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MADRAS

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When Civic Projects are Merely Cosmetic

Tamil Nadu may have a new political dispensation in place but many of the age-old practices seem to continue regardless. One of these is the cancellation of several projects that were clearly very dear to the previous administration. A high profile project whose fate hangs in the balance is the proposed airport at Parandur. The next to make the news has been the proposal of the CMDA to cancel several city-based infrastructural projects sighting a severe funds shortage. This throws open several questions. First, how were these projects planned and taken forward till announcement without a proper funding plan? Second, a perusal of these projects seem to indicate that many of them were merely cosmetic in nature and therefore would have made no difference to the quality of city life. So why were they taken up at all?

The CMDA has announced that it is battling a funds shortage with outstanding liabilities of Rs. 3,500 crores. Citing this

as its reason, it has proposed the cancellation of three major projects – the global sports city plan, beachfront development, and waterfront development. The foundation stone for the first of the three projects was laid in February 2026 in that flurry of foundation-stone-laying and announcements that always happens prior to the

● by **Sriram V.**

electoral code of conduct kicking in. With the change in government, this project obviously is no longer priority. That it was of great importance to the previous administration is well known, given that the then deputy chief minister had taken sports development as his personal mission. However, it must be asked as to what purpose a global sports city would serve to Chennai which by itself is grappling with several other infrastructural issues that

would be of higher priority in any administration.

The city, it should be noted, is already well provided for with stadiums of various kinds. These are not utilised to the extent that they ought to be and remain empty concrete shells that take up quite a bit of funding by way of maintenance. While we agree that sports investments are priority if we need to develop our youth, they can be done in a far more nuanced fashion at ward and school level rather than by way of large projects like a global sports city. With all respect, such schemes are for first world countries, not ours with its multifarious existential issues.

We now come to the waterfront and beachfront development projects. A scan of both the proposals would reveal that these were exceedingly cosmetic in nature, chiefly dealing with viewing decks, seating areas, walkways and other such facilities. The core challenges

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Obstruction free footpaths, a fundamental right

Recently, the Supreme Court in a landmark judgement declared the right to walk care-free on footpaths a fundamental right and asked the government to frame a law to protect pedestrians. It is a reflection of the sorry state of affairs that it required the apex court of the country to intervene and recognize something as basic as protecting the right of an individual to walk carefree without having to worry about dangers to life and limb. The abysmal conditions of the footpaths of our city has been discussed

threadbare in the past and this is the time to revisit the subject. As is most often the case in matters relating to public infrastructure in the city, there is no cause for any cheer.

● by **Karthik Bhatt**

The State of Indian Streets 2026 Report, a study undertaken by Neural City, a Lucknow-based tech startup founded to enhance the livability of Indian cities by revolutionizing

city governance through technology, has found that only 13.9 percent of our city's roads have continuous, walkable footpaths that allow people to walk at least 100 meters without any obstruction. However remarkably, Chennai ranked fourth in the study, conducted in 12 major cities (ranking behind Lucknow, Bengaluru and Hyderabad), showing that accessible and safe footpaths are a luxury across the country.

The problems are clearly

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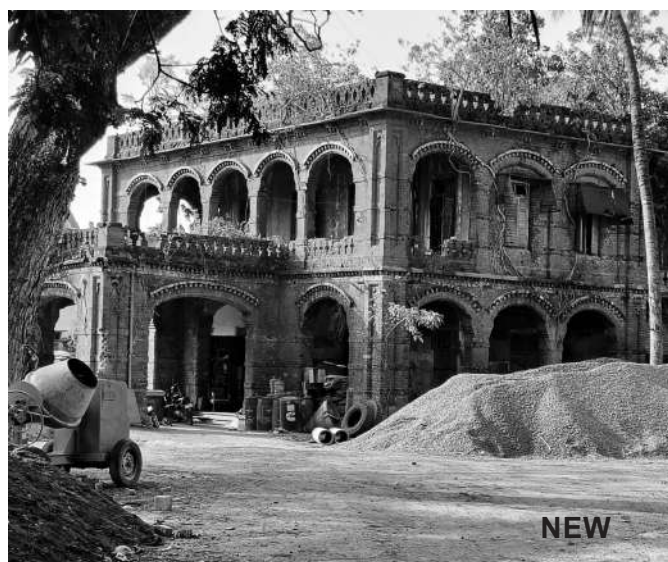
HERITAGE WATCH

Another Historic Marker in Danger



Our two pictures are around 14 years apart. The Old, taken in 2012 shows a fairly well-maintained building. That was when it was being let out for film shoots, which probably accounted for its good condition. Cut to 2026, when the building seems to have become derelict. Tall barricades have come up all around it, and there seems to be plenty of construction activity within the compound. Does this bode well for the building?

For the records, this is *The Lodge*, the residence of the Principal of the College of Engineering when that institution was at Chepauk Palace. The house is within the same compound as Victoria Hostel. *Madras Musings* readers will be interested to know -- that is where Lt Col HD Love, author of *Vestiges of Old Madras* lived.



When Civic Projects are Merely Cosmetic

(Continued from page 1)

being faced by the beaches and the waterfronts were never addressed. These include unregulated vending, indiscriminate dumping of garbage, encroachment, stray dog menace, and the poor quality of the water itself. To what purpose waterfront parks if the water by way of the river or the lakes is treated as a medium for the disposal of sewage and rubbish? The rivers have not shown any signs of improvement despite several projects that claimed to transform them. The lakes themselves seem devoid of that water recharge facilities, most of which have been destroyed

due to encroachment and indiscriminate land development. Any administration worth its salt would have first focused on these greater, insurmountable, challenges rather than on beautifying places that would be beautiful enough with a bare minimum of upkeep and civic awareness on the part of the local residents.

It is therefore appropriate that the present administration is mulling over the cancellation of these projects. But the question still remains – will it address the more serious core issues or will it in turn only look at other cosmetic projects that it can take up? Only time will tell.

Obstruction free footpaths, a fundamental right

(Continued from page 1)

multi-pronged. First, the construction exercise itself. Recently, the Greater Chennai Corporation cancelled 35 tenders worth Rs. 284 crores for construction of footpaths in key roads across the city, the reason being the familiar bedfellow of any public infrastructure project viz., corruption. It found issues such as pre-fixed bids, increased construction costs per metre and selective contractor participation patterns in the tendering process. Next come design issues. Lack of adherence to uniform design guidelines has led to haphazard constructions, with common problems being steep kerb ramps, missing tactile paving, etc. Lack of coordination amongst governmental agencies too adds to the mix, with utilities such as transformers (often with huge cables jutting out) and telephone junction boxes vying with each other to ensure that footpaths remain inaccessible. Pavements are also a casualty when works such as laying of stormwater drains take place, which post-completion makes it impossible to provide for footpaths or replace the ones damaged during the work.

The biggest and most visible problem though comes from encroachments on pavements, which prevent continuous, unobstructed movements. These include unauthorized roadside eateries (with plastic stools for patrons to sit and eat and strewn food waste making up the ambience), conversion of pavements into parking spaces,

etc. Recently, the authorities themselves were guilty of this transgression in this writer's neighbourhood, which saw MTC buses using the pavement – that had been broken down as a part of the Nageswara Park's restoration exercise – as a parking space for quite some time, before there was belated action by way of putting up of rails. Despite regular clearance drives undertaken by local traffic police and the municipal authorities to clear encroachments, they reappear at the same spot almost instantly, which raises questions as to the real intention of these drives.

There is an urgent need to stop treating footpaths as dispensable elements of pedestrian infrastructure and instead be recognized as an integral and important element in promoting non-motorized transport. No amount of budgetary allocations will work, unless there is a dedicated effort on the part of the policymakers and officials in this regard. There is also a need for the public to realise that obstruction-free footpaths are as much their responsibility as that of the officials and ensure that they remain vigilant against attempts to hinder what has been recognized as their fundamental right. It is not sufficient that the city prides itself in the wide pavements created in small patches (primarily as Smart City initiatives), while leaving the public susceptible to dangers in large stretches elsewhere. Safe, well-designed and well-maintained pavements need to be accessible for all.

Singapore of the Stone Ages

The Man from Madras Musings lives in a cul-de-sac off an arterial road. This may be a fact well known to most regulars and they, MMM can see, have begun to mutter, "O God, not another story about the Chief Minister driving down this stretch each morning, noon, afternoon and evening," but MMM hastens to assure them all that this is not the burden of the tale. In any case CMs whizzing down that arterial road is now a matter of the past. The present one takes another route altogether.

MMM had just set out on an errand when on reaching the mouth of his street, he was surprised to find the traffic on the arterial road

the middle of the road. The chaos being such, MMM did not lower his window to ask any of the policemen there as to what that machine was doing. But it is his guess that it had something to do with the metro rail work that has been ongoing a few blocks away for quite some time now.

It was quite clear that there had been no coordination of any kind between CMRL and the police, and right in the middle of a busy morning the former had thought it fit to bring this giant machine and place it on the road. The latter therefore had to contend with it and get on with the traffic. MMM sympathized hugely with the police and at the same time he felt that the administration could have

is asked if he could come and please address a gathering on some aspect of the city. MMM wonders as to why these events must happen only in a particular week in August and cannot be spread over an entire year! That way it would take the pressure off a few people who are repeatedly invited to speak on the city.

There are, however, deserving causes and MMM always likes to oblige these people. And thus it was that when he got a message a couple of days ago asking if he could come and address a charitable organization which was having a world-wide convention in the city, he was more than willing. The person in charge asked

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

had come to a complete halt. A posse of policemen was trying to establish some semblance of order in that chaos but to no avail. Inching forward, MMM could see that buses were being diverted on to the opposite side of the road. This was only increasing the chaos. Clearly nobody had thought of putting up signboards far in advance of the actual blockade telling motorists that there was a huge blockade ahead. Traffic was flowing in, from all directions. Everything therefore had ground to a halt.

Watching from the air-conditioned comfort of his car, MMM could see the poor policemen being abused by practically every driver and passerby. The upholders of the law were trying to do their best in what was clearly a very bad situation. It did not help that there was no coordination among the police themselves and each was flailing his or her hands in opposite directions and giving random instructions to traffic. As it happens in most Indian cities, traffic still managed to inch forward. After all, we have never heard of a gridlock lasting days, not yet anyway.

It was only after 15 or 20 minutes that MMM could see the actual reason for the block. This was a giant machine of some kind, at least three storeys high and perched on top of a multi-axle vehicle which had been positioned right in

done a lot better in a situation like this. After all, CMRL work is not something that has come about suddenly on the city. All it required was prior intimation to the police that there was likelihood of traffic disruption with a large machine arriving at a certain time on a particular day. It is also surprising that TN Police did not think of taking advantage of social media to inform the public of a blockage at a busy intersection.

For a city that is forever claiming that it will soon be Singapore, we appear to lack the very basics. Had there been prior involvement of the police, newspaper reports should have carried information about potential blocks, social media alerts should have been given, and radio messages could have been made use of. It is also surprising that TN Police do not seem to ever use electronic signboards well ahead of a blockage to inform road users that they would need to use alternative routes. These are all basic operating procedures, and it is high time that our city, its administration and the lawgivers start pondering over how to implement them.

All in a jiffy

Madras week is just a few weeks away and as is usual, the Man from Madras Musings is noticing a sharp uptick in the number of emails, phone calls and personal meetings where he

for a telephonic chat and when the time came, MMM found that he was more in the capacity of a listener because the caller went on and on and on about the greatness of the organization that they were representing. Initially very impressed, MMM later began to allow his attention to wander, restricting himself to a few assuring noises every time the speaker paused to take breath. The conversation eventually meandered around to the topic that MMM was supposed to speak on and he realized that what was being required was practically a comprehensive survey of our city including the nature of its people, its industrial resources, its practices and its unique aspects.

MMM was quite happy that such a detailed topic was being listed out. He finally asked the caller as to how long he had to speak at the event.

"Oh around five minutes," came the reply.

The speaker then went on to tell MMM that these days attention spans are very low and anything more than five minutes would be difficult. MMM then asked as to whether any of the content that had been asked for earlier could be cut out to which the caller said no, that would not be advisable at which point MMM suggested to the caller that what they wanted was an Instagram reel and they could take their custom elsewhere.

– MMM

OUR READERS WRITE



In Praise of Simplicity: A Visit to the Wallajah Mosque



Some buildings make an impression the moment you see them. Others take their time, revealing themselves slowly, almost as if they expect you to do a little work. The Wallajah Mosque belongs, quite firmly, to the second kind.

I arrived there as part of a study trip, armed with a notebook and the vague confidence that I knew how to “observe architecture”. It took only a few minutes to realise that the building was far more composed than I was.

Built in 1795 under the patronage of the Nawab of Arcot, the mosque carries a distinction that does not announce itself – it has been constructed without the use of wood or metal. One does not notice this immediately. But once known, it alters the experience of the space. The simplicity begins to feel intentional, the restraint quietly exacting. The entrance opens into an open courtyard that performs the architectural equivalent of a pause. There is no abrupt shift, no dramatic threshold. Instead, the space allows one to arrive gradually, easing into its rhythm without insistence.

From here, the structure resolves into the covered prayer hall. The first impression is one of balance. The proportions are carefully measured, the arches understated, and the surfaces free of distraction. There is no attempt to impress through ornament. Instead, the design relies on clarity – on getting things right rather than elaborate.

At the far end lies the *mihrab*, indicating the direction of the Kaaba. Architecturally modest, it is nevertheless the organising centre of the space. Everything aligns towards it. There are no instructions, no markers – just a quiet, unwav-

ering sense of direction embedded within the design. Nearby stands the *mimbar*, functional and unobtrusive. The minarets, rising above, do not compete for attention. They complete the structure without dominating it. Indeed, nothing here appears eager to be noticed.

What is most striking, perhaps, is what the mosque chooses not to engage through depiction; instead, it holds space with discipline. Geometry and proportion take precedence, creating an environment where the eye is guided rather than overwhelmed.

The layout suggests a shared rhythm. The uninterrupted expanse of the floor, the clarity of sightlines, and the openness of the hall all point towards gathering and alignment. Even in stillness, the space feels prepared – as though it carries within it the memory of collective presence.

At some point during the visit, I became aware of my own footsteps – slightly hurried, faintly out of step with the calm precision around me. It is not often that a building alters one's pace without instruction. Here, it happens quietly, almost naturally.

As study trips go, this one offered more than expected. I arrived intending to observe. I left having adjusted – just a little – to the measured order of the space. The Wallajah Mosque does not attempt to impress or overwhelm. It simply holds its ground, in clean lines and quiet alignment.

And perhaps that is its most lasting impression: not grandeur, but clarity. Not display, but discipline. The kind that stays with you, long after you have left.

– Priyanka Soman

Vanishing Wall Posters

I read with interest your observation that the incidence of wall posters has come down under the present regime. I must however confess that I seem to be seeing a different Chennai.

A walk through many of our neighbourhoods reveals walls still covered with posters marking birthdays, extending greetings, offering congratulations, and celebrating every conceivable political occasion. If this is evidence of a decline, one wonders what abundance looked like!

The walls, it appears, have not received the memo that poster culture is on the wane.

They continue to serve as free public notice boards for political enthusiasm, much to the detriment of the city's appearance.

Perhaps the reduction exists only in statistics. To the ordinary resident, however, the visual evidence suggests that the tradition of plastering public walls is alive and well.

It would be refreshing if the same zeal displayed in putting up posters was channeled into keeping our public spaces clean. Until then, reports of the demise of wall posters seem rather optimistic.

Vinithra Anandh
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Rediscovering the Neighbourhood

The Thiru-Vi-Ka Park in Shenoy Nagar has been a binding force for its residents. In its recent history, residents came together to see that the park was restored after the underground Metro was commissioned there. At 5 pm on the last Sunday of June this year, about 80 residents (men, women and children) grouped into 23 teams there to set off on a quest of rediscovery of their neighbourhood. Wearing customised caps, they were spotted trooping purposefully through its streets with chits of paper, cracking stimulating clues. One of them went like this: “A word for a grand house or building (not in English), add a word that means pure joy or bliss (not in English), add the South Chennai neighbourhood home to the famous Theosophical Society. Once you have found the answers to the 3 clues, reverse the sequence and rush there to get your next clue.” If you are still puzzled, the answer is ‘Adyar Ananda Bhavan’ which has a small outlet outside the Thiru-Vi-Ka Park-cum-metro station. Each team had a set of six clues to decode leading to different landmarks. In all there were 20 clues to 16 locations. All the participants traversing the five routes completed and congregated at the Chintamani Vinayakar temple. Prizes were given, snacks enjoyed, friends were made and of course the community was strengthened.

There were prizes for senior citizens, women and children. The prize for the ‘Best Team Name’ went to not Sherlock Holmes but ‘Shenoy Holmes’. A gift shop (Dyuti), a jeweller (Sri Chamundi), a gym (The Crew) and a food store (Bhavani Essence) – all local businesses, were the sponsors and Shweta, Thirivikram, Shrinika and Aashritaa of the Mukkala family, Sivakumar Selvarajan, Chinni Krishnan and M.E. Thyagarajan the organisers. There were 20 volunteers helping at the event.

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Super Chennai Summer Festival 2026: Where Hot Met the Happening



Beach sand art at Pallavakam beach on June 3rd.

Can Chennai's summer become what December is to its music lovers – a season that draws visitors from around the world? The inaugural edition of the Super Chennai Summer Festival suggests that it just might.

For decades, Chennai has celebrated its winters with the famed December Music Season, a cultural phenomenon that draws rasikas and visitors from across the world. Summer, on the other hand, has largely been viewed as the city's difficult season, a period of soaring temperatures when residents retreat indoors and tourists stay away. This June, however, Chennai decided to challenge that perception and reclaim summer as a season to celebrate.

The inaugural edition of the 'Super Chennai Summer Festival 2026' transformed the city's hottest month into one of its most vibrant celebrations – turning beaches, parks, heritage landmarks, cafes, metro stations,

restaurants and public spaces into stages for music, movies, food, art and community experiences. In doing so, it also sowed the seeds for a larger ambition, to create a festival that, much like the December Season, will one day attract NRIs and tourists from around the world to experience Chennai in an entirely different light.

Curated by Super Chennai, the city-led cultural initiative, the month-long festival engaged more than 40,000 residents across over 36 events and reached an astounding 24 million people globally through its digital platforms, taking the story of a vibrant and evolving Chennai far beyond the city's boundaries.

Over the past year, Super Chennai has emerged as a platform that celebrates the city's spirit, creativity and aspirations, building a thriving digital community of more than 1.5 million followers. The Summer Festi-

val became its most ambitious expression yet, inviting Chennaites to rediscover their city through meaningful and memorable experiences. Through the month of June, Chennai was not merely hot, it was happening. The city's calm mornings and breezy evenings became the backdrop for a rich and varied programme that included beach movie screenings, concerts in public spaces, food trails, stand-up comedy evenings, photography walks, Colours and Textures walks, chef-led dining experiences, community gatherings and youth-led activities. Conducted in partnership with the Greater Chennai Corporation, Greater Chennai Police, Greater Chennai Traffic Police and the Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation, the festival demonstrated the possibilities of a city that embraces its public spaces and opens them up for culture and community.

Music emerged as one of the defining highlights of the festival. *Morning Raga* by the Marina gave the festival a musical start at sunrise on Marina Beach. Hundreds gathered in the early hours of the morning and, as singer Sai Vignesh and his team rendered classical compositions, the audience sang along with remarkable enthusiasm, proving once again that Chennai's relationship with music extends far beyond the concert halls of December.

The *Street Jam* series took live performances directly to public spaces, transforming locations such as Thiruvanniyur Beach, Anna Nagar Tower Park, Anna Nagar Metro Station, Pondy Bazaar, KNK Road and the Buckingham Canal waterfront into impromptu concert venues. Independent musicians and emerging artists found new audiences, while passers-by paused to listen, sing along and soak in the atmosphere.

The festival also celebrated Chennai's growing appetite for independent and alternative music through Chennai Rocks, a special rock showcase at Phoenix Marketcity. The evening featured performances by Black Current from

Auroville, Puducherry, and Gid-dy Hoo from Bengaluru, both of whom delivered high-energy sets that had the audience singing along and asking for more. The concert reaffirmed the city's evolving music tastes and its increasing openness to diverse musical genres and emerging independent bands from across the country.

The festival's open-air movie experiences created some of its most memorable moments. *Beach Blockbuster*, which attracted more than 10,000 attendees, highlighted Chennai's growing appetite for outdoor entertainment. Families and friends gathered by the sea to watch films under the stars, turning the beach into one giant community living room.

The Marina screening of *Kung Fu Panda* was particularly special, marking what is believed to be India's first animation film screening on a beach. The event drew children and families in large numbers. This was followed by the screening of *Bigil*, celebrating both the football season and Chennai's passionate movie culture. As the film played against the backdrop of crashing waves, the beach transformed

into a giant open-air theatre, with audiences cheering and celebrating in quintessential Chennai style.

Sunset Atti, an engaging music conversation and concert hosted by the Chennai-based band Office Gaana on the terrace of Isphani Centre on Nungambakkam High Road, was another memorable experience. Hundreds gathered to witness the sunset and the city's skyline while enjoying soulful music and conversations, creating an evening that many participants will remember for years to come.

Heritage and exploration formed another important pillar of the festival. In collaboration with Nam Veedu Nam Oor Nam

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Chefs Table.



Morning Raga at Marina.



Chennai rocks at Phoenix.



Sing along bus.



The Study.



Ice cream tasting at Ciclo cafe.



Night Cycling Trail.



Sunset Atti by Office Gaana.



The Study.

L.M. Menezes: A Visionary Urban Planner and Champion of the Urban Poor

Louis Manuel Menezes (1937-2026) was one of India's distinguished Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers, an accomplished urban planner, institution builder, and lifelong advocate of inclusive urban development. Throughout an illustrious career spanning the Government of Tamil Nadu, the Government of India, international organisations and civil society, he demonstrated that public administration is not merely about governance but about improving the lives of people – especially the poor and the marginalised. He passed away on May 14, 2026 at the age of 89, leaving behind an enduring legacy of visionary leadership, compassionate public service and unwavering commitment to social justice.

Belonging to a generation of civil servants who regarded administration as an instrument of social transformation, Menezes consistently championed equitable, participatory and sustainable development. His professional life reflected a rare combination of administrative excellence, strategic vision and deep human concern, making him one of the most respected figures in urban development in India.

A Distinguished Career in Public Service

Menezes held several key administrative positions in the Government of Tamil Nadu, including that of District Collector, where he earned a reputation for integrity, administrative efficiency, accessibility and an unwavering commitment to public welfare. His exceptional leadership later led to his appointment as Secretary, Urban Development, Government of Tamil Nadu, where he played a pivotal role in shaping policies on urban planning, housing, municipal administration and infrastructure development.

His expertise was subsequently recognised at the national level through his appointment as Secretary, Urban Development, Government of India, where he contributed significantly to policies promoting balanced, sustainable and inclusive urban development.

His contributions extended beyond India through his association with the United Nations' urban development programmes, where he participated in international initiatives on sustainable urbanisation, community participation and improving the quality of life in rapidly growing cities. He also served as Convenor of the North Eastern Council, contributing to coordinated

regional planning and development in one of India's most culturally diverse and strategically important regions.

Pioneer of Community Development

Among L.M. Menezes' most significant and enduring contributions was his pioneering role in establishing the Community Development Wing of the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board. This innovative initiative transformed the philosophy of slum improvement in Tamil Nadu and became a landmark in participatory urban development.

closely with community organisations to promote secure housing rights, in-situ development, protection against forced evictions, access to safe drinking water and sanitation, livelihood security and inclusive city planning.

He consistently maintained that cities should develop with poor communities rather than at their expense, a principle that remained central to his life's work.

Advocate of Transparency

As State Convenor of Transparency International India – Tamil Nadu Chapter, he actively promoted transparency

● by
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Champion of the Urban Poor

His commitment did not end with retirement. As one of the coordinators of the Chennai Slum Dwellers Rights Movement, he continued to work

in public administration, accountability in governance, anti-corruption measures, citizen participation, and ethical public service. He was an advocate of good governance and sustainable development.

Guiding Principles

The philosophy that guided Louis Manuel Menezes throughout his life may be summarised in five enduring principles:

- Cities should be designed for people rather than vehicles.
- Development must be inclusive, equitable and socially just.
- Slum residents are citizens entitled to dignity, security and essential public services.
- Good governance depends upon transparency, accountability and public participation.
- Urban planning must balance economic growth with social justice and environmental sustainability.

A Legacy That Endures

Menezes combined professional excellence with profound compassion and an unwavering commitment to public service. His life's work demonstrated that genuine development is measured not merely by economic growth or physical infra-



structure but by justice, dignity, inclusion and the well-being of all citizens.

Louis Manuel Menezes will be remembered as an outstanding civil servant, internationally respected urban development expert, visionary institution builder, compassionate mentor and humanitarian. His lifelong service enriched Tamil Nadu, India and the wider global development community. His vision of humane, inclusive and sustainable cities will continue to inspire future generations in the pursuit of development that places people at its centre.

Chennai Summer Festival

(Continued from page 5)

Kadhai, Super Chennai curated experiences that encouraged residents to rediscover the city's rich history and hidden stories. *Chennai UlaaLa*, the city's first sing-along heritage tour aboard an MTC bus featuring independent musician Kizhakuvaasi, gave participants a fresh perspective on familiar landmarks, while the *Public Hall of Madras Trail* and the much-loved *Chasing Colours & Textures Walks* in the museum campus, KNK Road, Chintadripet, inspired residents to look anew at the city's architecture and neighbourhoods.

The *Madras by Night Cycle Trail*, curated with Cycling Yogis and led by Ramanujar Moulana, offered participants the rare opportunity to cycle through Mount Road after dark, discovering the city's architectural grandeur and history under the night sky. For many, it was an entirely new way of experiencing Chennai.

The festival also championed creativity in all its forms. *Canvas by the Beach*, the festival launch featuring sand art and music, and the *Tharamani Nights Photo Walk*, curated

with Madras Photo Bloggers, encouraged people to engage with art in public spaces and celebrate the city through creative expression.

Food enthusiasts embarked on a culinary journey through a series of thoughtfully curated experiences designed by Annam by Shabnam, which brought together chefs, food lovers and storytellers to celebrate Chennai's evolving culinary landscape. These included *Beyond the Plate*, an engaging conversation with MasterChef Akash Muralidharan; *Chef's Table* by Chef Mathangi Kumar at Mad Co; *Scoops & Stories*, a curated ice cream tasting experience at Ciclo Cafe; *Kombucha & Chill* by Khumbaya Kombucha at Sorted; *Saiva Biriyani Virundhu* at House of Idlies; and *GuBEER at East Coast* at Madras Square, which paired craft beer tasting with stand-up comedy by Mervyn Ross. Together, these experiences demonstrated the city's growing appetite for intimate and immersive culinary experiences.

Wellness and community engagement also found their place in the festival through *Sunrise Yoga* for World Yoga Day and *Log Out, Laugh Out*, a

stand-up comedy evening at the World Trade Center featuring comedian Ramkumar, encouraging people to disconnect from screens and reconnect through laughter and shared experiences.

The festival culminated in the spectacular *Sundown Music Festival* on June 28 at Thiruvannmiyur Beach, which drew more than 8,000 people to the shoreline. As the sun dipped into the horizon, the beachfront transformed into a celebration of music, youth culture and community spirit, with indie bands Skrat and Jhanu bringing their high-energy performances to the beach, followed by the much-loved Office Gaana and the Non Violinist Project.

Across every event, one theme remained constant -- bringing people together. Families spent evenings by the beach, young people discovered new corners of the city, artists found new audiences and thousands experienced public spaces in ways they never had before. At the end of it all, Chennai had done something remarkable. It had opened up its beaches, parks, IT parks, cafes, malls, museums, metro stations and restaurants to celebrate itself.

By activating public spaces across the city, the Super Chennai Summer Festival 2026 demonstrated the transformative power of experiential programming. More than a festival, it became a movement that challenged the perception of Chennai's summer and reimagined it as a season of culture, creativity and collective celebration.

The aspiration now is even bigger, to grow the Super Chennai Summer Festival into a marquee annual event that attracts visitors from across India and around the world, positioning Chennai as a summer destination in much the same way that the December Music Season has established the city as a winter cultural capital.

If the inaugural edition was any indication, the city is more than ready. For the thousands who attended, June 2026 will be remembered as the month Chennai came alive in an entirely new way. And for everyone who missed it, the fear of missing out has already set in. The countdown to the next edition of the Super Chennai Summer Festival has truly begun.

The Wall Friends of Nungambakkam

From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, Nungambakkam had its own unofficial landmark. A modest three-foot wall at Veerabadran Street. To outsiders, it was just a wall. To us, it was history, identity, and a way of life. We were known as the "Wall Friends".

Nobody remembers when a small amount of sand was first placed at the foot of the wall, or why. But that simple addition made it perfect for sitting, leaning, and spending endless hours. Behind it stretched nearly fifty yards of open space before my ancestral home. A house that has gone through multiple remodellations, but never quite replaced the memories that stood in front of it.

Every afternoon, without invitation or planning, a gang of twelve to fifteen of us would gather there. We sat from early afternoon until late at night. What did we discuss? No one really remembers now. There were laughs, loud arguments, serious debates, and occasional fights. The wall witnessed all of it silently.

I was told we were the fourth generation of the Wall Friends. It started with my grandfather and his group, followed by my father's generation, then my uncle and his friends, and finally us: cousins and neighbourhood boys who inherited the space without ever officially claiming it.

Cricket ruled our days. There was an unwritten rule then: play stopped at 6 p.m. By 5:45, we would start assembling around the wall. Some of us walked in, a few came on bicycles, and some parked their bikes nearby. By six, the Wall Friends were complete.

We were innocent in many ways, barely noticing the beautiful women who passed by, yet we were noticed by everyone else. It felt strange for people on the street if the Wall Friends were missing for a few days.

One of the most exhausting activities was fetching water. We had a few old mugs and, if we were lucky, one or two plastic bottles. The tap was inside a nearby house, and the walk felt long. There were turns, arguments, and fights over who would fetch water and who had to go next.



At around 8:45 p.m., like clockwork, the kulfi man would arrive. By 9 p.m., the group usually began to split, kulfi in hand. He cut the kulfi neatly, served it on leaves, and chatted with us for a few minutes. None of us remembers his name, but he felt like one of the Wall Friends. Hygiene never mattered; our immune systems were stronger then.

Another daily challenge was the bio-break. Anyone who left the wall instantly became the topic of discussion – his batting stance, habits, or personal life. So we held on as long as possible and often went in groups, just to avoid being talked about!

After witnessing four generations, one day my uncle decided to demolish the wall and rebuild it to a height of six feet. That marked the end. The wall was no longer climbable, and the Wall Friends slowly dispersed.



Today, most of us are spread across the globe. Yet the tag "Wall Friends" has never left us. Even in the post-Corona world, when we catch up virtually, the wall finds its way into every conversation, the stories, the arguments, and the smallest details we once discussed while sitting there.

A great local brand of Nungambakkam, built over four generations, came to a quiet close not with noise, but with time. None of us can climb that wall anymore.

But the memory? That stays forever.

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The Madras Air Taxi Service



The Madras Air Taxi Service commenced the first commercial air service to Vizag with the inaugural flight between Madras and Calcutta via Vizag in a de Havilland Fox Moth

● by
John Isaacs

aircraft on 10 February 1934. The flight left Madras at 6.00 am and arrived in Vizag at 11.00 am. Passengers on board were the founders of the company, Raja I.V. Kumar Rao and Raja Bhujunga Rao. The pilot was Mr. H. Tyndale-Biscoe, a chief instructor of the Madras Flying Club.

The Madras Air Taxi Service, claimed to be the first

of its kind in India, with the intention of taking passengers from Madras or elsewhere to any part of India and Burma. Flights were arranged from Madras and to places where there were suitable landing grounds.

The company obtained three Fox Moth airplanes (a single-seater, a two-seater and a three-seater where passengers were seated in a small, enclosed cabin and the pilot was in an open cockpit behind)

and proposed to arrange special all-round India trips at special rates. The one-way fare from Madras to Vizagapatam was Rs 125 and Madras-Calcutta one-way was Rs 225 and return was Rs 405. The company offered life insurance of Rs 10,000 and Rs 20,000.

The company's expansion plans included services to Agra, Ahmedabad, Allahabad, Ban-

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– THE EDITOR



Anusuya Bai: Doyen of Chennai's women sports talents

Her 100 metres sprint record could not be emulated for as long as 14 years! In 1975 she was the first woman sportsperson from Tamil Nadu to win the prestigious Arjuna Award for outstanding sports personalities in India. At the international level, her best performance in terms of serious competitions was at a meet in neighbouring Pakistan where she bagged four gold medals.

Yes, these references are about Anusuya Bai, one of India's yesteryear star female athletes hailing from Chennai where she grew up, though she had her roots in Andhra Pradesh.

A multi-event athlete, Anusuya's tryst with sport began rather informally as she used to run races with friends at Sir Ramaswami Mudaliar Higher Secondary School at Ambattur area in the city. Even now she lives in Ambattur. Later, at Ethiraj College, Anusuya entered official competitions, but without a formal coach.

However, things changed for her in 1971 at the All India Inter University Championship in Jaipur. Not counted among the possible winners, Anusuya surprised, or rather "shocked" the then team coach Beulah Moses by bagging gold in the 400 metres run and shot put. Such specialization in more than one or two events was, indeed, rare in those days. Then came Anusuya's successful bow on track and field internationally.

In the 1973 Summer Universiade competition in Moscow, Anusuya represented India in sprint events and the discus throw. She sprang a surprise on everyone by setting a new inter-university record albeit finishing 16th.

Cut to 1976: at an athletics meet in Pakistan, Anusuya won four gold medals. In 1977 she competed in the IAAF World

Cup held at Dusseldorf city in the then West Germany, but she did not bring home any medal. She was the only woman athlete to represent India in that team.

Anusuya, as an athlete, was significant because she made her bow at a time when women athletes in this mother of all sports had limited infrastructure and support. Her bold performances on track and field were a strong pointer to the fact that women athletes from Tamil Nadu had the talent to compete at the national

and Asian levels, at least. Resilience and confidence were the two strong points of her talent. She is remembered not just for medals or records, but for the fact that she paved the way, as it were, for a new generation of women athletes not just from Chennai or other parts of Tamil Nadu, but from the country too.

ficer. She retired from Southern Railway headquartered at Chennai, next to the Chennai

Central Railway Station, on August 30, 2013.

MADRAS AIR TAXI

(Continued from page 7)

galore, Baroda, Bellary, Benares, Bombay, Calcutta, Cawnpore, Chanda, Delhi, Gaya, Hyderabad, Jhansi, Jodhpur, Jubbulpore, Karachi, Lucknow, Nagpur, Poona, Quilon, Raipur, Sholapur, Trichinopoly, and Vizagapatam. The Madras Air Taxi Service route was from Madras to Calcutta with stops at Gannavaram (Bezawada), Vizagapatam and Puri with connections to east- and west-bound services of Indian Trans-Continental and Indian National Airways.

The inaugural flight between Madras and Calcutta via Vizag on 10 February 1934 was part of an experimental twice-weekly service that was short-lived and discontinued on 31 March 1934 and aircraft certifications were transferred to the Madras Flying Club.

Aircraft did not again make an appearance over Vizag until late 1934 when an aeroplane ordered by the Maharajah of Vizianagram arrived. On October 21, 1934, Mr. Tyndale-Bis-

coe, took delivery of an Avro Commodore aircraft for a ferry flight from Heston (UK) for Madras. He was delivering this aeroplane to the Maharajah of Vizianagram, who had recently learned to fly at the Madras Flying Club. The Maharajah initially ordered two Avro Commodores and this first aircraft was found to be unsuitable for Indian conditions and was returned to Britain and scrapped. The Maharajah had established an airfield at Cheepurupalli and chartered Tiger Moth aircraft from the Madras Flying Club from time to time, and one such aircraft crashed on a beach near Waltair and was irreparably damaged. There were no casualties.

There is a sad foot note to the short-lived Madras Air Taxi Service as, on 25 August 1935, one of the aircraft carrying the owner Raja IV Kumar Rao, a Madras Flying Club instructor pilot named Everett, and a manager of the Imperial Tobacco Company, crashed at Chowtapalem near Nellore and all occupants lost their lives.



by
V. Venkataramana

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