nature is the best way!"

Dr. V. Sampath, Director, Integrated Coastal and Marine Area Management Directorate, Department of Ocean Development, talks of changes in the floor of the Bay of Bengal. "There is submergence of the land as the continental plates rub against each other. So, in Port Blair (midway between the Indonesian region that has moved upwards and Nicobar that has gone down), the water level seems to be higher (and not because of storm surge or increase in tidal level). The ORV *Sagar Kanya* was dispatched on January 3 by the Department of Ocean Development to collect benthic organ-

isms or alien species from Kochi to Chennai for sediment sampling. This will make geophysical and geotechnical studies of the water and sediment samples. So will the FORV *Sagar Sampada*. Nobody can talk about changes in the ocean floor without precise investigative analysis and calibration, which could take roughly about a year. But two effects are possible from the fisheries angle — the tsunami could affect the health of corals due to sedimentation and cause adverse effect on fish population, or the upwelling could bring nutrients to the surface of the sea and have a positive effect in the coming years."

Dr. K. Venkataraman, Chairman, National Biodiversity Authority, says, "The eastern coastline has been more affected because of the short continental shelf region (an average of 32-45 km) than its western counterpart (about 175 km). The natural defence mechanisms are actually the coral reefs along the coastline, and then the mangroves. Destroyed indiscriminately due to over-exploitation and destructive fishing practices, the coral reefs have even been deprived of any natural defence through fish that feed on the unhealthy algae (an effect of global warming). These living reefs grow only about 1cm a year. Coral we commonly see in pictures is about 50 million years old. We misuse nature to reap such calamities! Nagapattinam was the



## Artistic memories of Senate House

The Department of Music, Madras University, recently organised a seminar at which speakers highlighted the associations that the *Senate House* had with the performing arts. The seminar brought to light the importance the *Senate House* had once upon a time as a venue for the performing arts. With its vast spacious grounds offering ample parking, its excellent ventilation and acoustics, it is to be hoped that, post-restoration, artists and audiences would flock to it.

Vice-Chancellor S.P. Tyagarajan, who inaugurated the seminar, commended the Music Department for organising the programme and called upon other departments of the University to organise similar events showcasing *Senate House*.

Recalling their presence in *Senate House* at one time or another were several artists. Veteran artist, singer, painter, musicologist and one-time hero in films, S. Rajam, reminisced about 1943, when he completed painting a portrait of Maharajah Swati Tirunal, the composer-ruler of Travancore. The painting, commissioned by the Music Academy, was unveiled by the Junior Maharani of Travancore, Setu Parvati Bayi, at *Senate House*. Rajam recalled that he was paid Rs. 30 for the work, but had spent Rs. 90 to purchase a pair of shoes to wear for the unveiling ceremony.

Vidwan B. Rajam Iyer spoke of his guru, Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Iyengar, reminiscing that the acoustics of *Senate House* were of the highest order. Veteran dancer Kalanidhi Narayanan remembered that she had danced in *Senate House* when she was ten years old. She also recollected witnessing several dance performances there and a dance drama based on the *Prahlada Charitram* in

which the dancer who portrayed Narasimha became possessed and tried to really kill the dancer depicting Hiranyakashipu. Dance exponent Prof. C.V. Chandrashekhara spoke about how he had looked forward to getting his degree at the *Senate House* when he graduated from the University. But this was not to be, as he had to leave the city before the convocation was held. He hoped to dance at *Senate House* when its restoration was completed.

Noted film director S.P. Muthuraman enumerated the various distinguished alumni of the University who were known for their contribution to cinema. He mentioned *Senate House* appearing as a backdrop in films such as *Iru Kodugal* and *Anni*. He also said that the façade of *Senate House* was so entrenched in the public mind with the Madras skyline that it was, like the Central Station, shown in various films as a symbol of the city.

V. Sriram editor, *Sangeetham.com*, highlighted the important events in the music world that had taken place in *Senate House*. These included the Music Academy's conference of 1929, when the decision to hold a conference each year was taken, thereby kick-starting what is today known as the music season. *Senate House* once again served as a venue for the Academy during the years 1939 to 1941. (For further details see *Madras Musings*, May 16, 2004.)

Other speakers were film director Hariharan, whose documentary on pollution, *Ezhavadi Manidan*, is very well known and who spoke on the subject of landscapes in Indian films, and the editor of this journal, S. Muthiah, who once again called for the passage of a Heritage Act.

— A Special Correspondent

worst affected by the tsunami mainly because the coral reefs there have been further eaten away by the funnel-shaped estuary created by the River Kaveri."

On the effects on biodiversity in these areas, he says, "In the Bay of Bengal, the coastal drift is six months in a clockwise direction and six months anticlockwise, due to the wind pattern. Since the existing current disperses biodiversity due to natural action, the tsunami effect may cause changes but will not affect biodiversity in the long term, because of the natural current action."

Dr. P.J. Sanjeeva Raj, a leading ecologist who has been working with fisherfolk from Pulicat to Neelankarai for over forty years, reiterates that for coastal fisherfolk, who are the chief victims, formal and non-formal environmental education should focus on emergency evacuation procedures, hazard management etc. "Since the seismic sea-waves of tsunamis are incredibly violent only in inshore waters but not in the open sea, fishermen on the high seas should not attempt to get to the shore till the tsunami waves subside. A continuous sea wall on the beach is ecologically as well as aesthetically unsound. Discontinuous 'artificial reefs', parallel to the shoreline, at a depth of four to six fathoms (*baghams*), as in the Japanese Pacific, can help not only to

mitigate the height of tsunami waves, but also promote biodiversity and fisheries in the long run. Also, palmyra and coconut trees, native to our beaches, may provide anchorage for safely fastening fishing boats, catamarans and nets during a deluge, and also provide perching sites and even tree-houses with rope ladders, to climb onto (as tribals in Car Nicobars did during the recent tsunami). Tents, shelter boxes and life jackets for each coastal house are needed. Apart from sirens and warnings through loudspeakers in each village, cell phones on boats and on land can help better communication," he feels.

"For an efficient distribution of emergency relief, data on fishing families, their craft and gear, should be constantly updated with the help of the local village panchayat, not only for tracing any losses in calamities, but also for orderly distribution of relief, according to the family size. Fisherfolk need to be in safe and strong houses near the shore. For *alpsi maram* or *Albizia* timber to rebuild so many catamarans, a massive reforestation of *Albizia* must begin immediately. Nylon fibre of various counts or grades is also needed in large quantities to make new fishing nets. The fish-eating public must help by buying the fish these impoverished fishermen capture in spite of their great fear and grave risk.

The fisherfolk may be at present perturbed by the sea's momentary wrath, but they will begin to venture onto the ocean as soon as possible. We need to help them," he urges.

Dr. Paul P. Appasamy, Member-Secretary, Centre of Excellence in Environmental Economics, Madras School of Economics, speaks about the socio-economic impact of the tsunami. "Historically, people in Tamil Nadu have been careful about danger from sea, avoiding the building of large settlements near the coast. Until now, not much attention was given to fishing grounds as against land and forest use. Fishermen, as a community, have been traditionally marginalised. Ironically, the tsunami has brought them back into focus, for a total rethink on their long-term livelihoods. Whether traditional fisheries can continue as in the past is a question to be discussed. There is an imperative need for other opportunities — maybe fish processing, totally different occupations, etc. Planning agencies like the CMDA need to decide what kind of land use regulations need to be in place. With fishermen fearing the sea at this point, we need to plan for warning systems, systematic plans and execution. Response time being short, the public must know exactly what to do. However, that, in our society, is not the easiest thing to do."

— THE EDITOR

## OUR READERS WRITE



### The Coom's role

About three decades ago, there was a cyclonic storm in the vicinity of Chennai which, besides bringing heavy rain, drove a ship s.s. *Stamatis* ashore. It took nearly two decades before the ship grounded on Marina beach was auctioned and dismantled. I think a part of its keel is still there.

Then, some years later, Dhanushkodi, at the tip of the southern coast, was completely wiped out by the swelling of the sea.

These two occurrences, I think, were warning signals of possible tsunamis in the Bay of Bengal. But both went unheeded after the initial shock had subsided.

Another point to note is that when, on 26.12.2004, the tsunami struck Chennai, much of the gushing water found a safe outlet in the Coom. You could notice seawater going into the Coom at high speed at its confluence. I believe that, but for the Coom, which accepted the rush so well, the seawater would have gone through the Island Ground and even entered Fort St. George. This aspect should be analysed by the PWD.

Regarding a sea wall, perhaps many are not aware of the fact that during the digging operations for the construction of the first subway in Chennai, near the Reserve Bank of India, a massive brick wall was found and it could be seen going towards Marina. This I think was a preventive wall built by the British to prevent seawater entering the Fort St. George in the event of tidal waves.

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- 2) For non-receipt of copies, change of address, and all other circulation matters: MADRAS MUSINGS, C/o Lokavani Hall-Mark Press Pvt. Ltd., 122, Greames Road, Chennai 600 006.
- 3) On editorial matters: The Editor, MADRAS MUSINGS, C/o Lokavani Hall-Mark Press Pvt. Ltd., 122, Greames Road, Chennai 600 006.

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

— THE EDITOR

### When RWH is useless

Rainwater harvesting is now quite the rage. All over, the authorities are keen to make people believe that they are doing all they can to solve the water problem, as though it is the ultimate solution. It is of course a matter of common sense that when more rainwater soaks into the ground, the subsoil water level rises. But there is another aspect. In areas (like mine) where the subsoil water has already become bad, all the rainwater in the world will not reverse the quality. In such a case, RWH is all but useless.

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### No parking

I refer to reader V. Rajagopal's letter (MM January 1st) about the loss of two issues of *Madras Musings*, consequent to parking his vehicle in Motilal Street in T. Nagar. As has been rightly pointed out by the beat-policeman, to whom he reported the loss, reader Rajagopal should thank his stars for having found his vehicle.

I am a resident of Motilal Street and have been a mute witness to the street being used as a parking lot by the shoppers. The street has been declared a 'No Parking area', following the road-roko staged by the Motilal Street Residents' Welfare Association. Despite the fact that there are boards indicating that the street is out of bounds for parking, it is sad that people continue to defy the orders of the traffic police. What is all the more puzzling is that they still raise questions! Local traffic police regularly tow away vehicles which are found parked in Motilal Street. Reader Rajagopal should feel happy that he found his vehicle in the place he had parked it! When he next time comes to shop in T. Nagar, he would do well to park his vehicle in a paid-parking area so as to ensure that he does not lose anything.

V.S. Jayaraman  
31, Motilal Street  
T. Nagar, Chennai 600 017

### Eco-friendly dry toilets

I refer to reader T.M. Sundaraman's letter (MM, December 1st), in which he asks what exactly eco-friendly dry toilets are. Also, Dharmendra Pratap Yadav (MM, November 1st) had written that 43 per cent of cities' population lives in slums that lack sewage systems and latrines in homes. While research is welcome and overdue, the plantation companies in South India have already been providing latrines for workers according to the Plantation Labour Act.

For example, dry-pit latrines are provided by the management. A later version has a 1.5' to 1.75' bore hole dug manually to a depth of 15' or 20'. On top of this is mounted a cylindrical concrete monobloc latrine which usually has a 36" inter-

The Tamil Nadu Government has announced that it is considering construction of a long sea wall in the coastal area of the State to protect against the impact of any possible future tsunami. A cost of several thousand crores of rupees is being mentioned in this connection. In the unfortunate event of a tsunami like the December one occurring in the future, its velocity, force and impact would be so great that no concrete wall constructed over such a long distance would stand against the violence of such massive tidal waves.

This is a typical example of finding bureaucratic or political solutions to the scientific problem.

Ten years ago, a law in Tamil Nadu stipulated that building construction should not take place within a distance of 500 metres from the seashore. This rule was not made in the expectation that 500 metres is a safe distance from the sea for buildings in the case of violent waves occurring. On the other hand, the rule was mainly meant to prevent seeping of seawater into subsoil and contaminating good quality groundwater in the nearby re-

gions. Unfortunately, even this well-meaning regulation has been implemented more in the breach than in the practice.

While the threat and fear of tsunamis is something which everyone will now have to live with, the best solution for this problem is rapid afforestation in the regions near the coastal area. Even during the recent tsunami in Tamil Nadu, several areas which had dense forests were saved from its impact to a considerable extent.

While there is urgent necessity to relieve the pain of the tsunami victims, there is no need for such measures like constructing a wall which would require several thousand crores of rupees of investment without any guarantee of safety in return. Such money can be utilised for better productive purpose designed and developed on the basis of more intensive and scientific study.

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## Why a sea wall?

In all, it was disappointing. How long it will take us to win Ranji Trophy again

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A doctor's view  
I read the letter written by S. Venkataraman on leptospirosis in the November 16th issue of *Madras Musings*. I have been working on human leptospirosis for the past two decades. I would like to share my experience so that readers benefit.

Leptospirosis is the most common zoonosis (spread to human from animals) all over the world. In India, a large number of cases is reported from Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Andamans. The virus resides in the kidneys of animals and is excreted through urine. When man comes into contact with water contaminated with the urine of infected animals, he faces the danger of contracting leptospirosis. The disease spreads through the damaged skin of the foot when you wade through contaminated stagnant water, the reason why it occurs in large numbers during the monsoon. In addition, leptospirosis can infect domestic animals such as dogs, cattle and pigs and they in turn can infect man.

One particular design that I saw years ago was the Chinese model of a mobile toilet meant for rural areas. The toilet is mounted on a plough so as to open a furrow. After use, the toilet is pulled 1.5'-2' forwards so that the faecal matter is covered by fresh soil. Everytime the toilet is used, it is moved forward by about two feet. A family of five can get it to move 12-14 feet a day, or 4,500 feet a year. This system saves water, does not produce sludge but results in field manure and there is no room for groundwater contamination.

The agricultural engineering departments attached to agriculture colleges can reinvent this mechanism. Obviously, this system can only be used in farms and rural areas.

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### Total disarray

As in the past, Tamil Nadu cricket received a rude shock by failing to qualify for the semifinal stage. Even though the bowlers were doing a fine job, with Ramkumar doing most of the damage, the batsman did not click in crucial games. The loss to Baroda and the draw against Assam played spoilsport. The absence of Balaji and to certain extent Dinesh Karthik spoiled our hopes.

A lot of research has in fact been carried out in Chennai on leptospirosis. A national workshop on the laboratory diagnosis of leptospirosis was conducted in Chennai in 1995 by specialists from the Royal Tropical Institute of Amsterdam, and Leptospirosis Laboratory, Barbados. We have collaborated on various aspects of leptospirosis with the Leptospirosis Laboratory, Barbados.

I fully agree that awareness about the disease is inadequate among doctors and the public. However, a lot of effort has been undertaken to improve the situation.

Dr. S. Shiva Kumar  
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Anna Nagar  
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Rid us of rats  
A few issues ago, a reader had written about leptospirosis disease spread by rats. It is a disease far more lethal than described. It cannot be controlled by a dose of penicillin or broad spectrum antibiotic.

I remember reading somewhere that a virus found in dried rat-droppings and urine causes drastic drops in blood sugar count, yellowing of eyeballs and massive organ failure leading to certain death.

Places like Kondithope are rat-infested and could become the epicentre of such diseases. The Corporation/Health Department should launch an intensive drive to rid the area of rats, especially those in locked godowns and unused houses.

C.G. Prasad  
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Can readers help?  
I will be very thankful if the readers can help me secure a copy of the old book *Sri Rudram* by R. Muthukrishna Sastrigal, published in 1956 by Hithabhashini Office, 1836/3, West Road, Tanjore, and priced at Rs. 1-8-0.

T. Kaleeswargan,  
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Mahalakshminagar  
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## MYLAPORE FEST GETS BETTER BY THE YEAR, DRAWS BIGGER CROWDS

(By A Special Correspondent)

The 2005 edition of the Sundaram Finance Mylapore Festival featured 27 events spread across four days — January 6th to 9th — and at least 30,000 people soaked it in. At least 1000 people — artists, craftspeople, students, volunteers, etc. — were directly involved in performing, organising and volunteering, the largest numbers ever, since the *Mylapore Times* started the first *kolam* contest nine years ago.

Two special features of the 2005 Fest were:

1. Involvement of eight schools, including the CSI School for the Deaf and the local Corporation school, who participated in folk arts items taught by traditional gurus, and each presented their learning on stage every evening.

2. About 20 volunteer groups in the neighbourhood worked at the Fest.

Sundaram Finance now plan to promote the Fest as the city's signature Fest and with Tamil Nadu Tourism being one of the event sponsors — participating for the first time — the Fest is sure to become bigger and better.

The Sri Kapali Temple provided space for dance and music performances inside its precincts and allowed its 16-pillar *mantap* on the eastern side to be lit up and serve as the backdrop for the main stage.

## Horticulture

— A great future, if there's help

It is usually stated that India is the largest producer of fruits, the second largest of vegetables and third of spices and condiments. At the same time, post-harvest losses are estimated at Rs.30,000-40,000 crore.

Can this situation be improved and fruits, vegetables and spices be made major export earners and provide rural areas a better future?

### Floriculture

Hi-tech floriculture attracted over 125 ventures, mostly with Dutch and Israeli collaboration. A large number of these ventures failed due to entrepreneurs being eager to make quick buck, lack of expertise and knowledge of local conditions. The successful ones modified the technology to suit local conditions, identified suitable climatic conditions and reduced the high cost of energy, greenhouses etc. These ventures are now being run successfully in

of highest quality with berry size over 1 cm diameter and brix over 20 with spotless bunches of about 400 gms. Every carton before packing is inspected by quality control and monitoring agents of importing companies. MAHA Grapes, an association of growers around Pune, started exports but, as the association could not ensure quality, exports started gradually declining. Studying international competition and growing conditions, the technology of production has now been modified in India and an overseas market for Indian grapes has been established. This is a combination of entrepreneurship, hi-tech precision and quality production.

### Mangoes

Most growers do not harvest or market their produce. Generally contractors control the entire harvesting and marketing. As a result Indian mangoes suf-

fer from lack of quality and uniformity. Desapping, precooling and harvesting of uniform maturity and quality are rarely practised in India. Spray residues, immaturity, lack of uniform ripening and sugar acid blend have become a handicap in export of mangoes. Containerisation, despite its economy, has proved to be a disaster due to long journeys, highly humid seas and development of fungus diseases during transit despite waxing. Fortunately, private enterprises in Gujarat and Maharashtra have established air transport of mangoes, as those sent by sea do not ripen in the climate prevailing in Europe and U.K. Unless air cargo is made available at competitive rates, entry of Indian mangoes to overseas markets has limitations. Hi-tech grading and packaging equipment with electronic sensors is also needed.

### Cashewnut

India is one of the top exporters of cashew kernels but Brazil may end its monopoly. We have to take adequate steps to increase acreage under wastelands in coastal areas with superior selections evolved in the research stations. Research is also needed to improve the packing technology with bulk packaging instead of the usual tin containers.

(Continued on Page 6)



The tomb of the Rev. Arathoon Shumavon in the Armenian Church in Chennai recalls his pioneering achievements.

It was in Madras that Armenian Journalism was born in August 1794, responsible for its birth being the vicar of the Armenian church in Madras, the Rev. Arathoon Shumavon. His *Azdarar*, or "Intelligencer", launched with 28 subscribers only was a monthly magazine devoted to social, political, literary and commercial information, in which "Domestic Occurrences", "Reviews of Books", "Answers to correspondents" and commercial and shipping advertisements found a place. Significantly, it began its life just a month after the English residents of the city began publishing its first journal. But the curious part of the venture was that the energetic founder of Armenian journalism, in addition to his sacerdotal duties, acted as the editor, the publisher, the compositor and the printer of his paper, and even cast the type and made from cotton pulp the paper used in printing the *Azdarar*, by the primitive method then in vogue. A truly journalistic feat indeed.

From such a humble beginning, Armenian journalism has spread all over the world, but the irony is that India, that gave birth to Armenian journalism, does not possess a single paper today in the Armenian language.

The life of the first Armenian journal was however a short one, lasting a year and a half only and dying a premature death, for want of sufficient support. The venerable Father of Armenian journalism, who shepherded the

Armenian church in Madras for 40 years, died on February 9, 1824, aged 74 years, and his grave can be seen to this day in the Armenian churchyard in classical Armenian.

Born in Shiraz in Persia, the Rev. Shumavon had the misfortune to lose his two sons in one week. Overcome by grief, he retired from the city and took up his abode with the Persian *dervishes* (anchorites) in the solitude of Babkoh. This hill, the Parnasus of Shiraz, the seat of Persian literature (Dar-ul-elm), being within easy distance of the city, was the favourite haunt of the two famous Persian poets, Saadi and Hafez, who frequently resorted there to invoke their muse.

For seven long years the bereaved Shumavon remained with the Persian *dervishes*, but being of a studious turn of mind, he studied closely the flowery Persian language. He mastered the language and distinguished himself as a Persian and Arabic scholar. He then returned to the city on which he had turned his face and shortly afterwards left for Madras, which at that time (1784) had an influential and wealthy Armenian community engaged in commerce.

He started a printing press at Madras in 1789 to print and publish books in the Armenian language. In the absence of any trained workmen, he did all the skilled work himself. The first publication from his press was a

# Madras, the birthplace of Armenian journalism

reprint of *The Martyrology of the Virgin Mariane*. The title-page, rendered into English, reads thus:

"An account of the Holy Virgin Mariane, reprinted from a copy originally printed at Constantinople in 1766 A.D., and now printed in India, at the capital city of Madras, from type prepared by the Rev. Arathoon, son of Shumavon of Shiraz, for the benefit of the Armenian youths, in the year of our Lord 1789."

Two hundred copies of the work were printed at his own expense. He printed more books between 1790 and 1794, when he started issuing a monthly magazine, called *Azdarar*, in order to keep the press and the workmen fully occupied. A notice in translation read:

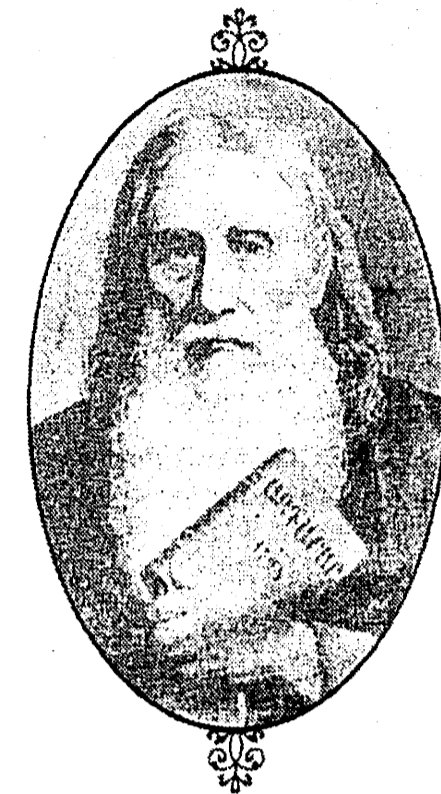
"To the pious Armenian gentlemen and the chaste ladies of Madras.

Having considered the benefit that the press would derive and seeing the good progress of the studious amongst us, I deemed it necessary to place before your patriotism my present intentions, that is, to print a pamphlet at the end of every month, to be called the *Azdarar*, from which the readers will be able to know the principal events of the month, taken either from the different gazettes or from different books, with important subjects and pleasant news; and at the end of the pamphlet there will be a calendar for the month following, containing the festivals of saints and the dates of the new and full moon, etc. Now, either for the worthiness of my project or for the benefit of the press and the encouragement of the hard-worked pressmen, I have fixed the price of the said pamphlet at one Hoon (pagoda), therefore, if anybody wishes to get the aforesaid pamphlet, let him subscribe his name below this paper, with the number of copies required, either for himself, or for his friends, and if there be sufficient copies to meet the cost of the present undertaking, I shall then, with the help of God, proceed with every effort.

As you have always been the followers of the glory of the Armenian nation, I request you therefore, to help me in this work, for your happiness and consolation.

Yours most humble,  
Rev. Arathoon Shumavon."

Through his knowledge of the Persian and Arabic languages, Rev. Shumavon found great



The Rev. Arathoon Shumavon.

favour in the eyes of Walajah Muhammad Ali Khan, the Nawab of Arcot, from whom he received permission in 1795 to print and publish books in the Arabic and Persian languages as well.

Madras tried to revive the *Azdarar* in 1846, but without success, as it did not last even a year. Another attempt was made in 1848 to resuscitate Armenian journalism in Madras, but it shared the sad fate of its predecessors.

The founder of Armenian journalism was not acquainted with the English language and had not seen any journal or gazette in that language. Yet to his credit be it said, he displayed considerable journalistic aptitude, as can be seen from his *Answers to Correspondents*, *Reviews of Books*, and criticisms and discussions of public and communal affairs.

He had placed a letter-box under the belfry of the Armenian church in Madras (where his press and the editorial offices were located) for correspondents and contributors to throw in their letters, articles or translations, intended for publication in the *Azdarar*. He opened the box every day and such of the contributions as were deemed worthy of publication were sent to the press. To the contributor who had sent a description of the city of Qzlar, he replied that the description had met with the approval of his collaborators, but as there were more important matters than description of cities to be published in the *Azdarar*, the article would be held over for some future date. And to another budding contributor, who had sent the first part of a translation, he replied that unless the entire translation was submitted, he could not say if he could publish the same.

The credit for starting the first Armenian press in India is due to Agah Jacob Shameer (1745-1774), the eldest son of Agah Shameer Soolthanoonian (1723-1799), an Armenian millionaire and a merchant prince of Madras in the second half of the 18th Century.

Agah Jacob Shameer, a nationalist, started, amidst his multifarious commercial activities, a press in 1772 to print and publish books in the Armenian language for which there was a big demand amongst the colonists in India, Java and the Far East. The title-page of the first book issued from that press is of special interest, and it can be translated thus:

"New pamphlet, which is called *Exhortation*, (Hordorak) composed for the awakening of the Armenian youth from the weak and idle drowsiness of the sleep of aloofness, and printed with an ardent desire at the expense and through the exertions of Jacob Shameer by his tutor, Moses Bagram, for the benefit of the tender Armenian youth, during the pontificate of His Holiness Simon, the Catholicos of all Armenians, in the year 1772 of the incarnation of the Word, and in the year 1221 of the Armenian era, at the city of Madras in India, in the press of the same Jacob Shameer."

Although the publication is called a pamphlet by the modest publisher, it is nevertheless a book of 240 pages, crown octavo, printed on handmade paper. It

contains a great deal of valuable information about the history of Armenians and other nations.

The next year, another equally interesting book, compiled by Agah Jacob Shameer, was published from the same press. The book which runs into 339 pages, crown octavo, is printed on handmade paper, with a beautiful steel-engraving, depicting a shepherd tending to his flock of sheep and used as a frontispiece. The work was to serve as a Code of Laws for the civil and military administration of Armenia when that noble but ill-fated country regained her political independence which had been the life-dream of the patriotic author, whose consuming zeal for his unhappy Fatherland knew no bounds, as can be seen from the pathetic inscription on his tombstone in far-off Malacca. From his cold grave, he wished to have "the news of the freedom of his countrymen for whom he did much weep, if there arose amongst them one good guardian to govern and to keep".

One hundred copies of this publication, out of the limited number of 110 which were published, were placed on board a sailing vessel for despatch to Armenia, via Persia, but the ship carrying the valuable cargo foundered in the Indian Ocean and all the 100 copies were lost, so that only 10 copies of this extremely rare publication were left behind at Madras.

After the untimely death of the pioneer in 1774, Eleazar (1758-1787), the youngest brother of Agah Jacob Shameer, kept the press going in Madras. The last book printed in the press was in 1783 — an Armenian translation of the history of Nadir Shah of Persia by Hanson, the translator being Pogose Mirzayan.

Six years after Shameer's press had ceased to function, the Rev. Arathoon Shumavon started the second Armenian press at Madras in 1789. In addition to *Azdarar*, some twenty useful works, originals and translations, were printed in Rev. Shumavon's press between 1789 and 1809. The last book printed in that press was a translation, in classical Armenian, of Jean Francois Marmontel's *Belisarius*. According to a long colophon, the cost of the publication was borne entirely by Agah Samuel Moorat, that great benefactor who, with his father-in-law, Agah Edward Raphael, also of Madras, became afterwards the founders of the famous "Moorat-Raphael College"



The Levon Tokmajyan statue of the Rev. Arathoon Shumavon that was unveiled in Yerevan, Armenia, in 2004.

that great national institution and temple of learning, under the control of the learned Mekhitharists Venice, the centenary of which was celebrated on August 16, 1936.

After the closing of the Rev. Shumavon's press, a wealthy merchant of Madras, Agah Sargis Satoor Agavallian (1745-1812), started the third Armenian press in 1809. Some useful Armenian books, six in all, were printed in the press between 1809 and 1812, but with the death of the owner, without any issue, the activities of that well-equipped press came to an end.

Nothing daunted, the two grandsons of the lamented Agah Jacob Shameer, the Armenian Guttenberg of India, started the fourth and the last Armenian press at Madras in 1812, immediately after the death of Sargis Satoor Agavallian.

The life of the last press was however of a short duration, as it lasted a year only. Two important and bulky publications were however issued from it. One was a translation, in elegant classical Armenian, of Florian's *Numa Pompilius*, and the other, also a translation in ancient Armenian, of Voltaire's *Julius Caesar* — a tragedy.

In April 1904, we paid our first visit to Madras where we arrived after a severe cyclone in the Bay of Bengal, midway between Rangoon and Madras. The next morning, we went to the Armenian church in Armenian Street

to offer our grateful thanks to the Almighty for having saved us from a watery grave. After the service, which was very poorly attended owing to the paucity of Armenians in the city, which at one time contained a large Armenian population, we went to pay our respects to the priest-in-charge. He received us in the room where the so-called Church Library was located.

We expected to find a large number of rare manuscripts and a complete collection of the works which had been issued from the different Armenian presses at Madras, but we were sorely disappointed when we saw no manuscripts and only a few torn and dilapidated copies of *Hisos Vordi* (Jesus the Son) which was printed in the Rev. Shumavon's press in 1792. Yet this Church Library had been famous in the olden days when the Madras Armenians were at the zenith of their glory and were devising ways and means for the liberation of the Fatherland from the thrall of the Persians, who had, according to the immortal Byron, "desolated the region where God created man in His own image."

In the afternoon, we went to pay a courtesy visit to the warden of the church, a grumpy and a self-opinionated old man, who had never been out of Madras in all his life. He lived all by himself

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The belfry of the Armenian Church in Madras.



# The needs of education

(Continued from page 1)

degrees in the physical sciences. The cross-disciplinary occupations of biomedical engineering/bioengineering and environmental engineering have attracted people with science degrees, especially those with degrees in the life sciences. In contrast, people in more traditional engineering occupations are more likely to have earned at least one engineering degree at the bachelor's level or higher.

## Learning flexibility

The learning capability and the interest profiles of students vary considerably depending upon their background, changing market trends and knowledge base. Some of the possible options are: Accelerated learning; Extended learning; Concurrent learning for additional diploma or degree; Part time learning; Lateral entry; and Modular learning.

It is imperative that a fully operational credit system is in place to enable learning flexibility. It will then be no longer necessary to designate the duration of the engineering degree programme in terms of years but defined in credits to be earned. The students will have the flexibility both for choosing a menu of subjects of their interest and also for adjusting the pace of learning with certain defined limits of duration. Assuming that a system of credit transfer is in operation, students can earn credits from distance learning in some approved sub-

jects concurrently with their regular studies or through summer credits, thereby shortening the duration for their graduation.

Employed students or those who have part-time employment, those who are show-learners because of physical, emotional or socio-economic reasons, may be allowed to take a longer duration as permitted by regulations. Some students may complete modules of approved courses for graduation. Some of the students may get advanced credits in selected subjects if the knowledge gained during other programmes of studies such as diploma in engineering, or degree in sciences or another bachelor's degree in a different discipline, can be approved for this purpose.

## Graduation flexibility

Learning-flexibility should be accompanied by several different optional tracks for graduation. The possible options are: Single degree; Dual degree; Additional degree; integrated degree; Degree by transfer of credit between institutions and between regular and distance mode.

The programme of study at the Undergraduate level may envisage alternative pathways for obtaining degrees. Through the mechanism of credit requirements there should be several different pathways open to students to obtain a degree. Some may wish to pursue a programme of study in either a sequential mode or a modular

mode concentrating on a single discipline or acquiring multi-disciplinary knowledge in a major and a minor discipline leading to a single bachelor's degree on fulfilling the specified credit requirements. Some candidates with a first degree in science or engineering may wish to pursue the programme of study for a second degree in specified branches by using some of the credits of permitted courses earned during the first degree (e.g. in core subjects). This would enable them to specialise in more than one discipline at a considerably reduced duration.

Some candidates may be allowed to pursue a programme of study concurrently in two branches leading to two degrees after fulfilling the credit requirements of the core and specialised subjects for the two degrees. Integrated Master's degree programmes may be offered for candidates who do not wish to pursue a bachelor's degree but use the extended period optimally for earning credit requirements for the Master's degree. Students may be allowed to transfer credits from one university to another within India for continuing the programme of study for which each university will lay down the necessary conditions. They may also be allowed to transfer credits from approved distance learning programmes to the regular programmes and vice-versa and disciplines approved by the universities concerned. There are many similar varieties of flexible learning opportunities in universities of repute abroad.

## Conclusion

The responsibility to create a high quality human resource base extends beyond completing the academic requirements in terms of classroom lectures,

# Protection sought for TN temples

Even as the famed Brihadisvara temple of Gangaikondacholapuram in Perambalur District (11th Century) and the Airavatesvara temple of Darasuram in Thanjavur District have been declared world heritage (12th century) monuments by UNESCO.

The Tamil Nadu Tourism Department hopes that the newfound status would lead to an increased inflow of domestic and foreign tourists to the two destinations. While the Gangaikondacholapuram temple was constructed by King Rajendra I (1012-44) after winning battles in the north, the Darasuram temple was built by Rajendra II (1146-73). The United Nations Educational Scientific and which considers them extensions of the previously-inscribed site of the Big Temple of Thanjavur, the Archaeological Survey of India, Chennai Circle, has sent proposals to the Centre to declare eight more ancient

temples — four in Kancheepuram District, three in Vellore District and one in Thanjavur District — protected monuments.

They are the Panamudeeswarar and Iravatheswarar temples in Suburban Chennai; the Sathyanatheswarar temple at Thirukalimedu and the Kailasanathar temple at Uthiramerur in Kancheepuram District; the Mahadevar and Gangatheeswarar temples at Thakkolam and a Siva temple at Thirumalacheri in Vellore District and a Siva temple at Thukkachi on Kumbakonam-Nannilam Road in Thanjavur District.

The Centre had recently declared the Abathsahayeswarar temple at Senthamangalam in Villupuram District a protected monument. Seven temples in Kancheepuram town are already under the control of the ASI Chennai circle. (Courtesy: TAL, August 2004.)

syllabi, examinations, grades and ranks. It is also much more than elegant buildings and expensive laboratories. The desirable personal attributes of fresh graduates can often compensate for the many initial disadvantages such as social background and reputation of the institution.

The professional of tomorrow cannot survive on handbooks and manuals alone. The effect of integration of science and humanities in the products and processes is being experienced in every discipline. Over the years, the institutions have neglected the responsibility to provide systematically neces-

sary counselling and guidance on the expectations of the professional life and ways to prepare them. Many students interviewed recently felt that there is a lack of awareness both among students and faculty on the importance of personality traits and very little concrete help in providing the institutional climate for this purpose. These are qualities that will be of great help even if the graduates work for themselves and not for others. These activities should be an organic part of the curriculum. — (Courtesy: Business Mandate, The Journal of the Madras Management Association)

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