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# MADRAS



MUSINGS

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## Strawberries in Tamil Nadu?

### If it learns from Maharashtra

(By V Ramnarayanan)

Wimbledon's favourite fruit is today quite freely available in India, in or out of season. In fact, strawberries are even being grown in Tamil Nadu!

The Tamil Nadu Department of Horticulture recently announced its intention of spreading strawberry cultivation in the State, taking it even to around ten acres in the Nilgiris. The immediate plan of the Department is simply to increase this acreage to around fifty in the coming season. And that includes growing the crop in Nagercoil too, where Godrej Plant Biotech Ltd have introduced the 'Sujatha' and 'Labella' strains they have developed in Hyderabad.

For an initial investment of less than Rs. 4 lakhs and subsequent annual expenditure of Rs. 50,000 (mainly on imported seedlings at Rs. 5 a plant), strawberry cultivation is expected to yield upwards of Rs. 5 lakh per hectare on an average selling price of Rs. 70-80 per kg.

What recent biotechnology efforts have done is to make it possible to grow the fruit even in hot climates, unlike the traditional variety which flourishes in the relative cool of temperate zones. It is these advances that enabled the explosion in strawberry cultivation that took place in Maharashtra in 1993-1995. Cultivation spread to the plains, after traditional gani recorded high gains in the 1993-94 season. The following year saw Maharashtra's acreage grow to an additional 1000 acres from the 250 acres under cultivation in the hills. Maharashtra's target for this year is 2000 acres.

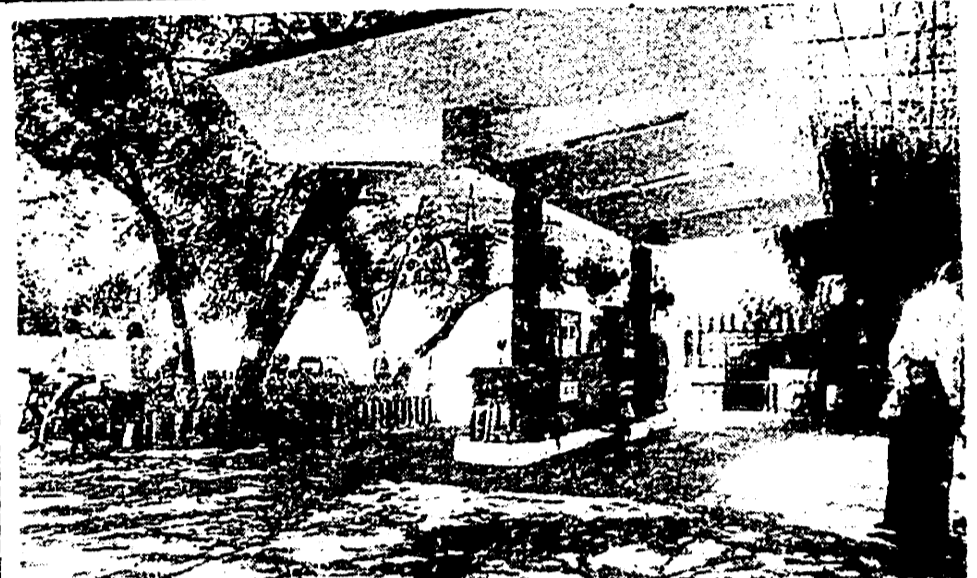
The Maharashtra experience was not without a few glitches. Prices crashed from an initial high of Rs. 250/kg in November 1994 to Rs. 50/kg in February 1995 due to an unprecedented glut in the market. The Pune-based Strawberry Growers' Association sees infrastructure development as the main solution to the problem — along with facilities to market the

produce close to the areas under cultivation. Because strawberries perish quickly, it is essential to establish adequate storage facilities so that the growers can control the times at which to release the fruit to the market. Transportation cost can reduce profitability to an extent the farmers cannot afford, therefore it makes sense to make arrangements to lift the fruit from close

These are lessons that the Tamil Nadu Horticulture Department should waste no time in teaching those who rush into this apparently lucrative venture. According to leading cultivators in Maharashtra, strawberry cultivation with its high capital costs is not meant for small farmers — it takes over Rs. 1 lakh per acre to import the plants not to mention varied other expenses like drip irrigation, packing and transportation, fertilisers, insecticides and pesticides, and labour costs. As it is also highly labour-intensive cultivation, besides involving modern science, it is clearly a game for the big players. On the credit side, there is sufficient demand in the Indian market — about 6,000 tonnes were produced last year, including 60 tonnes that were processed — while the export market can open up once central cooling plants, chilling vans etc. come into place.

The varieties grown in the Nilgiris are 'Phenomenal' and 'Chandler', whose average yield is about 5 tonnes per acre. The American 'Chandler' produces bigger fruit. With improved cultivation methods, yield could be increased to as high as ten tonnes per acre. Planting is in July-September and the season is 6-9 months long. Thirty thousand plants are needed for every acre under cultivation. And harvesting can be done 20 days after planting.

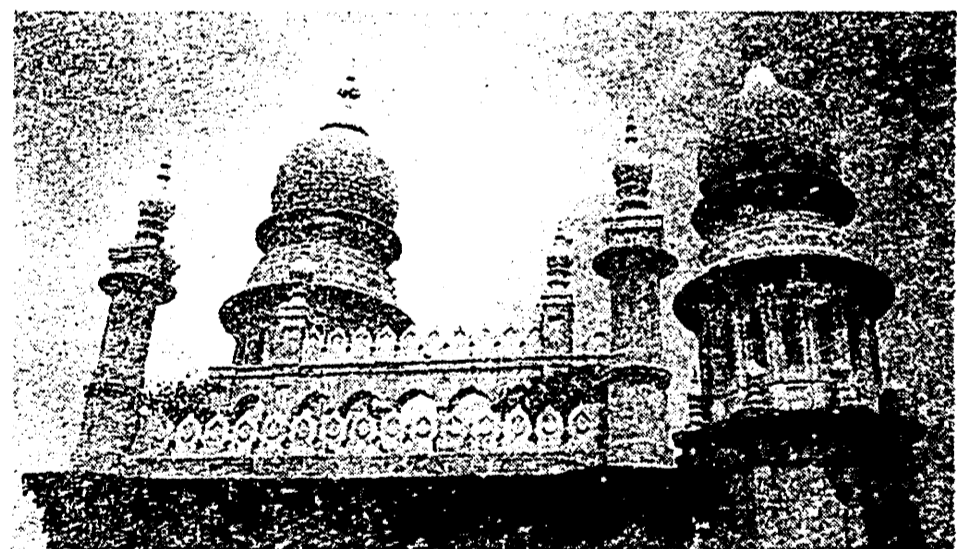
With companies like Maxworth and Godrej entering the field, and the early warnings from Maharashtra, the prospects seem bright for strawberries becoming easily available in Tamil Nadu. But the State must take advantage of the reduced learning curve and, through the right application of modern technology, avoid the pitfalls of supply exceeding demand.



Joyce Kilmer might have thought he'd never see a poem "as lovely as a tree", but trees do have a way of causing varying reactions. For instance, at Woodlands petrol station, on Dr Radhakrishnan Salai, the trees are truly things of beauty. In fact, their shade and the other 'green' decorations used in this 'bunk' make it the city's most beautiful one and a true oasis in Madras. On the other hand, the branch of a giant tree crushing the roof of a magnificent but uncared for old building on the same road is a sad commentary on the Madras Electricity Supply, who occupy this former train depot and seem to care nought for it. And then there are those trees sprouting from niches on high in the magnificent High Court building, threatening one of the city's Indo-Saracenic masterpieces. The loveliness of trees is rather open to question in the latter cases.

(Photographs: First two by V S RAGHAVAN, third by RAJIND CHRISTY)

## The trees of Madras!



## Sethusamudram could pose grave eco-threat

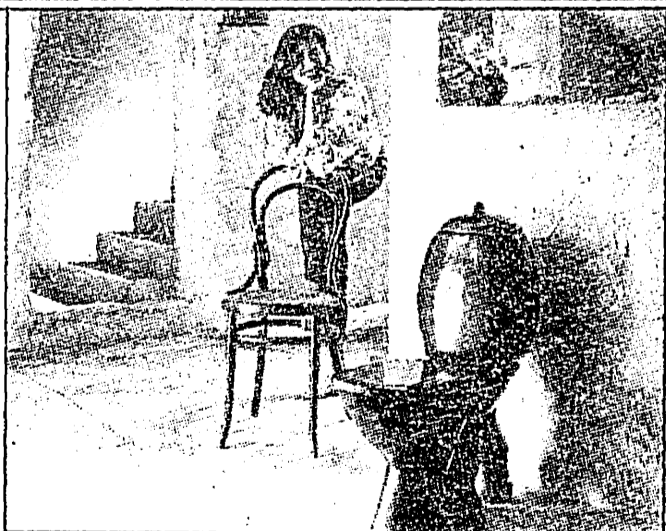
(By A Staff Reporter)

The proposed Sethusamudram canal project in the Gulf of Mannar, though it will be a great engineering feat, will pose a grave threat to the extremely fragile marine ecosystem and rich fishery wealth of the Gulf, says the Aquaculture Foundation of India.

Widespread coral reefs and live coral found in this region harbour many high-value, cultivable natural resources such as finfish, shellfish and seaweeds, which have a great demand in the world market. Items like spiny lobster, shrimp, crab, oyster, abalone, grouper, seabream, seabass etc. fetch fancy prices ranging from US \$5 to 50 per kilo.

When these fishery resources are developed through farming, it will be possible to set up a giant aquaculture and seafood industry in the country for export and also produce substantial quantities of fish for domestic consumption.

Therefore, at this hour, when fishery resources are dwindling in the sea due to overexploitation, pollution etc., any further damage due to the Sethusamudram canal (if constructed) will lead to the destruction of its entire "hidden treasure" which awaits major development in the country, says the Foundation.



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As a tribe vanishes...

# A language murdered!

(By A. BALU in *The Times of India*)

My latest hobby is to monitor the English language dailies, and I am indeed gratified that it has proved to be extremely rewarding. I have a rich collection of samples of slovenly writing drawn from several newspapers that I hope to display at an exhibition which may not make it to Pragati Maidan, but, more suitably, to the Press Club to India....

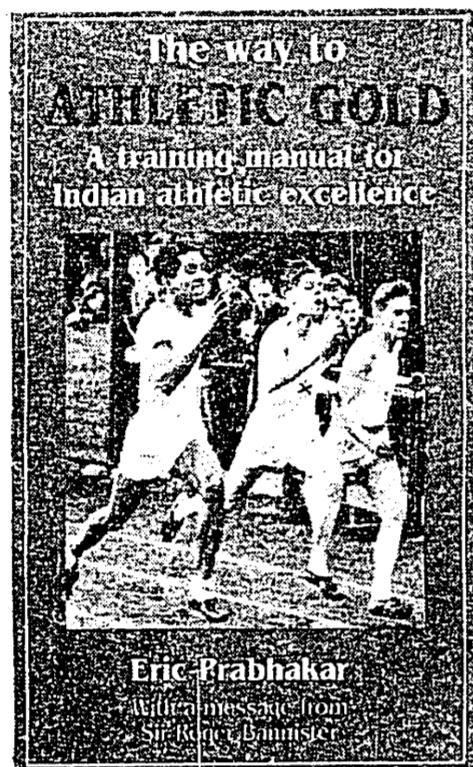
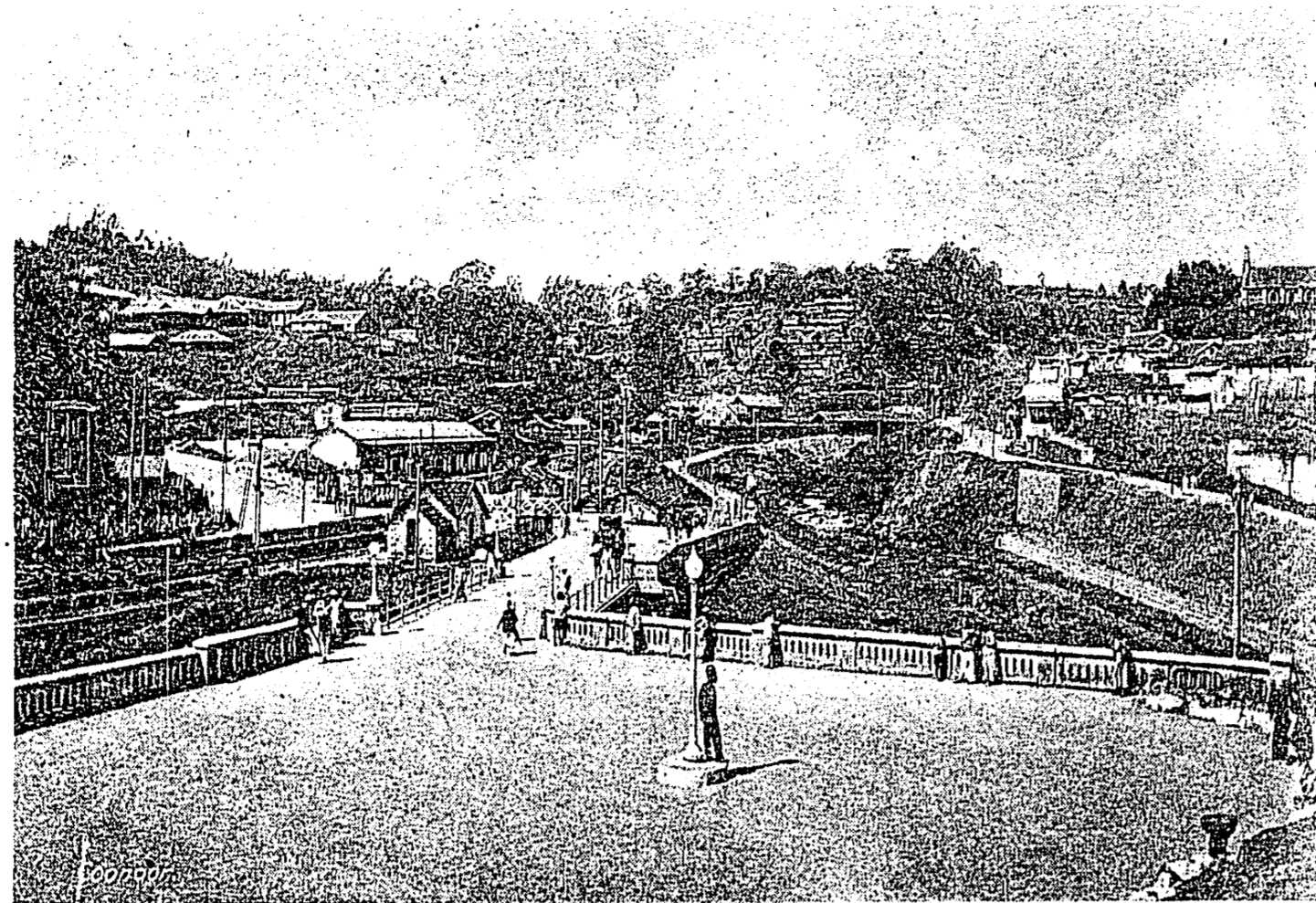
A journalist friend had tried to dissuade me from this fault-finding exercise, saying that sloppy editing is very much part of journalism. I refuse to agree with him because you cannot simply explain away the kind of daily menu of howlers, bloomers, spelling lapses and violence to grammar.

For lack of space, I would only cite a few of the careless mistakes that virtually every newspaper perpetrates day after day. You could come across such gems as 22 'carrot' gold, 'a drought of fresh air', 'lack of little interest', Prophet Hazrat Mohammad's 'heir', 'loose' in the place of 'lose', 'banian' tree, and 'gets himself ablaze'. A leading daily once reported that one of the two constables allegedly involved in the raping of a minor girl succumbed to his injuries. No, he was not 'bobbittised' by the victim, but beaten up by an angry mob. That became clear only in the third paragraph of the story. The editor of another newspaper wrote that during his interview with Ms Jayalalitha, the latter 'moaned' over

her relations with the Centre. Imagine the powerful supremo of Tamil Nadu doing that!

Is there a remedy, you may ask, for stopping this "murder English" that is being witnessed daily by the hapless newspaper readers? I could do no better than commend what a magazine publisher in New York did a few years ago. Fed up with lazy writing by senior editors, Scott Degarmo of *Success* magazine started imposing fines on editors for approving articles containing glaring grammatical and other errors. Whether it was a garbled phrase, an extraneous comma or a maimed name, the minimum penalty was 25 dollars. He had tried in vain "all the nice, positive things" like gently citing mistakes and praising neat copy.

Fortunately or unfortunately, we don't have these days Raghunatha Iyers (of *The Hindu* fame), Frank Moraeses and S. Mulgaokars to emulate Degarmo's fury. The present-day editors are made of softer stuff, and probably inclined to let things as they are in the belief that, in the ultimate analysis, who cares how writers write.



## THE OLD... ...THE NEW

Our OLD and NEW this fortnight are truly 'way out', as the expression these days goes. They feature here because of errors committed last fortnight not only in this feature but elsewhere in this journal when signals got crossed. Our apologies to our readers.

The Coonoor crossroads picture, with station and toy train in the background, should have appeared in place of Ooty Lake in the 1920s, which is what appeared last fortnight. Well, the Lake was interesting enough for something OLD, but Coonoor may well have been more interesting, in the context. As for the NEW, the whole front cover of Eric Prabhakar's book on training for athletic excellence should have appeared on the sports page last fortnight, but what did appear was only a part of it, Prabhakar winning the 100m sprint in 1949 at the annual Oxford-Cambridge athletic meet. We hasten to correct the error this fortnight and add the news that the National Book Trust have requested Prabhakar permission to translate his book into 12 Indian languages — which must be some sort of publishing record. Congratulations, Eric Prabhakar.

# A silver lining in the clouds

In the past few weeks investors have run for the hills in search of cover as the markets, both primary and secondary, have come to resemble a china-shop after a pitched battle between the bulls and the bears. While the Sensex dropped past the psychological 3,000-point level, devolvement and under-subscription are debilitating the primary market. Two big issues, Malvika Steel for Rs. 228 crore and Bhusan Steel for Rs. 165 crore, led the way for Leema Appliances, Range Apparels, Brindavan Gardens, Sea Gold Aqua etc in the matter of poor response and the contentious subscriptions of Padmini Polymers, not to mention M S Shoes, have raised cries of alarm and chaos in the primary market. Of those lucky enough to get subscribed and listed, the listing prices

have mostly been far below the offer prices.

The normal flow of funds between the markets (when one becomes unattractive, investors switch to the other), has also petered out. The markets, which in days past would have reacted with fervour to the good results posted by Reliance, have this year moved into entirely uncharted and unexpected waters. The fall of Reliance was a foretaste of things to come and the 30-scrip Sensex slid to touch a new 52-week low below 3,000. "Fear and greed rule the markets," said a wise man and the scenario today reflects this only too well. Panic seemingly gripped the investors as counter after counter recorded lows from a continuous stream of sell orders.



BSE, in a bid to stop the slide, has raised daily margins by 5% to 20% on sales and reduced it to 10% on purchases. News of institutional buying has also started to trickle down. UTI has reportedly re-started buying and has a massive portfolio of about Rs. 5,000 cr, which will definitely affect the market and should push up all indices.

More importantly, realisation will dawn upon most investors of the increasing opportunities presented to them whereby fundamentally sound scrips with low P/E ratios can be picked up at unbelievably low prices. Whether

you follow the mantra of successful players or just plump for cheap priced investment, buying such sound shares makes eminently good sense today. Cash in on this opportunity.

In this scenario, we think these scrips make good buys:

**Alsa Construction (CMP: Rs. 28.00):** Engaged in building residential and commercial complexes, the company has reported a total income of Rs. 10.30 cr and a PAT of Rs. 1.20 cr for the first half of 1994-95. The second half results are expected to be equally good and the EPS is expected to be near Rs. 5 on its equity of around Rs. 5 cr. The company's orders on hand at sales value are estimated at Rs. 100 cr to be completed in the next three years and its long-term plans include venturing into the holiday timeshare and resorts business. At current prices, the P/E works

out to 5.6 only on the expected EPS. Buy for a target of Rs. 40.

**Abco Plastics (CMP: Rs. 15.50):** The five months delay in the arrival of the machinery for the expansion of its plastic moulding capacity seems to have affected the performance of the company for the year ending March '95. The company is likely to post a turnover of around Rs. 4 cr and a PAT of Rs. 0.30 cr against its estimates of Rs. 7.27 cr and Rs. 0.80 cr. But the performance for 1995-96 is likely to exceed the target. It has finalised an export order for about Rs. 1 cr for the supply of plastic commodities to Burma. It expects to get repeat increased orders from them. It is also hopeful of getting orders from Coca Cola for the manufacture of plastic crates for its bottling unit in South India which it is now meeting by transporting crates from Western India. An MOU has also been entered into with an Australian company for the manufacture

(Continued on P6)

## Naturalists' Corner



A short-nosed fruit-bat zeroes in on its dinner. (Photograph by N S MOHANA KRISHNAN, courtesy Madras Naturalists' Society.)

Remembering a centenary

# The Father of Madras chess'



The late Subramanya Iyer, 'Father of Madras Chess'

Viswanathan Anand, Konguvel and Vijailakshmi, perhaps even Aaron — these are the names Madras Chess fans recognise today. Few remember the 'Father of Madras Chess', whose birth centenary this year was recently commemorated with a chess tournament for schoolchildren by a trust formed by his family members V Kameswaran, Karpaga Ganesh, Director, Pixel Graphics, R Raghunathan and S Krishnamurthy.

He was not an International Master or did he play in tournaments. "Yet it did not not been for K S Subramanya Iyer, it is doubtful whether players like he would have come up," feels A Sundaram, a former chess international. Indeed, if you want to trace the growth of chess in Madras, the starting point has to be the late Dharmakesari Solar K S Subramanya Iyer's Ramani Printing Press and his residence, Solar House.

"Those were the days when chess clubs were nonexistent. It was Iyer who taught chess to many of us and allowed us to play in his press and in his residence," remembers R Raghunathan, former National B player. As a matter of fact, Iyer built a separate room for chess, spending Rs. 55,000 on it then.

Subramanya Iyer was an amalgam of shrewd businessman, philanthropist, footballer and enthusiastic chess player. An entirely self-made man, he had been born into a poor family in Madurai in 1895. At six, his business acumen was seen; he began selling peppercorns on the streets of Madurai after school. He later added plantain leaves and pencils to his range and earned six rupees a day.

Iyer came to Madras as a sturdy youth, with just one rupee given by his grandfather. To his surprise, Iyer found himself becoming an Inspector of Police all of a sudden! A good footballer, Iyer had given a sterling display in an exhibition match against the Police Commissioner's XI and was recruited by the Police. But the very next year,

by Venkatchari Jagannathan

he gave up his job, refusing to shave his tuft which he sported till his death. After his brief stint with the city police, Iyer started in partnership a waste paper business, then diversified into the stationary and printing business. Iyer was initiated into chess by a lawyer friend, Kuppuswamy Iyengar, in 1930. He became obsessed with the

game and, soon, chess became a 24-hour activity in his home. When Iyer set up his press at calling distance from his home, chess shifted there. Seeing Iyer and his friends playing chess by the window of the printing press, people going to the Kapaleeswarar Temple dropped in to watch the play and, later, joined in. As time

passed, word spread about the chess activity at Ramani Press. Soon, young boys flocked to the press, wanting to learn chess or to improve their game. With just two boards, the fight for a chance to play was as intense as the game itself. Many a time, games continued throughout the night and Iyer used to sit with the players teaching them. "Sometimes we even drew the squares on the floor and played," reminisces V Kameswaran, General Secretary, Tamil Nadu Chess Association.

Recalls R Jayaram (90), Iyer's long-time friend, "Ramani Press was more or less a chess club sans subscription or fixed playing hours". With several good players emerging from the press, the invincibility of the country's first International Master, Manuel Aaron, was shaken. "The reputation of the Ramani Press players grew and even Aaron used to play very carefully against them," says S Krishnamurthy, another former State player. "In fact, it used to be called the Aaron-beating club," laughs Sundaram. Speaking about Iyer's style of play, Jayaram recalls, "He was an attacking

player and made his moves fast. His defence was solid and he was nicknamed 'Armada' by Krishnamachari. Iyer was dreaded for his knight manoeuvres"

"He was a positional player who never read any chess theory. Even in 'his seventies, he would not sulk at being defeated by a boy. Instead, he would analyse the game in detail or would ask for a rematch," recalls Sundaram.

When Iyer sold the Press, chess reverted back to his home. Didn't Iyer's obsession with the game affect his family life and the business? "Certainly not. Further, no one dared to question him," says Chandra Ramani, Iyer's granddaughter.

Iyer used to say, "Chess cleans the mind, purifies the intellect. The three essential virtues for a man to be successful can be found in a true chess player — patience, honesty and obedience."

Iyer, who moulded several State chess champions, saw two of them emerge from his family, his grandsons. Ramesh was a national junior champion and Suresh a national player. A philanthropist, Iyer helped several poor families to marry their daughters.

"It was the late Paramachariar who gave Iyer the title Dharmakesari," recalls Krishnamurthy.

After witnessing four generations of chess players, Iyer breathed his last on 25.1.85. "We cannot quantify in money terms the way heajoled, motivated and mocked us to perform better. That had to be experienced and can't be expressed in words," says Sundaram remembering his guru.

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# SAF Games sites named

## But what's the progress?

It was just a couple of days after Reader Fazal's letter about the Santhomé School's stadium being earmarked for table tennis and gymnastics (MM, May 1) that the Indian Olympic Association announced the venues for the SAF Games to be held in the City in December. The venues will be:

Athletics and football: *Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium.*

Basketball and wrestling: *Jayalalitha Indoor Stadium.*

Weightlifting: *Student Activities Centre, IIT.*

Table Tennis: *Santhomé Higher Secondary School Indoor Stadium.*

Kabaddi: *Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu Sports Complex, Nehru Park.*

Boxing and Volleyball: *Multipurpose indoor stadium, Old zoo area.*

Hockey: *Hockey Stadium, Mayor Radhakrishnan Stadium, Egmore.*

Tennis: *Tennis Stadium, Nungambakkam Recreation Centre.*

Swimming: *Aquatic Complex, Velachery Road.*

### THE CORNER FLAG

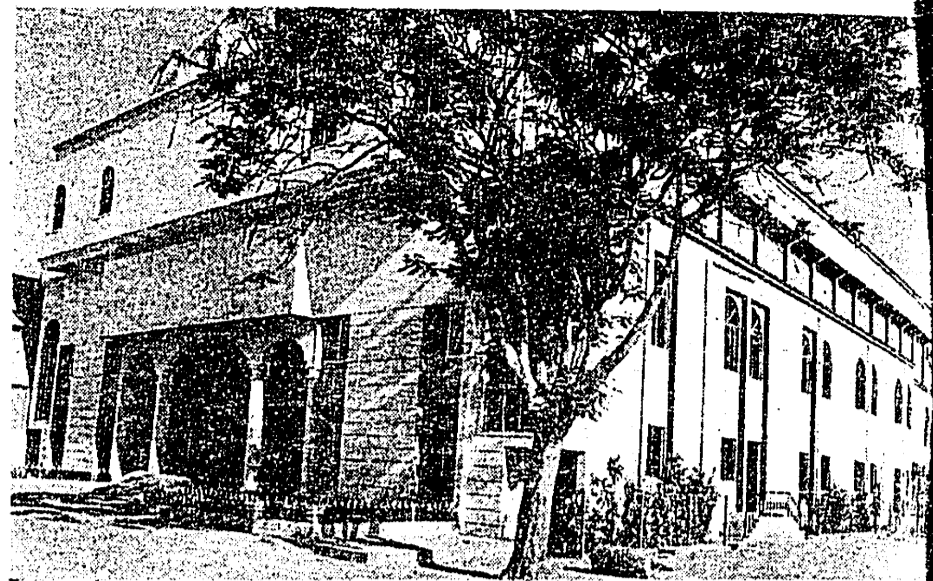
Shooting: *B. Sivanthi Adityan Shooting Sports Complex and Sivanthi Shooting Range, Alamadi.*

Of these, the tennis and swimming stadia and the indoor stadium for boxing and volleyball will be new facilities built by the Government, but the hockey stadium will be an old hockey venue improved by Government to keep up with the times. Another new stadium will be the

Santhomé Higher Secondary School's, which the School is putting up with the help of corporate and public donations.

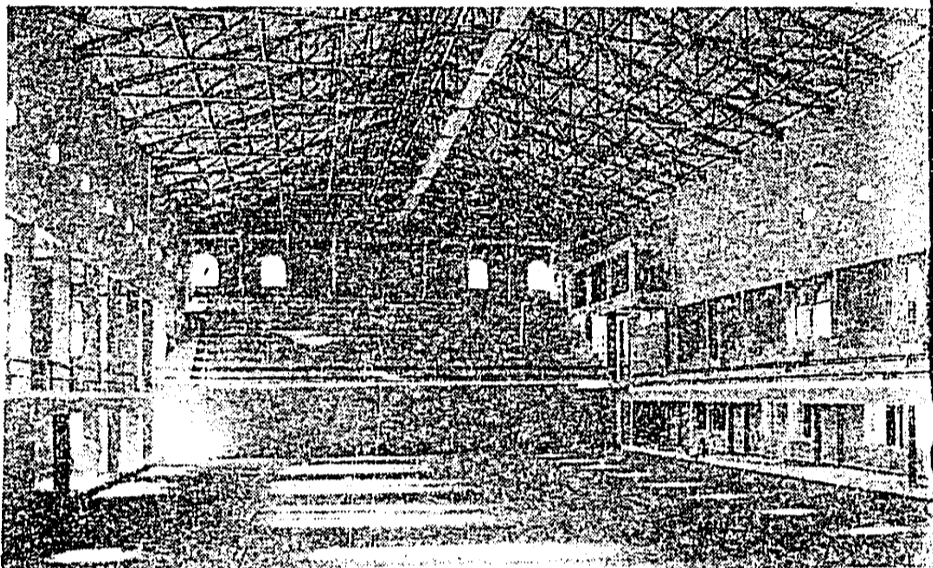
Government is spending Rs. 70 crore on the Games Village, which it hopes to recover, and perhaps even make a profit on, through sale of the apartments after the Games. It will spend Rs. 21 crore on new stadia and improving the existing infrastructure and Rs. 29 crore has been earmarked for organisational expenditure, according to an IOA spokesman.

The one thing the spokesman made no mention of was the progress at each venue in developing or improving the infrastructure. For instance, work has just commenced in the old zoo area on the multipurpose indoor stadium for boxing and volleyball. Could someone tell *The Corner Flag* what the state of play is everywhere?



Outside and inside views of the multipurpose indoor stadium being built by the Santhomé Higher Secondary School. The stadium, big enough to conduct any tournament in any indoor sport, will be venue of the table tennis competition at the SAF Games in December. The school, which has a fine sports record, particularly in cricket and table tennis, is still waiting for Central and State Government support for this magnificent Rs. 1.5 crore stadium which will, when complete, seat 2500 in the hall and 2000 in the gallery. The 72 x 31 m auditorium has a ceiling which soars 31 metres and a wooden playing area 40 x 25 m. In its basement will be a well-equipped gymnasium.

(Photographs and text by V.S. RAGHAVAN)



## Triple century next?

M. A.M. Ramaswamy's double century of classic winners, which the Madras industrialist-cum-turfite completed by leading in the winner of *The Hindu Nilgiris Derby Stakes* winner at Udhagamandalam on April 7th, is by no means the end of the road for the world's leading racehorse owner. For one thing, he has been blessed with an indefatigable spirit to make history and rewrite it, and, for another, he can boast of owning the country's biggest contingent of highly-pedigreed thoroughbreds. This is crystal-clear from the pace at which he achieved his second century.

Since *Queen of the Hills* won for him the 1983 Mysore Derby and helped him complete his century, which earned him a place in the *Guinness Book of World Records*, MAM took just over a decade to set a new world record of 200 classic winners. Considering the record number of horses he races throughout the year at nearly all the Indian centres, and the blue-blooded stallions on duty at his Chettinad stud farm, it is a safe bet that in an almost identical number of years, if not sooner, he will boost his tally to an unapproachable triple century.

The road to success is not strewn with roses. MAM has had his setbacks, as in the 1994-95 season at his home centre of Guindy when his runners finished among the also-rans in all its

five classics, won by challengers from Bangalore. But the sporting owner took them all in his stride. His insatiable appetite to boost his tally was by no means affected.

India indeed has never had an owner like MAM. Even before he completed his century, he had eclipsed all the records the Princely owners had established before Independence. Oddly enough, unlike the Princes, MAM had no racing in his blood.

### JAICI

Neither his grandfather, Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar, nor his father, Raja Sir M.A. Muthiah Chettiar, had owned a racehorse. He had indeed begun his turf career as a backer in the Guindy ring, where he came to know some of the leading owners of the time. He did not take long to join the owners' list along with his late elder brother, Kumara-rajah M.A.M. Muthiah.

Silver Jet, a grey colt, was the brothers' first winner, and Fair Court their first classic winner. Most unfortunately, the partnership did not last long, as the elder brother died a premature death. After the mourning, MAM signalled his return to the scene with Star Haven, a great filly, who made a clean sweep of the 1971-72 Madras classics.

From Star Haven to Great Spectacle, MAM has had a galaxy

of classic winners, the like of which the Indian turf had never before known, even if it did not include a *Comanche*, a *Squanderer* or a *Royal Tern*. *Amberdue*, *Air Hostess*, *Cupid*, *Half a Crown*, *Aristocrat*, *Attaturk*, *Red Satin*, the great *Opinion*; to mention his better-known classic winners, all combined to establish him as India's greatest-ever owner long before he led in his 200th classic winner. *Nicolette* won for him no less than nine classics, an all-time record by a filly. But pride of place among his classic winners must go to *Own Opinion*, who perhaps gave MAM his proudest moment — before of course he led in *Great Spectacle* on August 7th — by conquering the great *Royal Tern* to the *Invitation Cup* in Bombay in 1979.

MAM owes his rise to eminence not only to his horse sense — "I pay a lot of attention to bloodlines", to quote him — but also to his faith in his trainers and jockeys. His long and successful associations with trainers Ali Asker, Aris David and Robert Foley have made other owner-trainer combinations look mediocre. But MAM's greatest quality is that despite all his eminence he remains a commoner, accessible to all. The great reception he got at Udhagamandalam speaks for itself.

## BATTLE FOR PUNE CANTT.

(Continued from P3)

place. The more visible examples are also the best maintained; the University of Pune, built originally as *Government House* for Sir Bartle Frere by James Trubshawe, inspired by Prince Albert's ambitious *Osborne House* on the Isle of Wight; *Command House*, built in 1886 and currently residence of the GOC-in-C Southern Command, or the Pune Law Courts built in the Gothic style.

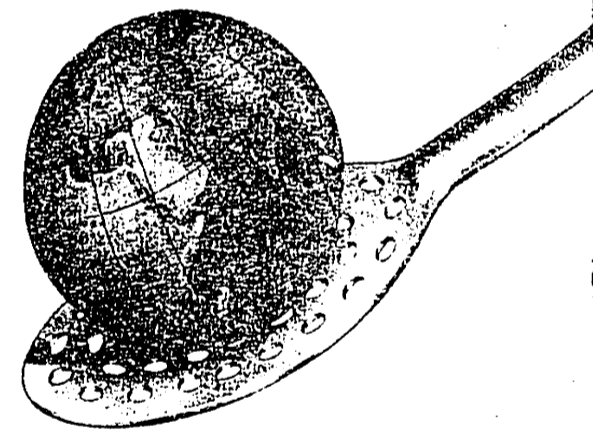
But for every *Government House* that sparkles with spit and polish and zealous care, there are other forgotten corners of Pune that will be forever England...

Pune throws up large quantities of antiquarian whimsy, but in equal measure with outstanding examples of colonial architecture that deserve to be preserved as part of India's priceless building heritage and not become the

truth of Philip Davies's perfect epitaph for the splendours of the Raj: "They were always pale imitations of life at home, and never more than wistful reflections of the real thing, which is why today they seem so forlorn and rather sad. Conceived in nostalgia, they seem destined to decline into melancholy, for old empires don't really die, they just fade away."

## ANSWERS TO QUIZ

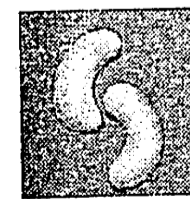
1. V. Vaikunth and K.K. Rajasekaran Nair respectively; 2. Edson Arantes de Nascimento *alias* Pele; 3. Ginger Rogers; 4. Argentina; 5. 'Auto' Shankar; 6. 'Sivaji' Ganesan; 7. Stephen Hendry; 8. G. Viswanathan and Alagu Thirunavakkarasu; 9. On the Jammu-Srinagar line, over the Chenab at Salal; 10. Dibendu Barua and Bhagyashree; 11. The editor of *India Today*; 12. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; 13. The last metre gauge steam engine; 14. Nisha Mohota of West Bengal; 15. South Africa. The ANC auctioned Dr. Nelson Mandela's personal effects; 16. Yehudi Menuhin; 17. Palaly; 18. Chengalpattu, Coimbatore, Dindigul, Erode, Sriperumbudur and Tiruchi; 19. It's a marine wing to explore the east coast of



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