

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

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Let us tax pollution

— urges Justice Kuldip Singh
(By A Special Correspondent)

He is a big, burly, bluff Sikh. The archetypal Sardarji. Always laughing and smiling, but passionate about anything close to his heart. And passionate he was about the environment when he delivered the keynote address at a recent symposium in the City organised by the Max Mueller Bhavan and the National Law School, Bangalore. The subject was 'Environmental Law'; what Justice Kuldip Singh wondered about was what each one of us was doing about the rape of the environment. Force the pol-

luter to pay — and soon he'll stop polluting the country, Justice Singh advised.

India's 14 perennial rivers, along whose banks are most of the country's towns and cities, and several other rivers are no longer water channels; they are pollution channels, he thundered. And he continued firing further salvos:

- Of India's 3114 major towns and cities, only EIGHT have full-fledged sewage systems; the rest

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The Potti Sriramulu park in Loane Square, George Town, is often a parking lot and always a toilet, despite the Environmental Society's best efforts. But is that reason enough to do away with it and build on its site a multistoreyed building that will only add to the congestion and strain the infrastructure of George Town still further? (Photograph by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)

Save that park!

(By A Staff Reporter)

The plans of the Corporation of Madras to convert the Potti Sriramulu Park in Loane Square into a commercial complex has drawn a

shocked response from the Indian Institute of Architects, Tamil Nadu Chapter, which has added its voice to those of concern expressed by the citizenry of the city.

In a letter to the Mayor of Chennai, the Institute has appealed for a rethinking of the plans. Writes the institute:

'There are only two existing parks covered at present under the Tamil Nadu Parks, Play Fields and Open Spaces (Preservation and Regulations) Act 1959 in the whole of Goerge Town. Potti Sriramulu Park is a medium-sized park and is one of the two covered by the Act in this area. By converting a park into a commercial complex, the very purpose of the Act is defeated. We expect the present Government and Corporation Authorities to be more sensitive on environmental issues like these.

Parks which are vital lung spaces of the city should not be neglected or destroyed whatever the reason. Old George Town, which is an extremely dense and congested area, suffers from a dearth of open spaces. The streets are chocking with built spaces, traffic and temporary constructions. Where is the need to create another commercial complex in this already chaotic urban

centre? This area is screaming for breathing space, and choking an existing open space with concrete structures goes against all norms of environmental sensibility and sustainable development. This decision not only goes against the interests of the City, but it also works against the Government policy of decentralising business activities from the core of the City.

The basic purpose of handing over parks, playgrounds and roads to a public body like the Corporation is definitely not to destroy them, but to maintain and preserve them for the use of the public. Nowadays there is no respect for public property. Portions of roads and platforms are encroached upon and used for shops by traders. Why is this being allowed? Roads and platforms must be kept free for the use of the public.

One of the reasons quoted by the Corporation for this conversion is that the public do not use this area as a park and that it is used by anti-social elements for illegal activities. This statement is self-explanatory and reveals how badly the park has been maintained. This is no reason for converting it into a

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Call for public hearings

Over the two days of the symposium on 'Environmental Law' organised by the Max Mueller Bhavan and the National Law School in Chennai recently, the discussion tended to wander a bit after a lively opening session and a couple of factual sessions on the Indian and German environmental laws. At times it seemed to get bogged down in unnecessary debates on whether NGOs were genuine or not, whether they were doing good work or not, and whether their commitment was to the people they were working with or the donors. There was also unnecessary debate on alternative lifestyles (wearing a dhoti? living in a hut? cycling when you can afford a car?).

One point, however, that was made often enough in the enviroment debate, was the call for public hearings on all projects before impartial tribunals. The Green Benches had other work apart from hearings on environmental issues and, therefore, the need was for environmental tribunals like the consumer courts,

with these tribunals holding open sessions to discuss the plans for any project BEFORE the project got underway. Joint monitoring thereafter was a necessity.

Another point made was that despite legislation and the Right to Information Act, transparency can only come if both legislation and information are provided in plain language and local languages, so that even those at the grassroots level can understand their rights and the consequences of any project affecting their lives.

Other points made during the course of the symposium were:

- * Today, a complaint, even on a postcard to the Supreme Court, results in investigation being undertaken under the Court's direction.
- * It is time to empower citizens as watchdogs.
- * Most effluent treatment plants are only apologies for what they should be.
- * Environmental lawyers have to be activists to ensure rulings are translated into action.

- * Community pressure is the one weapon in the hands of the public to tackle environmental issues
- * Government and polluters should not be allowed to plead lack of funds; administrators or workforce to implement Court's orders.
- * The Writ of Mandamus should be a 'Continuing Mandamus' in the case of interim Court orders in order to make sure the parties report to Court regularly on the developments, thereby helping the Court in making its final decision.
- * The Press strongly supportive of the Environmental Movement in the Sixties and Seventies, has of late become lukewarm; it appears to reflect the feeling in some quarters that the Movement is hampering Development.
- * Hospitals are major polluters and disease carriers by not having proper waste disposal systems.
- * Why aren't there representatives of Government and Industry at the seminar?

Hospitals need to clean up

Chennai hospitals/private nursing homes/clinical laboratories with their antiquated and unsafe waste disposal mechanisms are more likely to spread epidemics and diseases than ensure good health. Most of them just dump biological wastes into the City's sewage system or garbage dumps instead of incinerating them, thus endangering health.

According to R. Desigavinayagam Pillai, Additional Chief Environmental Engineer, Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB). "Only 42 hospitals out of City's 193 (165 private and 28 government) have installed incinerators". Even the 42 hospitals would not have installed the incinerators except for the license they needed from the TNPCB.

Aid to tackle hazardous waste

Tamil Nadu will be one of the four States — Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat being the others — that will get financial assistance under a \$290 million World Bank project for management of hazardous wastes. The four states together account for 72 per cent of the hazardous wastes generated in the country. There are in Tamil Nadu 962 units generating hazardous wastes.

Recently, the Supreme Court, while hearing a public interest litigation, directed the authorities to install incinerators/suitable devices for safe disposal of hospital wastes. Hospitals/nursing homes were advised to consult the Central Pollution Board in this regard.

Desigavinayagam Pillai laments the fact that the TNPCB does not have any power to punish the delinquent hospitals/nursing homes (including well-known private establishments) for not installing incinerators. It can only issue show cause notices, which are "con-

signed to the dust bin by these hospitals". However the Pollution Control Board is biding its time till the Bio-medical Waste (Management & Handling) Rules, 1995, are notified by the Centre. These rules lay down the manner in which hospital wastes must be handled, segregated, packaged, transported, stored, treated and disposed of. The rules also fix the responsibilities of the waste generators.

Citing the leather and garment-dyeing industries, which have put up common effluent treatment plants, Desigavinayagam Pillai says that the city hospitals too can team together and install a common incinerator and minimise their individual investment. Such attempts have been made successfully in Salem, Trichy and Madurai. In Salem, 64 hospitals have jointly installed at a cost of Rs.10 lakh a common incinerator to dispose of 650 kg of bio-medical waste every day.

According to Desigavinayagam Pillai, the TNPCB has written to the Centre to provide investment subsidies for such ventures, as it does in the case of the leather/dyeing industries common effluent treatment plants. The Centre at present provides 25 per cent of the project cost of installation of common effluent treatment plants put up by the leather/dyeing industries. The State Government for its part provides similar assistance and the IDBI gives 30 per cent of the project cost as a loan with a three-year moratorium period. To avail itself of this assistance, the user industry has to form a society to implement the project and chip in just 20 per cent of the cost.

The TNPCB gives permission to establish and run hospitals in two parts — one for their establishment, the other to permit them to commence operation. The second part is issued only if the hospital installs an incinerator and conforms to emission standards.

V. Jagannathan

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Restored, renovated and refurbished to look the landmark building it once was — the Standard Chartered Bank branch at M.G. Road, Mumbai.

HERITAGE GETS CORPORATE AID

A recent report in *Business World* points out that heritage has been getting a helping hand from the corporate sector. More corporate money has been coming into the restoration of heritage buildings, the report states. It amplifies:

Humayun's Tomb in Delhi is being spruced up with a \$25,000 (Rs.90 lakh) donation from the Indo-British 50th Anniversary Trust, a group of British expatriates which has raised part of the funds from the Aga Khan Foundation and part from the Oberois ...

International banks, such as Standard Chartered, Deutsche Bank and Hongkong Bank, have been renovating the buildings where their offices are located... Mumbai architects claim banks spend between Rs.15 lakh and Rs.40 lakh on each project, renovating the facades of the 19th Century buildings where they are located... The Hongkong Bank has also pumped in huge sums into its Chennai and Calcutta offices. At its Netaji Subhash Road branch in Calcutta, for instance, the bank recently removed the false ceiling to reveal some beautiful stained glass work which had been hidden for long, and polished the ochre pillars. "Banks prefer such heritage structures because they give the impression of grandeur and stability," says the bank's manager (public affairs), Mumbai, Malani Thadani.

Critics dismiss corporate conservation as just another form of commercialisation of heritage. Certainly, its concerns are not always philanthropic, particularly in

Mumbai, where the private sector has got into heritage conservation primarily for two reasons. One, with the government introducing legislation identifying a large number of heritage buildings, firms suddenly find themselves on heritage properties. But the more important reason is the shortage of office space in Mumbai. It makes better sense to renovate an old building than to build new ones.....

Not all foreign banks restrict themselves to their own buildings. Hongkong Bank, for instance, has been active in maintaining the Banganga Tank, a 12th Century Hindu pilgrimage site in Mumbai. The bank gave the Indian Heritage Society a grant to help restore the precincts. American Express is the leading sponsor of the New York-based World Monuments Fund which bankrolls conservation and restoration projects around the world. (Recently) American Express — which has committed \$5 million to the Fund — donated \$1,00,000 to INTACH for the Jaisalmer Conservation Initiative, to restore the Jaisalmer Fort. American Express manager (public affairs & communications) Sujit Mitra defends its decision ... "We want to be seen as good corporate citizens, and not just by an image. An image can be bought for much less. But this is indicative of a deeper commitment."

The Tatas have decided to mark the 50th anniversary of freedom by launching the restoration of the 19th Century Army & Navy building in Mumbai's Kala Ghoda district. The entire project will cost about Rs.50 lakh. ACC has

funded the work on Mumbai's magnificent David E Sassoon Library, a 150-year-old neo-Gothic building in the city's Fort area. The Sassoon Library has got generous funds from several quarters, including the Sir Dorabjee Tata Trust which has donated Rs.20 lakh.

In Calcutta, the UB group has spent Rs.12 lakh on restoring the Gwalior Monument; the Princep Ghat was renovated with a Rs.15 lakh grant from the private sector. The Sterling group has spent Rs.32 lakh restoring the Madurai Meenakshi temple and lighting up the temple's four gopurams (towers). Illumination is a particular favourite with companies. Ceat spent almost Rs.5 lakh on illuminating the old council building in Mumbai; it also shells out around Rs.5 lakh a year to maintain the lights.

The Ahmadabad Walled City monuments, including the over 500-year-old fort wall, have recently been included in the American Express-sponsored World Monument Watch programme. Although the grant has not been fixed, the city's municipal corporation has already begun work on the walled city, with its Rs.50 lakh budget for this year. But the corporation has not sought funds from any other private body...

With funds from the private sector pouring in, many ignored heritage buildings in the country may soon find themselves jostling for attention with the elite group of frescoed caves, sculpted temples and medieval tombs.

When is all this going to happen in Chennai?

The City's first railway station ...

Our OLD this fortnight is of the first Madras Rail Terminal, now the Royapuram Railway station, when it was opened. We owe the sketch of this once-magnificent building to V. Sundaram I.A.S.(RETD.) who has perhaps the finest collection in Chennai of antiquarian books, journals and newspapers. He writes:

● In *The Illustrated London News* dated September 6, 1856 (a priceless copy in my possession) a news item entitled "Opening of the Madras Railway" was published. It contains a description of the inauguration of the Madras Railway on June 28, 1856 by the then Governor of Madras, Lord Harris. Here are excerpts:

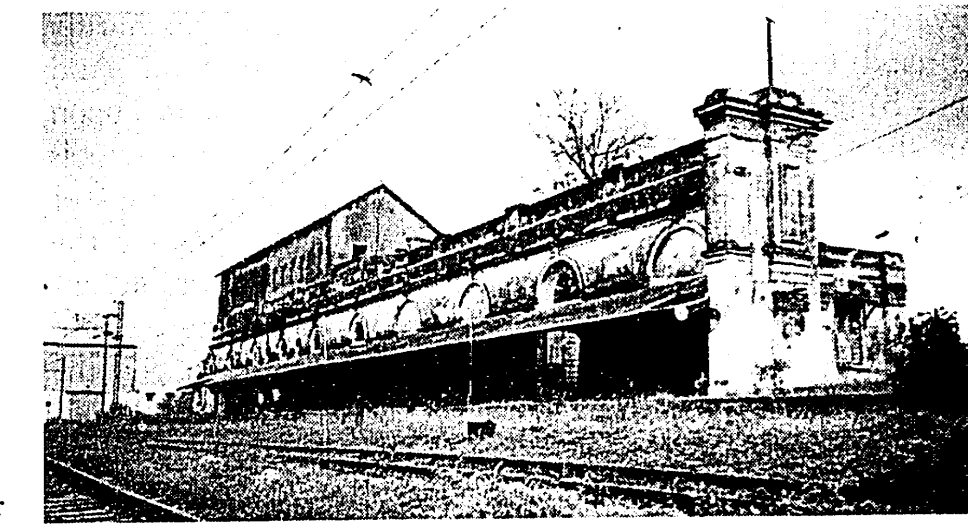
"On the 28th of June the inauguration of the Madras Railway was celebrated with great state. The Right Honourable the Governor, His Excellency the Commander-in-chief, the officers of the Government and staff of the Garrison of Fort St. George with all the elite and beauty of the Presidency, honoured the Railway Company with their presence on this important occasion.

It was a sight long to be remembered in Madras, thousands flocking to witness the proceedings from any point from which a view of the ceremony or the train could be obtained. The company had issued invitations to about 300 of the leading European society to witness the former, and to take a trip by the latter to Amoor, up to which place the railway is now completed: there to partake of a dinner, and to return in the evening:- another train was dispatched after the departure of the first one, to a nearer station up the line — Trivelloor, which was occupied by the principal members of the native community of Madras and others who had also been invited to join the excursion.

"The sketch by Capt. Barnett Fort of the Madras Army represents the terminal station at Madras at the moment when the religious ceremony was being performed in the noble verandah of the northern side of that building. The rooms here are very elegant and most superbly furnished with handsome pun-

kahs & etc., the coup d'ail was very picturesque when seen as they were filled with a crowd of elegantly-dressed ladies, the light colours of whose dresses were broken by the variety of uniforms of the military and the black of the civilian. The train is seen ready to come up the platform for this party, and that for the native community which was to follow is seen already filled, and run up so as to enable its occupants to witness the inauguration. As soon as the ceremony was completed, the party proceeded on their excursion...

As the train proceeded across the arid plain of the Carnatic, it brought to view, the countless number of natives who thronged the route, sixty-five miles on either side of the line... The train dashed by the masses of bright colours here clustered by a bridge — there collected under the deep shade of a tope — crowded



round a station house, or fringing the edges of a cutting, cheering us lustily as the train flew by them. Now and then too, a hearty laugh broke forth when in passing some pasture ground, the lazy cattle, startled by the rushing shriek of the train, flew frantically away, sometimes followed by the scared, herdsman himself, who thinking that the fiery-fiend whom he saw approaching might crush him also, took to his heels with all his speed.

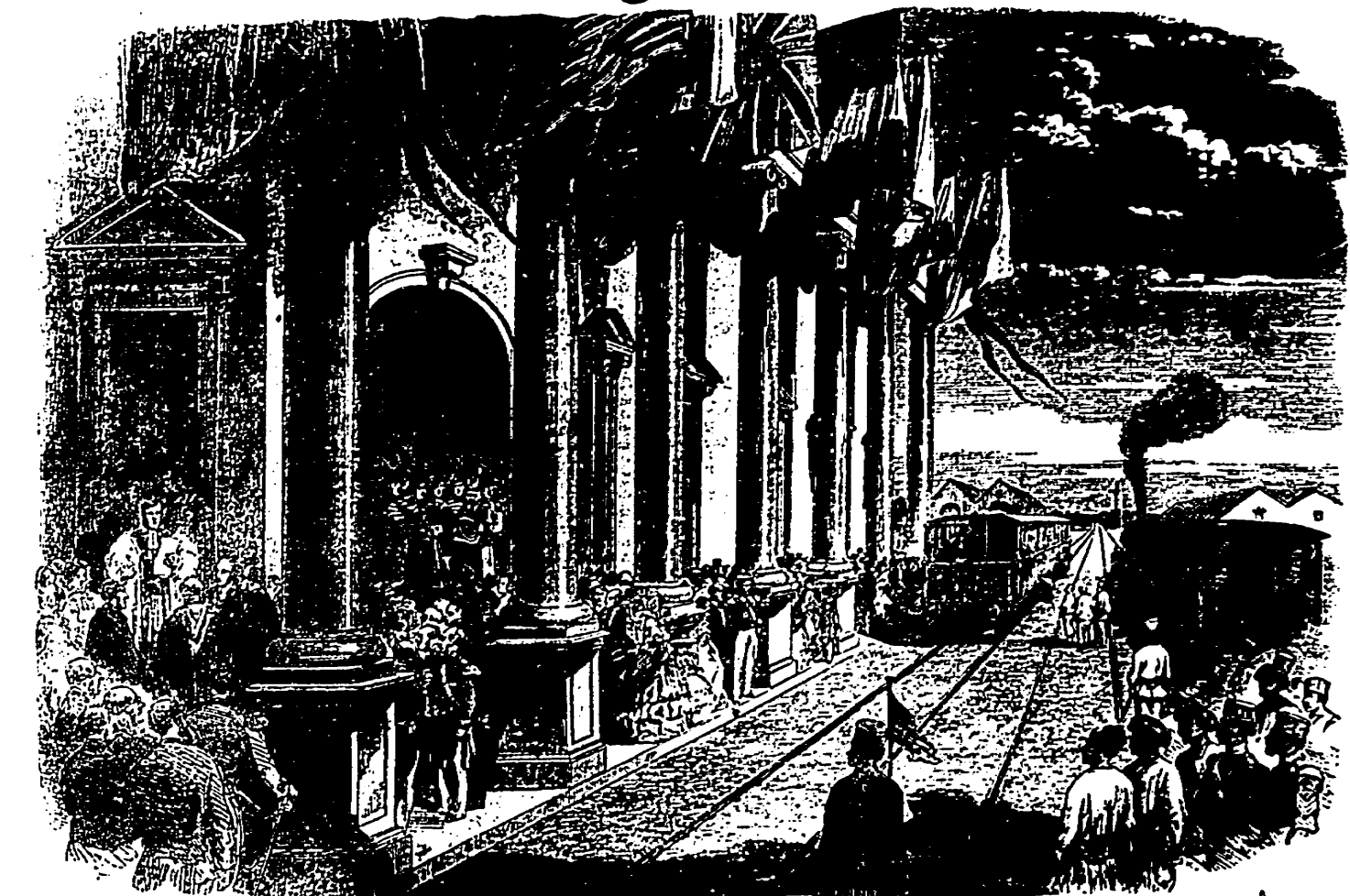
Arrived at Amoor, the crowds were greater than ever — the hills were covered with varied-coloured masses; the artillery guns roared their welcome to Lord Harris, who on alighting, was received by a guard of honour of the 19th Regiment and officials of the company, headed by Major Jenkins their manager. The

THE OLD... ..& THE NEW



The NEW: The Royapuram Railway Station today... a dilapidated structure whose entrance alone shows vestiges of its ancient grandeur in its fluted Corinthian pillars.

... In need of restoration

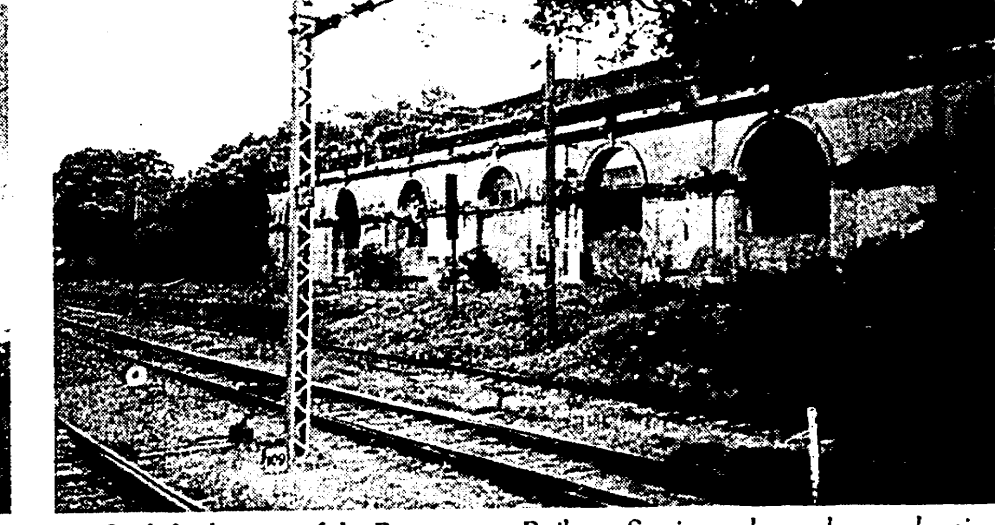


The Old: Royapuram Station, when it was inaugurated in 1856 as Madras's first Railway Station. (From *The Illustrated London News*, London, of 6.9.56, now in the collection of V. Sundaram.)



On left, the rear of the Royapuram Railway Station today, asbestos sheeting shading a platform that's not in use. The superstructure, a later addition, is also not in use, but below it is the only part of the building in use — as a ticket office. On right is a free-standing wall — all that's left of the platform that faced the rear of the station building. And below, the present state of the roof, with a large hole gouged in it. (All photographs by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)

Major Jenkins replying to his Lordship's toast, stated that the whole line extending to the western coast, a distance of about 450 miles was in course of construction... Its course, he stated, lies through Vellore, Salem, Coimbatore, round of the foot of the Neilgherry Hills, terminating at Naypoor, a small port on the Western coast, a little to the south of Calicut...



Our NEW is of the shambles this once-splendid station is in today. Vestiges of the once-handsome pillars are still to be seen. The rest is a sorry mess. Surely the Railways has enough money to restore this stately building to what it was when it was the first railway station in

the whole of South India? There are members of INTACH and the engineers of the Taj Group who will be glad to advise without a fee on how such restoration can be done. (Photographs of the NEW are by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)

MRTS could be a godsend

— *If passengers' fears are eliminated*

"Ticket to Beach... Rs.2.50, please!" The booking clerk smiles courteously. I am at Tirumailai, the latest addition to the MRTS. It is 9.40 a.m. on a weekday. The platform is reasonably crowded, but certainly has more than a normal share of indulgent grandfathers and their excited protégés. A polite notice warns passengers "to enter and detrain carefully."

Exactly at the scheduled time 9.50 a.m., the train glides smoothly outwards. Some of the Mylapore schools are close to the MRTS route, and many children wave cheerily, as we go by their third floor classrooms!

'Light House' station is about three minutes away. Between this and the next, 'Thiruvallikeni', there is a lovely view of the Marina Beach. On a cloudy day, ghostly ships dot the grey horizon that merges ethereally with the serene waters.

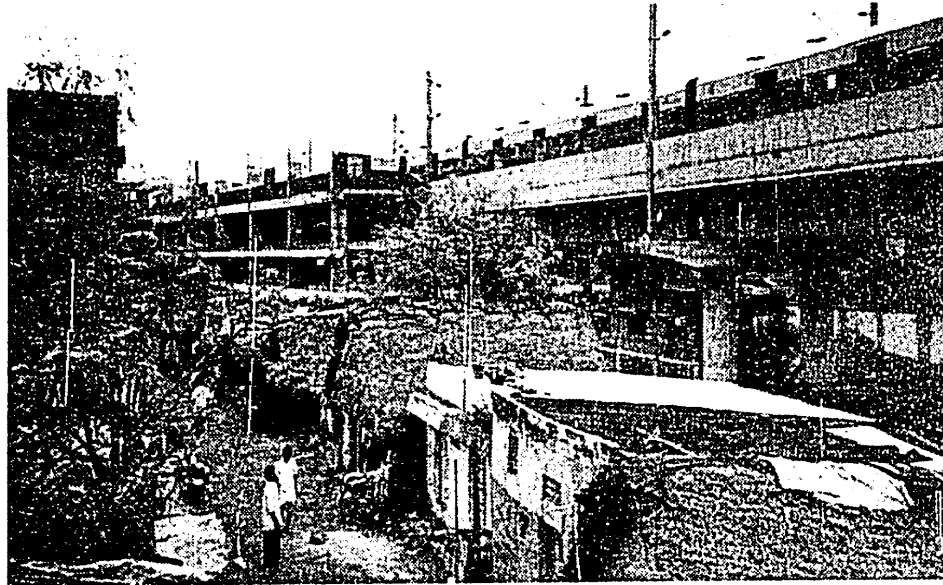
Next stop is 'Cheppakam'. Employees of the PWD, DMS and Ezhilagam state government offices, along with those bound for the University and nearby, detrain and hurry away. A few minutes later we are high over Mount Road (with its careening, packed-to-bursting buses) en route to 'Chintadripet' station. A woman next to me gushes, "What a relief it is, to travel in such comfort, and so quickly too! The MRTS is a boon to working women like us. Earlier, we'd to travel in packed buses from Mylai to Town for 45 minutes (and that is if we could get into the bus). Now I reach my office in 20 minutes".

A middle-aged man agrees, smiling, "It certainly is very convenient. Worth it to be saved the agony of stressful bus travel, even if you have to walk a little longer to office. Since I work in G.H., I have to get off at the next station, 'Park Town'. Still, it is definitely healthier, either way!"

Three minutes more and we are at 'Chennai Kottai', or Fort station, where the Secre-

around 30-40 rupees, I think. With the system expected to be extended in the III phase (Mandaveli - Greenways Road - Kotturpuram - Kasturba Nagar - Indira Nagar - Tiruvanniyur - Taramani - Velachery), along with increased frequency of trips, it will be even more convenient."

All in all, a rather satisfying experience. But ominous rumblings of discontent also surface

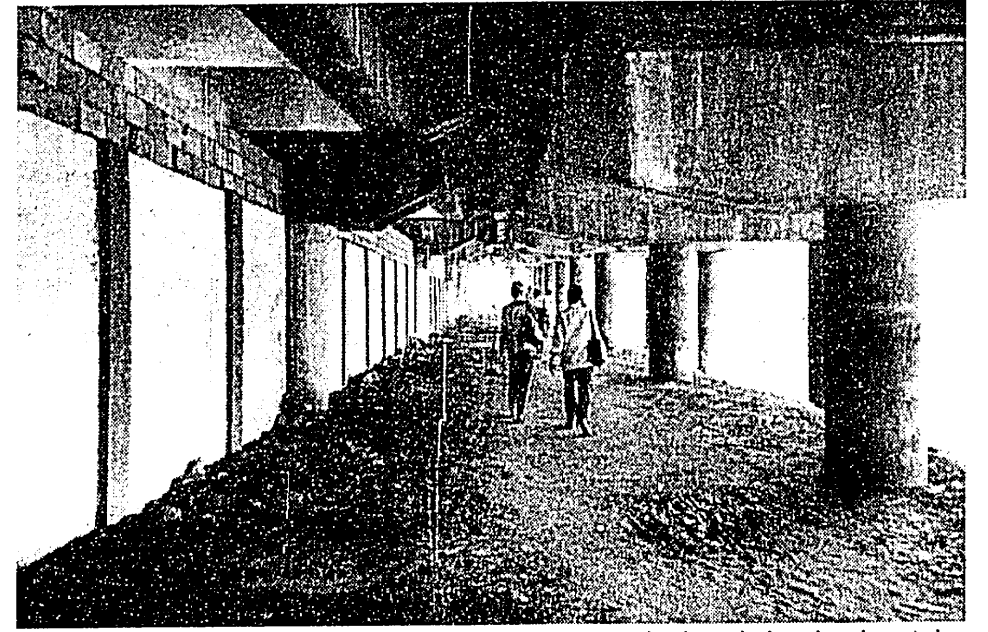


The unappealing access to the Thiruvallikeni Metro Station. It is a pathway best avoided, says many a frightened would-be passenger. (Photographs by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)

tariat employees alight. And at 10.10 a.m. the train arrives punctually at 'Beach' station!

A Railway official affirms, "The response has been very good on the Tirumailai - Beach route. Since Mylapore is a residential area, there are many commuters, and 75 per cent of them travel through to Beach station. Season tickets are in great demand, with the II class fare at Rs.70 (including elevation surcharge of 20 per cent), and I class fare of Rs.220. In fact, II class fare is cheaper than the bus season ticket, by

here and there. Many complaints about construction and drainage discrepancies. Leakage of rainwater into the booking halls is a common feature, leading to potentially hazardous, slippery approaches. For the same reason, escalators and lifts in the Cheppakam and Chintadripet stations stop working frequently, inconveniencing passengers (since the booking office is on the 1st floor, and the platform on the 2nd). A senior citizen sighs, "the location of ticket counters in certain stations is very in-



The access to the Park Town Metro station... Only three lights 'brighten' this lonely passage!

convenient. Climbing up and down stairways, just to buy tickets is very tiresome. Maybe the MRTS could open booking offices on the platform itself, as on certain suburban metre-gauge routes."

The approach routes to certain terminals are in a deplorable state. A commuter, who boarded at Park Town station, seemed quite disgruntled. "Both the approaches (one, along the Central Jail) are poorly maintained and badly lit. Throughout, we are assailed by an overpowering stench (this area is used as a public toilet), and also troubled by the sight of anti-social elements hanging around."

Others fear for personal security, especially after dusk. A woman commuter voiced her misgivings "Many of us avoid alighting at Tiruvallikeni or Light House stations after 6.00 p.m. There are many huts near the station, and the area is dimly lit. We feel very uneasy, especially after the recent spurt in chain-snatching incidents." Comments a Railway official, "We are aware of this factor. MRTS lines are very close to slum tenements in certain areas, and access is easy. We have two R.P.F. personnel on patrol in each train, and an outpost in the middle of each route. Stricter control of entrances and exits will also be ensured."

Nevertheless commuters

suggest increased frequency of services during peak travel hours and extension of the service to Arkonam and Gummidipoondi.

It must be said, however, that even with the existing 38 pairs of trains, and with the earliest trip starting at 4.50 a.m. and the last at 10.50 p.m. (together with convenient weekday and weekend timings), the MRTS is a godsend for harried bus commuters. It remains to be seen whether this 'revolution in urban transport' will prove the ideal solution for a space-hungry Chennai.

— Shobha Menon

Answers to Quiz

1. The Mysore Palace was restored to the scion of the Wodeyar family; 2. Hindustan Lever and Colgate; 3. Battle of Badgam; 4. Siachen Glacier; 5. The Kalinga Prize; 6. Richard Hornberger Jr., a.k.a. Richard Hooker; 7. Anshuman Gaekwad; 8. India Today; 9. The CBI Chief, R.K. Sharma; 10. Jet Airways; 11. It is the place where Virgin Mary was supposed to have rested en route to Bethlehem; 12. Venkatesh Prasad and Pakistan; 13. The Bharat, Geeta Chopra and Sanjay Chopra awards for bravery; 14. N.V.N. Somu; 15. INS Delhi

* * *

16. The flagposts flying political party colours; 17. A ten-year visitors visa to the U.S.; 18. Mylapore, St. Thomas Mount and Kalamandapam; 19. Subbulakshmi Jagadeesan and R. Nagarajan; 20. At the junction of Binny Road and Anna Salai.

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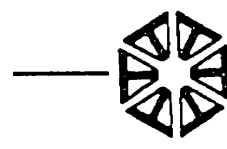
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