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MADRAS MUSINGS

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WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

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Mega plans for mega streets project, with outstation architects

You have to hand it to our city's Corporation. It is forever in the process of launching some mega scheme or the other. The last few years saw much noise over the Smart City initiatives and you had consultants literally popping out of every second building in the city. One of the most visible outcomes of this was a very wide footpath on Sir Theyagaroya Road in T. Nagar, which narrowed the space for vehicles considerably. Since then not much has been heard, presumably because attention has been diverted owing to the pandemic. But that has not deterred our civic body, which

is now busying itself with the Mega Streets project.

This is to make sure that our roadways and streets are obstruction free for a seamless commute by pedestrians, non-motorised vehicles and of course cars, buses, autos and

● by The Editor

two-wheelers. On the anvil is a plan to invite consultant architects to submit proposals on an area-wise basis. Phase 1 will focus on 110 km of roads in Tondiarpet, Anna Nagar, Velachery, Nungambakkam,

Adyar and Mylapore. As part of this grand scheme, Mylapore has been taken up as pilot and the project has been awarded to an architectural firm in Ahmedabad.

While this is in no way a comment on the abilities of the selected entity and we are sure due process has been followed by the civic body, it does come as a surprise that no local firm was considered suitable for executing a project in an area that is viewed as a cultural heartland by many residents of Chennai. Many local architects have over the years developed

(Continued on page 2)

Schooling in the 'New Normal' – Part 2

(Continued from last fortnight)

When the lockdown descended on the city in March, Raju* felt the economic pinch immediately. An auto driver, he suddenly found himself without any patronage. With savings quickly dissolving to meet living expenses, he faced an unprecedented situation – he didn't have enough in the kitty to pay his childrens' school fees. Raju isn't alone; many working class parents are struggling through the same state of affairs.

To gain a better understanding of the situation, *Madras Musings* spoke to Nikhath Suhail and Radha Vasudevan, whose schools deliver education to children from economically unprivileged backgrounds. Nikhath, who serves as

the treasurer at the MWA Matriculation Higher Secondary School, estimates that more than half of her school students are struggling financially. "Most of the children in my school are first or second generation learners," she explained. "The families live hand to mouth, some of the mothers keep their families afloat by working as housemaids." A bird's eye view of the situation would understandably lead the layman to recommend waiving school fees for struggling parents. But the matter is more complicated than that, especially for schools like Nikhath's and Radha's, who have to balance the needs of the students as well as the staff.

"We are not an aided school. We don't have a trust fund built from donations, either. How can we take care of our teachers?" Nikhath points out. It's a fair question. Her school has

around 1,600 children under its wing, most of whom are continuing to receive education through digital mediums even in the lockdown, thanks to the hard work of the 60 teachers on the rolls. The staff depend

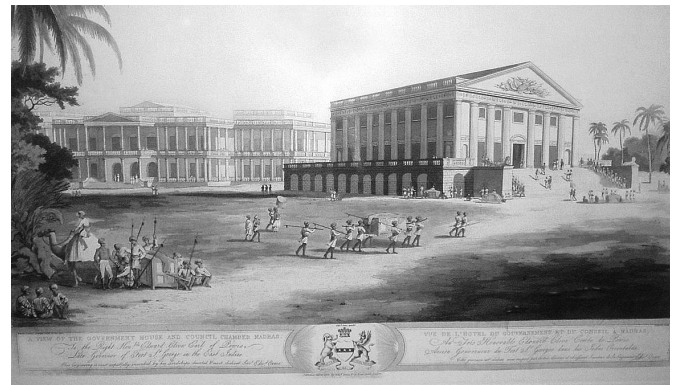
● by A Staff Correspondent

on their professional income to make a living too, like everyone else. Making the best of the situation, Nikhath's school has taken to requesting parents to pay as much as they can and is in the process of inviting public donations to offer scholarships to families who simply cannot meet the expense. The teachers have taken a 20 per cent pay cut in salaries as well, counting their blessings that they have retained their jobs. But the school is walking a

(Continued on page 2)

HERITAGE WATCH

Where Governors once resided



Government House, left and Banqueting Hall right, from a 19th Century print.

It was in 2008 that the High Court of Madras decreed that around 400 buildings of the city merited heritage status. A Heritage Conservation Committee was formed under the auspices of the CMDA and it was mandated to come out with an action plan to protect these structures. Bureaucracy managed to stifle all the noble intents in that judgement while on paper fulfilling every requirement in it. The entire HCC was populated with bureaucrats and those with Government affiliations. The Committee hardly ever met and after several delays managed to send out letters to the owners of the listed buildings, all of which stated that they could do nothing with the structures in their possession. Many were quite happy to oblige, for they could that way give up bare maintenance as well and wait for the buildings to collapse.

The State Government had a bigger agenda. That was when the new Assembly cum Secretariat was being planned and in the Government Estate, which was the site, there were as many as six individual structures listed in the judgement. Five of these were demolished, leaving Rajaji (Banqueting) Hall the sole survivor. The biggest loss was of Government House, once the city residence of the Governors of Madras, later used as an MLAs hostel and finally with the police. A building that held within it over 250 years of Madras history, for it was acquired from the Madra family that owned it in the 1750s, it was quickly done away with. The new Secretariat did come up, but was used very briefly as such, for a succeeding Government changed it into a hospital.

Most ironically, the High Court judgement classified Government House under grade 1 – of national importance and a prime landmark. But what do you do when the Government drives the bulldozer?

Madras Week

This is that time of the year when under normal circumstances, *Madras Musings* will be neck deep in putting together its quota of programmes, talks and walks for Madras Week. This year, owing to the ongoing Covid pandemic, we have decided to abstain from organising any events. We wish all our readers a healthy and safe Madras Week and Madras Month.

– Editor

Name changed.

MEGA PLANS FOR MEGA STREETS PROJECT

(Continued from page 1)

expertise and knowledge as far as Mylapore is concerned and it is a wonder that the award had to go to someone in Ahmedabad. Handling a space like Mylapore demands being aware of the local idiom and culture and this may be hugely absent when outstation architects are chosen.

A brief interaction with the team did not reveal anything out of the ordinary. There were the usual plans – to clear the space of hawkers, create broad footpaths, parking spaces, repositioning of the hurdles people normally face while walking, and regulated shopping zones. Of course, it may still be early days and a plan that is satisfactory to all may eventually surface, for which much will depend on how much weight the local representatives of the architects carry. Will their voices be heard? And in what way is this initiative any different from the Smart City plan? If this project is indeed under the umbrella of that latter scheme, it did not appear so in the consultations that happened.

The consultation process also revealed the fundamental weakness in such discussions. While those called in were all

of the same ilk – upper-class, English speaking and forever dreaming of an Acropolis like solution for Mylapore, none of those who eventually will have power to make or mar the project were visible. And in this we include the elected Member of the Legislative Assembly, officials of the civic body, local residents, the temple administrators, representatives of the shops and establishments in the area and above all, the hawkers. If these people do not get to see what is being proposed, to what effect then such consultations?

Over the years, various schemes such as this have been mooted, partially executed and then abandoned. The general chaos and sense of co-existence that passes for quality of life in all Indian cities prevails here too. Even if this plan were to succeed, making a showpiece out of Mylapore is not going to have a great impact on the city as a whole. It will be a hollow scheme, as cosmetic as the repeated beach beautification projects we have lived through. Unless the indiscipline and corruption that pervades civic administration in all aspects gets cleaned up across the city, the impact of the mega project will remain micro.

Schooling in the ‘New Normal’

(Continued from page 1)

narrow financial edge. “Every month is a challenge,” said a worried Nikath.

Radha, who runs a school in Ashok Nagar, underlined the importance of paying teachers by pointing out that some of them are the sole breadwinners in their families at the moment. “With the lockdown, some of their husbands have been laid off. Households which were financially healthy before the lockdown are finding themselves in trouble, since it’s been a good 4 months since the men stopped working,” she explained. Her school is in a slightly better position than most, relying on savings that can carry them for another three months. They haven’t had the necessity to cut teacher salaries yet.

Complicating matters further, the state administration had, earlier in June, issued an order to take action against private schools asking parents to make the fee payments. For unaided private schools like Nikhath’s who have little savings to rely on, this was an incredibly tricky pass to cross. The Madras High Court stepped in for their cause, with Justice R. Mahadevan raising the ques-

tion, “If unaided institutions are prohibited from collecting even minimum fees, how will they pay salary, that too when almost all such institutions are conducting online classes?” Easing the woes of TN’s private educational institutions, the Madras High Court issued a directive in July permitting them to collect 40 per cent of the annual fee before the end of August. The state has also provisionally fixed this year’s fee as 75 per cent of last year’s.

While this clarifies one side of the problem, the state must also consider the way forward in supporting parents who simply cannot make the fee payments to the unaided private schools their children attend. It’s not an easy problem to solve, but it’s not one that’s going to go away anytime soon. While the state mulls the issue, citizens, generous as always, have been stepping in to bear the cost of scholarships for children in need. While we look to our government to devise a fair solution to this complex problem, it is probably worthwhile to take a minute to rejoice in our community spirit, which rises wonderfully to the occasion each time our fellow citizens need help.

The strange lure of unhappiness and frustration

The *Woman from Madras Musings* is beginning to think that, in general, people are more attracted to things that are ominous or frustrating than happy and pleasant. Take for instance, the Covid situation in Chennai. When matters were grim a month ago, with the rapid rise of infections in the city, much attention was given to daily statistics, lockdown regulation measures, medical infrastructure analyses and so on. There were some chaps that (Wo)MMM knew, who would log onto the Aarogya Setu app for the express purpose of seeing how many unfortunates in their vicinity had contracted the coronavirus; others seemed to rather enjoy their sandbox speeches detailing gloom and doom and incredible conspiracy theories. Today, our city is arguably in a better position against this enemy virus; doubling time has gone up and the number of containment zones and the death rate seem to be slowing down. One can be forgiven for imagining that the armchair experts who showed a fervent interest in the spread of the pandemic would display at least an equal, if not greater, enthusiasm in its halt, given that it is no mean achievement. Curiously, (Wo)MMM has heard nothing but radio silence at their end. One feels that even the morbid pastime of publishing premature obituaries – as the inimitable MMM has observed and dissected in the past – is an example of this strange predilection for pathos.

It’s not just the pandemic, you know. A couple of months back, (Wo)MMM came across a mobile game that was doing the rounds on the internet. The aim of the game was to help the protagonist, who was doomed to be stuck in a pot with no equipment but a long hammer in his hands, climb very strange obstacles like trees, mountains, and towering piles of truly weird objects, ranging from rocks and bricks to waterslides. It seemed to be an incredibly frustrating game, as one can imagine. (Wo)MMM spent an evening watching online videos of players attempting to finish the game, most of whom dissolved into raging melt-

downs when they fell all the way down to square one. And everybody – even the players, (Wo)MMM thinks – absolutely loved it. The kicker? It was a paid game, which meant that the players actually had to shell out hard-earned money to experience such exquisite frustration. (Wo)MMM is certain that the crafty developer behind the game earned a fat sum out of all this.

And so, the (Wo)MMM has come to the conclusion that pleasant, informative content is not as saleable as dark or frustrating content. Which is a pity, because (Wo)MMM truly feels that while a naive outlook can render one to foolishness, a scrutiny of the silver linings can always help solve a problem or make the best of a bad situation.

Hair Apparent

The *Woman from Madras Musings* has noticed that even though the city’s beauty parlours and salons have resumed services, patronage has reduced with many still reluctant to brave a visit in these times, especially senior citizens

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

or those with vulnerable family members at home. And so, people are trying to figure out how to take care of their own haircuts and hair dyes and so on. This has, as expected, given rise to many interesting situations in homes across the city.

First, the haircut. When salons first shut down in March, it was the lure of a professional haircut that tempted many to sin against the lockdown measures. But much experience has been gained since then, with some enterprising hairdressers offering consultation services via video call to help people cut their own hair or that of a loved one. At least one attempt that (Wo)MMM personally knows of turned into a real-life depiction of a fable that was a childhood favourite – the well-meaning missus kept reducing the length of her husband’s hair to make it even until he gave up and shaved his head. While there hasn’t been much research on this topic, (Wo)MMM is confident that there must be others in our fair city who can share similar anecdotes. Frankly, (Wo)MMM imagines that the problem is arguably worse for women, who cannot take drastic measures like this enterprising gentleman did.



Women have it tricky in other ways, too. Most are accustomed to sporting well-shaped eyebrows and facial features free of whiskers and moustaches. This hasn’t been possible to maintain in the lockdown and men across the city have been stumbling across feminine secrets that the gentler sex has largely sought to suppress for most of history – for instance, while it is common knowledge that we are also capable of growing moustaches, we have largely been able to hide how luxurious some of our ‘staches can be.

(Wo)MMM finds the whole situation most amusing since she personally doesn’t think that her friends, family and acquaintances look all that different in these parlour-deprived times – beauty truly does lie in the eye of the beholder. The better half’s hair admittedly looks more enthusiastic than usual, having found itself with the unprecedented liberty to grow at will; but it has always been curly and a stern combing does the trick quite well. The matter is a non-issue with the mater, who looks her usual lovely self; actually, not dyeing her hair has given her a new dimension of beauty. As for herself, the (Wo)MMM has rather grown to like her little moustache, and while it leaves the playing field wide open for family and friends to crack highly original ‘meesai aanalum manavi’ jokes, (Wo)MMM feels it gives off a regal, Frida Kahlo-esque appearance that she is quite enjoying at the moment.

Personally, (Wo)MMM is convinced that we’d all be better off living in a world which frequents parlours not out of embarrassment, but self-love – and hygiene, of course. Here’s hoping that this restricted access to salons sows the first seeds of this mindset!

Trending

The *Woman from Madras Musings* was highly amused to note that the hashtag #SubmissionDeadlines was briefly trending last week in Chennai. The messages didn’t seem to be about any particular topic; it appears that a bunch of people urgently needed to inform the world at large that they’re all racing to meet submission deadlines in their respective projects. While (Wo)MMM sympathized with the whole lot, she couldn’t help but wonder if logging off social media might be a better strategy than making impassioned announcements and cursing the flow of time.

– (Wo)MMM

OUR
READERS
WRITE



The unsung heroes of Tennis

Pratab Ramchand has rightly brought out the greatness of Leander Paes and his intimate tidings with Chennai, the then Madras (MM, July 16, 2020). He has bagged 54 ATP Tour doubles titles and 18 Grand Slam doubles titles, unmatched by anyone in Indian tennis. It is not an easy feat. It evidences the amount of hard work he has put in, his perseverance and the 'come what may, I will achieve' attitude that has crowned him with this success.

As someone who has closely watched the growth of the Amritraj brothers in their early grooming days of tennis, and as one of their teachers in Loyola College, I used to closely follow the way they excelled in their matches in the international arena with awe and happiness as a tennis fan too. Later, I continued to do this with young Leander and Mahesh and have

enjoyed their games on the tennis field.

I have only one grouse – our tennis stars, including Leander, have not been recognised by our government to the extent they should have been for their excellent performance, like the way our heroes of cricket have been honoured. They should have been decorated more, as tennis is a game of individual performance or at the most of that of just two, while games like cricket are of collective performance.

Even now it is not too late. Are the concerned people listening?

Tharcus S. Fernando
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Better half

I am happy that MMM now has a co-contributor, that too a (Wo)MMM, to write the fortnightly column *Short n Snappy*, though many readers like me may wonder whether every item therein is really s and s.

Be that as it may – I don't know whether the English people use this phrase any longer

but unfortunately they left it behind them here in Bharat, and those who had even a smidgen of education before they left our country lock, stock and barrel, still stick to it like a limpet. BTW, I have the faintest idea as to what they carried in that barrel. Where was I?

Ah yes, in her column, (Wo) MMM mentions that once she had to "eat her words" (how did they taste? Can I have a plateful, please?) when she was having an argument with the better half on some issue (not children, anyway, I am relieved to learn). Now, in our country, it is usually the men who concede the 'better' status in the neatly apportioned fifty-fifty parts of the sacred union to the sagad-harmini or the dharmapatni or the lady. Here is our (Wo) MMM graciously referring to her husband as the better half. There lies a great secret for successful marriage, I guess, each partner conceding the honour to the other.

C.G. Rishikesh
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• Our website had quite a few comments, which we are publishing below:

It's time SBI remembered Dr. Anderson
(Vol. XXVI No. 19, January 16-31, 2017)

Anderson House used to be the residence of the General Manager (then known as the Deputy Secretary & Treasurer) of the Madras Local Head Office of the State Bank of India. During 1962-1965, my father R.K. Talwar (who went on to become the Chairman of SBI in 1968) held this position. And this house was where I lived for 3 yrs with my parents as an 8-10 year old boy. I have my fondest memories of this house.

Pavan K. Talwar
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Manikkodi – A magazine which brought many young writers to the fore
(Vol. XXX No. 3, July 16-31, 2020)

The article on *Manikkodi* magazine by K.R.A. Narasiah made for interesting reading. Tamil literature is indeed deeply entrenched in Kumbakonam, a town that nurtured literary giants such as Thi. Janakiraman, Na. Pichamoorthy, and Ka.Na. Subramaniam. Many were closely associated with *Man-*

ikodi, which was based in this town, and which marked the advent of a new chapter in Tamil literature in the 1930s. It soon became a platform for a number of creative writers to express their literary sensibilities. With their rich socio-ethical values, these writers churned out great humanistic works that captivated Tamil readers.

– **Ranganathan Sivakumar**
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Chennai's First Trade Centre

(Vol. XXIX No. 1, April 16-30, 2019))

I was then 11 years. I visited the exhibition (09-03-1968), and was thrilled to go round the venue. As the day was too hot, I couldn't continue visiting different stalls. Ashok Leyland offered a free bus service to go round the exhibition area, in different open body builds, like chariot, ship, temple tower etc. After the visit we returned home to T Nagar where my relative lived, at Melony Street opposite Dakshina Bharatha Hindi Sabha. I got a fever and went to bed as soon as I reached. The same night, I received the shocking news of my father's demise. I returned home without visiting the exhibition again.

– **Srinivas V Pandit**
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Thought process of Senior Citizens in Covid Time

Several scholars around the world have unambiguously pointed out that humanity is the same all over the world, irrespective of the regions in which people live. This implies that under similar circumstances, people around the world react almost in the same way. The present ongoing COVID crisis has proved this contention beyond doubt.

All over the world, people belonging to the younger generation generally think that they still have a long period to live and are, therefore, focused on improving their career and business prospects, acquiring wealth, bringing up the family and seeking pleasure. Though they are aware of the fact that the end of life would inevitably happen, they mostly assume that such an end day is far off and they need not be concerned at the present time.

However, the thought process of aged people is markedly different from those of the younger ones, as the people passing through old age are glaringly aware that their end day may not be far off, even though they too are tempted to think or conveniently assume that such day would be some time away.

The present COVID crisis has brought about a significant change in the thought process, particularly of the senior people who are constantly made to think that their end day could be not too far off. This is particularly due to the fact that the medical professionals say that immunity level of the individuals is the best barrier for the COVID virus and it is known that the immunity level of aged people is inevitably low.

In such circumstances, the senior citizens are undergoing mental stress. Every time they sneeze or cough or get a sore throat or slight feverish feeling, they start worrying as to whether the virus has attacked them. Not only the senior citizens but even the younger ones who see the senior citizens sneezing or coughing conclude that they could be COVID patients.

Now, in several places, governments insist that the day-to-day testing of the people is necessary to ensure that they are not COVID patients. In some places, the government sponsored volunteers visit every house every day and ask the inmates, particularly the senior citizens, to undergo a temperature check up

with the instrument that the volunteer carries. It is pathetic to see the senior citizens subjecting themselves to such tests by semi-educated volunteers and shivering as to what would be the results and heave a sigh of great relief when they are told that the temperature is normal.

Added to this, the statement released by the governments every day on the COVID scenario not only indicate the number of people who died due to COVID but also reveal the age groups to which they belong and state the percentage of people who are senior citizens. One gets an impression that the government appears to lay stress that amongst those who die, the senior citizens form a big chunk of them, which certainly creates a sense of fear amongst senior citizens.

The advocacy of the government that senior citizens should particularly take care of their health conditions and confine themselves to the home throughout the day and all day long, clearly conveys the view of the medical practitioners and government that senior citizens are particularly vulnerable to COVID virus, much more than the younger people.

These days, many senior citizens live alone with their dear and near ones living in other cities or abroad. With travel severely curtailed internationally and even within the nation and cities, senior citizens are helplessly conscious of the fact and are worried that they would not be able to see their dear and near ones and neither the near and dear ones can see them, in case they would become victim of COVID virus or are hospitalised due to COVID attack.

While several sections of the people are suffering due to joblessness, loss of income and such matters are much discussed, the plight of the senior citizens who undergo the mental crisis due to COVID 19 does not seem to have been adequately understood or appreciated or discussed.

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We today, publish donations received with thanks.

– The Editor

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Master of Express Estates

The old man in the Kamaraj khadi shirt and veshti, a fading namam on his forehead (with no air conditioning in the sweltering newsroom, the red mark lasted no more than a couple of hours), and wisps of grey hair making a token presence on his otherwise bald head, looked forbiddingly at me as I handed him my resume and tried to impress him with the sterling attributes I was offering the newspaper under his watch. "Sorry we have no openings," Mr. C.P. Seshadri, the news editor, said quite firmly, dashing my hopes. Disheartened, I made to leave, but remembered in the nick of time that my uncle P.N. Sundaresan had asked me to convey his regards to him. The mention of my uncle's name had an electrifying effect. "Why didn't you tell me earlier that you are Raja's (Sundaresan's) nephew?" the editor, who was "Master" to everyone said. "Are you Ramani's son, then? I thought you were some *vadakkathian* (north Indian). You can join straight away. Go and sit there next to Chandrasekhar in the sports desk."

Thus began my newspaper career – as Apprentice Sub-editor – with a monthly pay packet of Rs. 200, peanuts even by 1967 standards. My landing at Master's doorstep was an accident, a happy one, as it turned out. I had had to miss my B.Sc Chemistry exams in March 1967, thanks to a mystery illness, characterised by unbearable headaches that lasted more than a month, and left me weak and exhausted. "I think he's having a nervous breakdown," I overheard my father tell my mother, and, not knowing what those words meant (Can you imagine such an ignorant 20-year old today?) I duly informed my friends in college of this diagnosis, feeling suitably important. Of our group of five classmates, only one, Meenakshi, who later went to medical college, seemed to find my confession strange. She laughed her head off.

Not only had I lost preparation time, I was too weak to sit down and do any overtime swotting. I therefore decided to take the exam in September – with my parents' blessings – and actually acquitted myself quite well. At least three people, Prof. Jayanti Lakshminarayana, my former school teacher R. Srinivasan, and a young doctor helped me through this period, and I will write about them later.

I spent only a week in the sports desk, editing copy relating to the Guindy Races, learning from the expert advice that

Chandrasekhar gave me, and some football copy which Mr. Nair helped me with, taking time off his reporting duties. Master encouraged me to go out and report, so I covered a few football matches, with the cricket season in a mid-season lull peculiar to Madras. My knowledge of soccer was only marginally better than my knowledge of horse racing, but I sailed through the MFA league matches thanks to the generous help I received from other reporters at the grounds, notably S. Thyagarajan of *The Hindu*.

After a week, I went up to Master and asked to be shifted to the general news desk, as I was bored with my sports routine, and Master readily agreed. The young man who took my place in the sports section, Partab Ramchand, became a leading sports journalist who also wrote on films. Unlike the general run of journalists, Ramchand has always been keen on writing books and has written many.

Master was a cult figure at the *Express*. He was probably in his late forties when I first met him, it was a close fight between him and Tushar Kanti Ghosh of the *Amrit Bazaar Patrika* group of Calcutta to decide who was the longest serving newspaper editor in India, until Seshadri passed away in the late 1990s, with Ghosh still in harness. Master was always the first to arrive in the office and never went home until the paper was put to sleep. There was perfect discipline in the office but also a relaxed air, with no worry about the boss looking over your shoulder. Anyone who has worked in the *Express* knows that it was a perfect training ground for rookie newsmen, who were quite early in their careers thrown in at the deep end. I had been in the paper for less than a month when Master said to me, "Your title may say sub-editor, but don't stay cooped up in the office. Go out and do stories." Excited and nervous, I stepped out with nothing besides good journalistic genes (hopefully) and Master's blessings in my armoury. A series of fires broke out in a few Madras slums, and I was one of the reporters on the scene. Interviewing slum dwellers was no easy task, as some of them were as worldly wise as the London cockney of My Fair Lady fame. The genuinely stricken, mostly women, were hardly in a state to answer silly questions from English-educated upstarts like me. I even managed to gain access to Mr. Madhavan, a minister



The Old Club House at Express Estates.

in the DMK government, and he spoke with confidence about the steps the government was taking to alleviate the sufferings of the residents and to try and prevent future accidents. Unfortunately, I was no impartial observer; my mind was made up against the government of the day, and I was convinced that it was doing nothing to save the day for the fire-ravaged poor of the city. My report was naturally one-sided and tended to editorialise. Somehow the report went unnoticed, luckily for me. I also did a story on IIT Madras, in what context I don't remember. I was soon afterwards

● by
V. Ramnarayan

assigned a politically sensitive story, which took me to the Government Arts College, then located within a stone's throw of Club House Road, where was situated *Express Estates*. The moment he knew I was from the *Express*, the principal had me and my photographer colleague thrown out of the college. He was angry because of a recent report on the college whose details I cannot recall now.

Work at the *Express* was a lot of fun. For some strange reason, my own copy was invariably edited by Master himself, and stranger still was the fact that it was hardly ever touched. Once he called me to tell me he was changing a word I had used. "Harangued" is an Americanism, we don't need such words, here," he said. He also expressed his strong dislike of the word "off." "Sparked a riot, don't sparked off a riot, don't ever

say the tournament finals," he would stress, "the final is singular, unlike the semifinals or quarterfinals. You can of course say 'the Wimbledon finals, referring to the many finals like men's singles, women's singles, men's doubles, so on and so forth."

Why was he called Master? He lived on the Express campus, and tutored Ramnath Goenka's schoolgoing children, I learnt from my colleagues. The children called him Master or Masterji, and in time, he became Master to everyone. When he found some breathing time amidst his hectic daily routine, he made conversation with his senior colleagues, with his face often lit up by a brilliant smile. When he walked home after the night shift, he was accompanied by a colleague or two, walking towards the gate to go home. On the occasions I did night duty, meaning I pottered around doing nothing of importance while others slaved, I usually walked to a teashop near Odeon cinema, which offered a delicious mango juice, manna from heaven after night duty tea, and came back to sleep on newspaper stacks. My companions one night were senior colleague Mathew and Master. Knowing his wife was in the family way, Master solicitously asked Mathew, "How is your wife? I hope she is not alone." Mathew's reply, made with a solemn face, was, "I hope she is." Master's reaction was endearingly typical of him when amused. He put his pointer finger on the tip of his nose, his eyes twinkling in mirth.

Twice during the night shift, I was almost caught on the wrong foot, with teleprinter

clattering away major headline news: the invasion of Prague by Soviet troops during the Dubcek regime, and the Robert Kennedy assassination. On both occasions, I thought I was alone in the newsroom, and froze in panic, but help arrived in the form of seasoned journalists returning from cigarette breaks.

Chandrasekhar, Nair, Krishnaswamy, Krishnamurthi, Murari, Nagarajan, Partab and Rishikesh were among the friends I made in the newsroom. I have been in touch with many of them, while one or two are no more. Surprise visitors to the office included Lala Amarnath and Veenai S. Balachander, and, graciously included by my seniors, I had the good fortune to listen in while these idiosyncratic personalities told some uproarious stories, some of them quite unprintable. Amarnath said of a notable personality that he murdered his wife, and described the wife of a cricketer as an alcoholic. Nair was generous enough to let me accompany him while he interviewed Amarnath. The Railways' cricket coach then, Lalaji advocated playing on matting wickets to improve your technique against fast bowling, and he was conducting a camp for the Railway team at Madras as the city had plenty of matting wickets. I was quite puzzled by this prescription, as lack of practice on turf pitches was often cited as the reason for the Madras (now Tamil Nadu) batsmen's inadequacies when they travelled outside the state. In recent years, Amarnath's view has been endorsed by other experts, who

(Continued on page 5)

N. Venkataramani – a life dedicated to Industry and Sports

TRIBUTE

In the passing last fortnight of N. Venkataramani, Vice Chairman of the Amalgamations Group, India and more importantly, Chennai and Tamil Nadu, lost a corporate chief who in his quiet way did considerable work to help the city and the State remain an industrial hub.

Born on December 9, 1939 at New Delhi as the fourth son of Sarada and R. Narayanaswami Iyer, a senior civil servant, Venkataramani graduated with a Maths (Hons) degree from St. Stephen's College, Delhi before securing admission at the Imperial College, London, from where he qualified with an Engineering degree. The early 1960's was when the TVS Group was getting into manufacturing and R. Ratnam, one of the senior members of the TVS family was in England recruiting engineering graduates for the automobile electricals company Lucas TVS. Venkataramani was among those selected and after training at Lucas Birmingham, came to Madras, where he joined the Sales Engineering department of the Indian company. In 1966, he married Sita, the youngest daughter of S. Anantharamkrishnan, founder of the Amalgamations Group. A few months later, he joined the conglomerate and returned to the UK, where he enrolled at the Imperial College for his master's degree.

Returning in 1969, he became Manager, Manufacturing Services at India Pistons (IPL), a constituent of the Amalgamations Group and the first automotive component company to be ever set up in India. He later rose to become its Managing Director. Life at IPL in those years was no bed of roses for the Amalgamations Group was then in the throes of severe union trouble. But this gentle personality was no pushover and he weathered the gherao-s and strikes, including on a horrible day in 1972, the brutal attack and murder of a DMK-allied Union member within the factory premises. Later in life, Venkataramani would on occasion reminisce about the various tough situations he had negotiated and the troubles he had surmounted but he never expressed any bitterness. He looked back on this era with

much grace and some humour as well. In fact, most Unions came to regard him as a model employer and this was reflected in his serving at the helm of the historic Employers' Federation of South India and later the Employers' Federation of India also.

It was during this phase that he put IPL on a trajectory of technical advancement. The company built its in-house capability for R&D to such an extent that it became India's first entity to receive accreditation from the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India. He introduced pioneering product designs in the piston and ring industry and also invested heavily in the automation of the manufacturing process. In the mid-1980s, he was one of the first to recognise the potential of Maraimalai Nagar as a manufacturing hub, at a time when it was nothing more than vast scrubland. IPL's second plant came up there and shortly thereafter became the first Indian piston supplier to Maruti. All of this would lead a Union Leader to quip in appreciation that if Anantharamkrishnan was known as the Maharajah of Mount Road, his son in law was Maraimalai Mapillai!

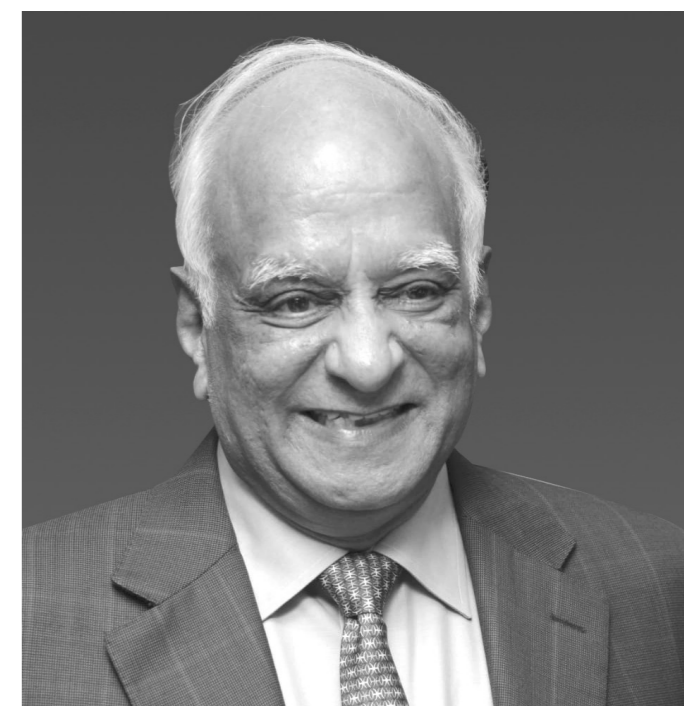
In the late 1980s, Venkataramani saw the changing trends in

● by
Sriram V

the Indian auto industry where-in reduced emission and more fuel-efficient engines would be the future necessities. With this in mind, he began focusing on pioneering speciality steel-coated piston rings in the Indian market. The existing collaborators, T&N Piston Group Products Limited were not too keen and so he chose NPR of Japan for this. The new collaboration was nurtured even as the existing one with T&N continued which was quite a feat. IP Rings Limited was formed with public shareholding in 1992, which was in itself a pathbreaking move for most entities in the Amalgamations fold remain closely held. AEIP and IPPL came up in the mid 1990s and together, all these new companies brought in cutting-edge technologies into India. With rapid changes

happening in the auto industry from then on, more action followed – a JV with Mahle in 2007 and new factories in Sengundram in 1998 and 2001. He also oversaw IPL preparing itself for BS6 readiness. Within the Amalgamations Group, he remained a close associate of its late chairman A. Sivasailam and the present chairman A. Krishnamoorthy, and the trio functioned in a very coordinated fashion when it came to matters concerning the conglomerate as a whole. In this context, Venkataramani developed relationships with Valeo of France for clutch assemblies, Stanadyne of the USA for fuel injection systems and Mahle for piston assemblies. Known for his skilful negotiations, he was always seen as a perfect gentleman who looked at benefits for both parties.

A past president of the Madras Management Association (1978-1980), his tenure as chairman of the Madras Chamber of Commerce Industry (1991-1993), was when this body, India's second oldest, put in a strong pitch for Tamil Nadu taking a hard look at how it could attract investments. The country had just opened up and States were competing with each other to get a share of new business. The Madras Institute of Development Studies was commissioned by MCCI to do a survey and it came up with several findings as to why TN lagged – poor investments in infrastructure, lack of advancement in technical education, conservative thinking among industrialists, ministers and civil servants not interacting with industry and an abysmal power scenario. All of this was presented to the State Government in October 1992 by L. Lakshman of the Rane Group. The MCCI also released the study as a book. This led to much soul searching in State Government circles. A joint MCCI-Assocham meeting followed with the then Chief Minister, J. Jayalalitha. It helped that N. Sankar was then the President of Assocham and so the two representative bodies could coordinate well. Years later, in an interview to this writer, Venkataramani with characteristic modesty said that he could not state authoritatively that this step by the Chamber was the sole reason, but when Ford came calling, he did notice that there was a marked change in



the way the Government responded. Then came Hyundai and the rest is history.

Outside of his business interests, Venkataramani was passionate about sport – almost every kind of it – and was of the school of thought where it had to be played and promoted for the love of it, not for money. He could watch almost any game with the same levels of interest, ranging from kabaddi to cricket. He played tennis almost till his last year and in the 1980s won the Merchants and Bankers tournament several times. He also served as the Vice President of the Tamil Nadu Tennis Association and he was happiest when at Wimbledon, visiting which was more or

less an annual pilgrimage for years. He promoted sports with a passion as he felt they built character and taught everyone to play hard but fair and take defeat and victory with equanimity. The IPL cricket team, one of the few in the State to share the name of its corporate sponsor, has been in the first division for years. Over 15 international cricketers have represented the team over time and he also privately helped several players. In 1995, Venkataramani was one of the early enthusiasts to develop a cricket ground – the one at the Central Polytechnic campus in Taramani. It is a tribute to his love for the game.

Master of Express Estates

(Continued from page 4)

even attribute Rahul Dravid's excellence abroad to his early training on matting.

The idyll was too good to last. Two newcomers, let's call them Uma and Raja, started throwing their weight around, perhaps emboldened by their social – not journalism – pedigree. Neither of them was good at the job, but tried to teach me mine. At the same time friends in my college

urged me to return to do post-graduate studies and play cricket for the college again. All of 20, I needed no further inducement to quit. Master was disappointed, but as I was stubborn in my resolve, he let me go, saying his doors would always be open for me. Years later, he told my wife Gowri that I had been one of his favourites, and also that he had learnt his trade from my grandfather V. Narayanan when he was editor of the *Express*.

Quizzin' with Ram'nan

Quizmaster V.V. Ramanan's first 10 questions are on current affairs and next 10 on Bharat Ratna winners.

1. Which prominent European country is planning to issue a coin in honour of Mahatma Gandhi to mark his 150th birth anniversary?
 2. The 75th anniversary of the deployment of 'Little Boy' and 'Fat Man' was observed recently. What were they?
 3. Which Union ministry has been renamed as Ministry of Education?
 4. NASA recently launched 'Perseverance'. What is it?
 5. After which two legends has the new trophy for the West Indies-England Test series been named?
 6. Which diplomat-turned-minister has authored *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World*?
 7. Name the initiative, launched by WHO, UNDP, UNAIDS among others, that aims to share legal documents from over 190 countries to help states establish and implement strong legal frameworks to manage the COVID-19 pandemic.
 8. The former king of which European country has decided to leave the nation and go into exile?
 9. Between which two States did the first Kisan Rail services, to transport perishable goods, run recently?
 10. In which Asian capital did a catastrophic blast, driven by tonnes of Ammonium Nitrate, kill more than 135 people recently?
- ***
11. In which year was the Bharat Ratna first awarded and who were the inaugural recipients?
 12. After which natural thing is the Ratna medallion shaped?
 13. What firsts do Lal Bahadur Shastri and Indira Gandhi have with regards to award?
 14. Since its inception, how many people have been bestowed with the honour (till 2019): 46, 47, 48?
 15. Name the only two individuals to be given the Bharat Ratna before they became First Citizens?
 16. Which film personality was the first to receive the coveted honour?
 17. As of July 2020, who is the oldest living Bharat Ratna?
 18. Apart from Nelson Mandela, who is the only other non-Indian citizen to get the honour?
 19. This Indian freedom fighter's name was announced for a 'posthumous' award but was not conferred because of controversies. Who?
 20. Name the two residents of Chennai honoured with the award in 1998.

(Answers on page 8)

The travails of two cities

August. Re-invented as an incredibly special month for Chennai-that-was-and-still-is-Madras by The Chief and a group of like-minded enthusiasts sixteen years ago.

The Grand Old Lady's Birthday Month celebrates her dual personalities, Chennai and Madras, as they weave in and out of each other, creating this unique fabric, with its inherent ability to expertly toss together the contemporary and the traditional with the skill of a Masterchef.

Do you have any idea what you've done, Corona? (By the way, hiding slyly behind an alias, 'Covid-19' like you're some fancy new asteroid that's been discovered along the Milky Way by a passing spacecraft won't change the fact that you are the Supreme Pest above all pests, okay?) Look what you've reduced this month-long Ode to Madras/Chennai to.

August in the city is essentially about happenings – locality-based events, heritage walks, culinary shows, a proliferation of lectures, photo exhibitions, talk shows, film shows, cultural programmes and book releases based on the city's traditions, history, and heritage.

The one essential component at any event is...? People. Take away the people – what's left?

Corona, you've hit at the very spirit that shapes the month of August in this city. Everything, but everything, has been brought to a complete halt by something which, if experts are to be believed, can be put in its place by soap and a mask.

Lecture halls, auditoriums – all meeting spaces are empty. Bored chairs, stacked high one upon the other for months now, slumber in dusty corners. The bonda-bajji-'one-sweet'-coffee/tea combinations are now bereft, abandoned. They wait in vain for human lines to form, hands clutching those hungrily empty plates. Specially missed are those indefatigable



From left to right: Sriram V, S. Muthiah and Quiz master V.V. Ramanan at a Madras Week event from the past.

● by Ranjitha Ashok

'Tea-ers', who could always be depended upon to appear the moment they heard the delectable sound of a hot cup of coffee being poured.

With voices, both the well-modulated and the unfor-

tunately-pitched, having moved on to virtual arenas, mikes now languish in dark spaces, longing for the days when they could go 'sccreeech' at awkward moments. They miss dashing up and down aisles with earnest

volunteers, trying to reach the waving hands of those eternal 'I-have-a-Question-ers'. You have to hand it (no pun intended) to these guys. Amazing. Give them a talk on how to peel a banana, they'll have a hundred questions by the end of it. There was a time when seeing those familiar hands go up yet again made you groan and check the time, but now,

(Continued on page 7)

Lunch at Calicut with Pandit Nehru

In Jairam Ramesh's fascinating biography of V.K. Krishna Menon, the brilliant crusader for freedom and a close confidant of Pandit Nehru, there is a charming vignette of Panditji visiting the family home of the Menons at Calicut (present-day Kozhikode) on 24th December 1955. Ramesh records the episode, "Nehru, accompanied by the then Chief Minister of Madras K. Kamaraj, visited Janaki Amma in her home in Calicut."

Krishna Menon happened to be away at New York and could not make it back on time, much to the consternation of his sister, Janaki Amma. She had been informed that her distinguished guest would only partake of non-vegetarian items, obviously a taboo in her pure vegetarian Nair household. Ramesh includes an account from Nehru's own diary of the meal - "The house is vegetarian and they were unhappy about this. Worse still, the District Magistrate sent four chickens to be slaughtered and cooked. The lady of the house was completely upset at this idea. Fortunately, I came in time to prevent this outrage on her sentiments and

I asked specially for a Malayali vegetarian meal. A very good dinner was given to me which I enjoyed." (Extract from page 11 of 'A Chequered Brilliance' by Jairam Ramesh, published by Penguin).

When I discussed the event with K.N. Ramaswami, Director Chennai Kendra of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan at his office in Mylapore, his eyes lit up. "I was there at the meal in Menon's house. Our house was just a few yards away from Krishna Menon's home, Vengali as it was known. I used to walk past the house on my way to school and his sister Janaki Amma would wave to me. The lunch was served on banana leaves and once all the items were placed on it, someone asked for a fork!" Ramaswami recalled, throwing up his hands to indicate the consternation that the idea of a fork caused him at the time. "I wondered if the banana leaf would be torn into strips by the fork, rendering us unable to eat any of the food. But we all managed and it was a memory I shall always cherish of a great man."

"Those days we led a very simple life," continued Ramaswami. He took us back to an era just before Independence was declared, describing how he celebrated the very first Republic day at home. "I was a Boy Scout, so when it came to celebrating the first Republic Day, we were all given small flags to pin on our pockets." He

● by Geeta Doctor

indicated how the flags had to be pinned exactly to one side. "We were given safety pins. No stickers or any such thing. We had to make sure that the safety pin would not be seen from the front and also that the flags were pinned straight in one corner of our pockets. That day I went home and made a larger flag out of paper. I stuck it on a stick, went upstairs to our tiled roof, and somehow placed it so that it would hang straight. Then I made all my aunts come out and salute the flag. I had already made them practice the salute. So, we stood in a line

and saluted the Indian flag that was flying over our house for the first time."

His one memory of Krishna Menon is of him walking up and down with a flask of tea, and every now and then to take a sip from it. He also recalled with amusement the puzzled look on his aunts' faces when he asked them if they had any foreign-made goods that he could throw into a bonfire. "There was not a single thing that was foreign-made in our house. There was a very precious fountain pen that belonged to my Father. It was foreign. I looked at it. He would not even lend it to us except on some rare occasions. That is Father's pen, I told myself. If he wants to burn it, that's up to him. I cannot burn his pen."

Ramaswami then picked up his cell-phone and spoke into it. "I just use this for official work," he explained. "When I want to talk to the family, I use the regular one," he says, thumping an old-fashioned grey-molded plastic phone that sits on a tray on his left. It makes a slight squeak of protest. The meeting is clearly over.

An eminent son of Pondicherry

Sometime in the evening of July 06, 2020, a local daily called me over phone and requested me to help them with the literary details of Mannar Mannan. As a historian of Pondicherry I have in my files all the relevant details of every local writer, both living and dead. I flipped open the relevant file and informed them of the dozen prestigious awards he had received and the fifty one books he had authored. Amazing indeed was his literary output. "Is he nominated for a new award?" I asked the lady at the other end. Her reply was heart breaking. Mannar Mannan passed away at 2:40 in the afternoon.

A popular writer and an excellent orator he was quite

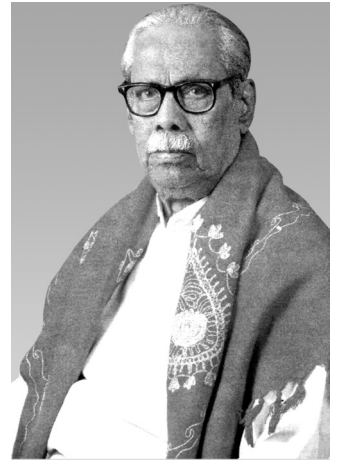
often seen in the literary arena, either at a book launch or to speak about the unknown aspects of his renowned father, Bharathidasan, himself an eminent poet and dramatist, and an ardent admirer of Mahakavi Subramania Bharati. Born as Gopathi, he chose to be known as Mannar Mannan, a Tamilization of his Sanskrit name. Having participated approximately in 10,000 programmes he was

eminent men and women. But what actually shot him to fame was his monumental biography of Bharathidasan – *Karuppuk kuyilin Neruppuk Kural*.

Incarcerated for 49 days for rigorously participating in the anti-Hindi agitation, he narrowly escaped death when he supported the ideals of Periyar and began a movement in Pondicherry. And when All India Radio started its branch

Street to be made into a government museum in honour of his father, and preferred to live in a rented house.

Saddened by the death of his beloved wife, Savitri, in 1982 he spent all his leisure hours in making his father's museum a centre for research. Several researchers working on the oeuvre of Bharathidasan find it fruitful to consult these archives. After his retirement in 1988, Pondicherry University honoured him with the post of consulting radio journalist and he guided many illustrious students, who are making their mark today in various broadcasting centres.



Mannar Mannan.



Mannar Mannan with his father.

not seen on any stage for more than three years. Old age began telling on him and he was ailing. He was 92 when he took off.

A poet, fictionist and radio dramatist, his essays alone have crossed 1,400 in number. As a son of this divine soil and as a lover of his native town Pondicherry, he has written extensively on its literature and culture, and also about its

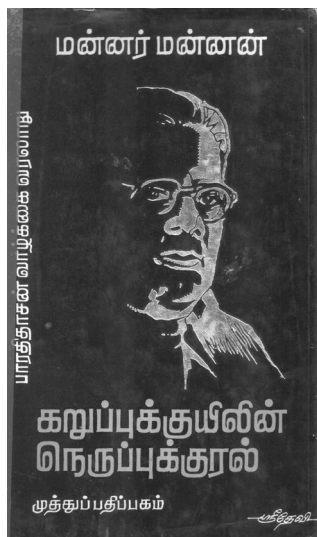
station in Pondicherry in 1968, he joined it only to make use of it to spread his message wider. It was here he brought several revolutionary changes. At a time when only popular figures were invited to perform, he fought for the rights of the local writers and artistes who were yet to make a name. He magnanimously donated his palatial ancestral home in Perumal Koil

● by
P. Raja*

He spearheaded the movement to change the name Pondicherry into its ancient name Puducherry and succeeded in it. He was also instrumental in instituting Kalaimamani and Tamilmamani awards in Puducherry. To cap them all he made all efforts to establish a Tamil Sangam in Puducherry and when he was made secretary, did his best to ensure that it had a place of its own. In short he played a major role in encouraging local writers in all possible ways.

I still distinctly remember the day I met him in Pondicherry AIR station. That was in July 1978 when I was making a mark as a creative writer in English and on assignment, and that was my first one, I went to present my short story. When I was not sure of whom I should meet, Mannar Mannan came to my rescue. When he asked the purpose of my visit and I told him the reason, his face lit up and he said: "Surprising! We used to invite writers from Chennai for all our English programmes. I am glad to see a local writer writing in English and that too short stories".

(The writer is a bi-lingual fictionist and historian of Puducherry. www.professorraja.com)



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– THE EDITOR

The travails of two cities

(Continued from page 6)

you'll give anything to see these irrepressible 'enthu-cutlets' once more.

Event-planners are choking on ideas they haven't been able to use; 'talk-ers' are wondering if they should have chosen some other field, while MCs, who love the power that goes with their job, are a forlorn lot. They miss conducting programmes, which includes the particularly satisfying task of being able to cut the over-garrulous to size every now and then. A webinar doesn't feel the same. The 'mute' button, the great leveller, has bestowed that power upon everyone now.

When every breath is loaded with that 'maybe-this-time-it's-my-turn' threat, and a simple sneeze can cause a stampede, how is this city supposed to celebrate anything?

Well, yes, technology helps – but it's not the same. Those

who speak need the vibe of actual human presence, the shuffling, the coughing, laughter (sometimes), and the applause. Those who listen want to sit with friends and whisper critical comments about the speaker. Imagine being unable to share nostalgia during a show about iconic movies, while being transported back for a brief moment to that afternoon, when all of you 'bunked' class to catch a furtive matinee, hoping you won't be discovered. Where's the excitement in a virtual event that merely points out heritage spots in those fascinating, endlessly interwoven narrow lanes? Half the fun in being shepherded to these places is never knowing whether you are going to get run over by a vegetable-laden push cart; of being able to bite into a pakoda that has been deep-fried in well-used oil, with a liberal dash of vehicle emissions and random dust, or of becoming so

disoriented by teeming hordes, you find yourself riding in an auto you never intended getting into.

Yes, you can watch vintage recipes being prepared while listening to lectures on culinary history. But what's sensory about this? And imagine not being able to stand around later, chatting, exchanging gossip, while nibbling on the show-cased dishes.

This is tragic. What have you done, you Virus-from-Hell? The Grand Old Lady's voice grows soft this August, and Chennai-that-is-Madras is hopping mad.

FYI, Corona/Covid-19, the festival season has begun on the Indian sub-continent. And ahead lies the one-of-a-kind December Season here in the city. Maybe it's time you packed your bags. You've had your time – you've made your point. Leave this city, this nation, this planet – alone.

What is life without sport?

Even World War II couldn't put a stop to sport altogether. Yes, international events obviously could not be held but the domestic cricket calendar for example in India, South Africa, Australia and West Indies was gone through and in fact Ceylon and India exchanged tours in 1940-41 and 1944-45. The coronavirus, however, is something else, says Partab Ramchand, explaining how it has impacted sport.

Yes, the coronavirus indeed is something else. It has put a halt to sports events altogether, local, national and international. And we were all under the impression that the joys of sport could always be experienced at any time, all the time, thanks to the numerous events worldwide and the non-stop coverage on television and the internet. We all thought that sport would never stop and we would feel the thrill and excitement that only a Wimbledon or the Olympic Games could provide. Well, we now have to do without these mega events. Both have been put off by a year as also the Euro Cup football. Another major event, Formula I racing, is effectively over for the season even before a car could be rolled out on to the circuit. The French Open has been pushed to September instead of May, there is no word when the Premier League football will commence and the IPL in all probability will be played in Dubai. This is a surreal experience. Teams and athletes have, in the past, played through torment and

turbulence, braving bloody wars and bitter political conflicts. Over the years, sport has evolved into something more than just entertainment. It is a perennial source of optimism, a universal healer tailored to deal with grim times. At least it was until now, when a scary virus has forced so many of us to retreat into lockdown and has left administrators with no choice but to postpone sports fixtures all across the world. Experiencing sport has never been just a pastime, but a way of life, an escape from the mundane of daily schedules, a gateway to undiluted happiness and a kind of therapy for the soul. And that is why in these grim times we should perhaps not just miss sport but also appreciate and celebrate it. The hollowness so many of us are feeling at present is a reminder that the show the elite athletes put on for us week in and week out is a privilege we must cherish.

As much as so many of us live and breathe sport, catastrophes such as the virus help put things into perspective. In the face of families losing loved ones, carrying on with any kind of sport is just plain unfeeling and uncaring. Indeed, the very idea of sport suddenly sounds meaningless.

After all, the global commercialisation of sport has ensured that we are bombarded with so much of it that we seem to have forgotten its true value. In a way, the mindless consumption of sport has meant that it has been drained of all its charm. This time-off will perhaps give

us an opportunity to introspect and reclaim some of that. That way, once it is all over, once the athletes return and stadiums open, we will be able to enjoy it even more. And who knows, once normalcy is restored, sport may offer the healing touch it almost always does, uniting grieving people and springing hope by infusing a rare kind of universal power only it has the capacity to wield.

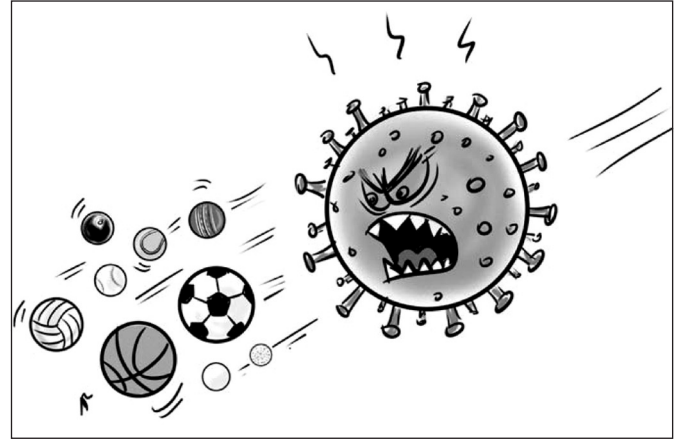
But the question is, when will this happen? When will the athletes return, when will the stadiums open and when shall we sports lovers experience the frenzy of the action-packed moments, the ethereal skills and the dramatic denouements? Medical experts have warned that resuming anything

● by
Partab Ramchand

this year could mean putting lives at risk. Even the most conservative estimates have put the comeback of sporting activity at at least six months into the future.

Most are of the view that while sport is great, at the moment the focus is on saving lives, and having sports events which attract large crowds could prove to be disastrous. The experts feel that since the transmission rate is very high, it should be completely avoided for a substantial period of time even though sport encourages physical and mental well-being.

There has been talk of conducting events without an



audience – even though this would be anathema to the genuine sports lover for what is sport without spectators – but doctors are of the view that even this is not advisable at this point of time. “It can be done when things improve, but even then it will be risky as it involves players, officials, organisers and

so many staff, the chances of getting infected will always be there,” is the general refrain.

Yes it may be some time for the action to commence and all that we sports lovers can do is to hope that it is sooner rather than later. For what is life without sport?

Answers to Quiz

1. United Kingdom, 2. The atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively, 3. Ministry of Human Resource Development, 4. The Mars rover that will explore the red planet from Feb. 2021 onwards, 5. Sir Viv Richards and Sir Ian Botham, 6. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, 7. COVID-19 Law Lab (www.COVIDLawLab.org), 8. King Juan Carlos of Spain, 9. Maharashtra (Devlali) and Bihar (Danapur), 10. Beirut.

11. C. Rajagopalachari, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, and C.V. Raman were honoured in 1954, 12. Peepul (Ficus religiosa) leaf, 13. First posthumous and lady awardee, 14. 48, 15. S. Radhakrishnan and A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, 16. MGR, 17. Lata Mangeshkar, 18. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, 19. ‘Netaji’ Subhas Chandra Bose, 20. M.S. Subbulakshmi and C. Subramaniam.

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