



Sales of flood-hit cars soar

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H1 drugs sold sans prescription

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Temples to keep dresscode

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Flood affected now pushed to outskirts

ANKUR BHARDWAJ

CHENNAI: People living in slums along the banks of the Adyar and the Cooum River are being evicted as a part of the rehabilitation process and shifted to "far off corners" of the city, according to the residents.

The residents, who are daily wage labourers, said that they were on the brink of losing their livelihood because they would find it difficult to commute to work.

R.Mani, 38, lives in a makeshift tent on the banks of the Adyar near Fortis Malar Hospital. He and 20 other families lost their houses in the recent floods. They received notification for their relocation two weeks ago.

After the heavy rain in December flooded the Adyar river and several houses were washed away, the Government decided to relocate the slums along the river in places like Perumbakkam and Semmencheri in the southern suburbs.

Mani said "When we were moved to the relief camps, we were promised houses in nearby locations, but now they are providing



Huts on the banks of the Adyar River PHOTO: ANKUR BHARDWAJ

us houses in Perumbakkam and Semmencheri which are extremely far. We will lose most of the working hours and the money earned in travelling."

The situation is similar in Chitra Nagar and Surya Nagar along the Adyar River and slums along the Cooum River where people have been recently notified about their eviction.

Even NGOs are protesting against this relocation. A volunteer from Agni Foundation who did not want to be named said, "The areas that have been selected for relocation are already low lying and are flooded to some extent even now after the rains in December."

Rani, 34, who lives on the banks of the Cooum along with her three children, lost her thatched roof

house during the floods.

Rani said "I work as a house maid in a nearby colony, if I am shifted to Perumbakkam how will I come to work and feed my children?" Rani added that her relatives lived close to Perumbakkam, which was flooded in December. They were rescued after being stranded for two days because help did not reach there on time.

The slum residents are demanding new houses within a radius of one or two kilometres from their original homes. Vivek, a volunteer working with the slum dwellers, said "Perumbakkam and Semmencheri are located on a water body, so there is no point shifting them from a river bank into another water body which will surely submerge during monsoon."

The Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board which is carrying out this relocation project has said that this was a rehabilitation process and nobody would be forcefully evicted from their house.

When asked about the choice of site for relocation, officials from TNSCB weren't ready to comment on it.

Student deaths show ugly face of colleges

ANVITA SINGH

CHENNAI: The death of four students in two colleges in Tamil Nadu has raised concerns over management practices and the state of education apart from how some students are unable to cope with academic pressures.

Three female students from SVS Yoga Medical College in Vilupuram district were found dead in a well. The initial theory that the students had committed suicide on January 25 was dismissed by one of the parents who, suspecting foul play, demanded a proper inquiry. Senior members of the college management were arrested and the Madras High Court ordered a second autopsy on the body of one of the students. The college management has been charged with harassing the students who had reportedly questioned the exorbitant fee they were forced to pay.

In Chennai, another female student from Anna University fell from the hostel terrace and died. While the parents disagree with the suicide theory, the matter is still being probed. In this case though, no action has been taken

against anyone.

Raja Annam, a third year student of Anna University, said "Many students in Anna University hail from a rural background or have studied under the Tamil Nadu State Board. They find it difficult to cope with the language and the tough engineering subjects."

"The unfair judgement by professors and the competition they endure during job placements also adds to the problem. Many give up engineering by the end of their second year and start searching for alternative careers."

Sonia Mishra of Mohamed Sathak Engineering College said that she had never heard of any suicides in her college, but her friends from Anna University and Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras have told her about how tough it was in their respective institutes. As a result of that stress many of them took to substance abuse, she added.

While both Anna University and IIT Madras have student bodies elected by the management to look after the grievances of students, Sonia said that a representative body elected by the students

and for the students would have been a better option. Mr. Laxmikant Mishra, Sonia's father, added that students who failed to voice anxieties, were prone to suicide.

Dr. Mohan Raj, a psychiatrist, listed a variety of possible reasons behind the tragic step. "Peer pressure, financial difficulties and failure in love are some of the many causes which push these youngsters to the brink. They come to a state where they do not, and, due to lack of will power, will not seek help or fight back. They simply give up. After enduring painful circumstances repeatedly, they unlearn the process of overcoming struggles of life. This is called Learned Helplessness. I try and give them hope in disguise of a solution to their problems," he said.

According to the data recently released by the National Crime Records of Bureau for 2014, nearly 1000 students committed suicide in Tamil Nadu. Students account for 6.1 percent of the total number of suicides in the country. Meanwhile, Tamil Nadu with 16,122 suicides comes a close second to Maharashtra (16,307) for the highest number of suicide cases in the country.



A bio-gas plant at Amma Unavagam PHOTO: THE HINDU

Biogas plants for hotel waste

ANAM AJMAL

CHENNAI: The Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) on Wednesday declared March 31 as the deadline for restaurants and hotels to set biogas plants to dispose off their food waste effectively. Meant to promote proper disposal of waste in the city, the initiative will be first applied to the Teynampet zone, which generates 60 tonnes of organic waste everyday, before being implemented in other parts of the city.

According to Dinesh Rai, manager at Ali's Barbeque, the main problem that restaurants might face while installing these plants is the lack of space and knowledge for installation.

"We would love to contribute to making Chennai more environment-friendly but we have limited space here and these plants cannot be installed in the hotels. So, the authorities will have to provide us with space in another area," he said, adding that the TNPCB would have to conduct an awareness programme to teach them how to operate the technology.

"We can provide financial assistance but the first step will have to come from the government as they only have the information required for setting up such plants."

Following the "polluter pays" principle, the guidelines to establish biogas plants have been distributed among 130 well established food joints, while small eateries and bakeries have been spared the burden.

G. Jawakar, manager of Hotel Ananda on Anna Salai, said "We had received a written notice from the TNPCB six months back to look for more efficient ways of disposing solid waste but it was only a week ago that we got an official notice asking us to install a biogas plant to convert the hotel waste into manure. I have replied to the notice saying that our hotel will start the process of installation as soon as we get further details about the project."

According to Mr. Ranganathan of the Solid Waste Management Department, Chennai Corporation, restaurants across the city generate 16 percent of the municipal solid waste and dispose it off by sending it to a dump yard on a daily basis. This waste is then used in landfills, which often results in fires and contaminates the land.

Officials at the TNPCB have confirmed that the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre in Mumbai will provide the technology to be used for the installation of the biogas plants that can produce 100 kg of organic manure and 100 units of electricity from every tonne of biodegradable waste.

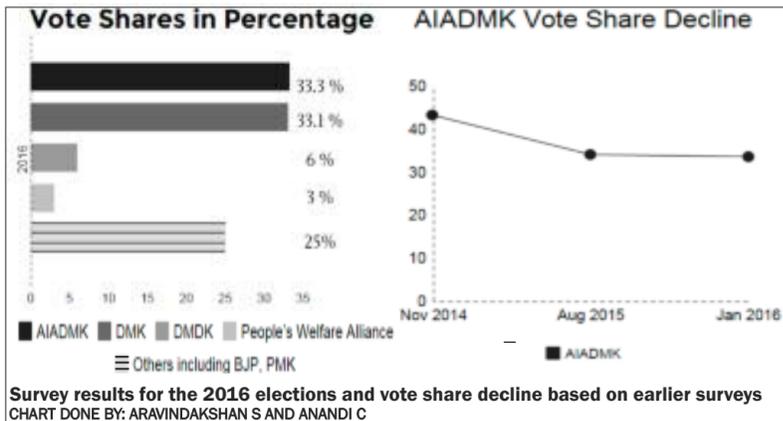
Survey gives DMK an edge in polls

ARAVINDAKSHAN S

CHENNAI: The results of a recent survey predicting that the DMK would edge out the AIADMK in the 2016 Tamil Nadu Assembly elections despite both parties winning almost the same percentage of votes have brought up the question of alliances. The poll has also highlighted the absence of a strong alternative to the Dravidian parties.

People Studies, a research group at Loyola College, Chennai, had released on January 23 the results of the poll conducted between August 2015 and January 2016; As many as 33.3 per cent of those surveyed said they would vote for AIADMK and 33.1 per cent said they would vote for DMK. Vijayakanth's DMKD polled 6 percent with the third highest vote share. The People's Welfare Alliance, a coalition comprising Vaiko's MDMK, VCK, CPI and CPI (M), polled about 3 percent.

Ramu Manivannan, professor of politics and public administration at Madras University, says



Survey results for the 2016 elections and vote share decline based on earlier surveys CHART DONE BY: ARAVINDAKSHAN S AND ANANDI C

that though the AIADMK has not clearly indicated its possible coalition partners, it is indeed looking for an alliance. "If AIADMK goes to the polls alone, the People's Welfare Alliance will be able to collectively gather some votes," Manivannan says. The DMK is also looking for allies, he adds.

The survey, headed by Dr. Rajanayagam of the Visual Communications Department of Loyola College, covered 5,500 people across three caste categories in 120 Assembly constituencies.

Based on the findings in earlier surveys, the AIADMK's vote share declined from around 43 percent in

November 2014 to 34 percent in August 2015 and to the 33.3 percent now in January 2016. For the DMK, however, the vote share for the party headed by the 91-year-old M Karunanidhi rose by 7.1 percent from August 2015 to January 2016.

The poll results follow the December 2015 floods, with the

AIADMK Government coming under criticism for the loss of life and property.

But Manivannan says it is a matter of debate how much the flood management will affect the elections. People will only evaluate the Government's administration and governance, he adds.

P. Anantha Krishnan of the BJP's Intellectual Cell in Tamil Nadu, who says the BJP is a "natural ally" of AIADMK, predicts that AIADMK supremo J.Jayalalitha will definitely turn the tables, and that the hit taken by the ruling party as a result of the floods may not have a lasting impact.

The DMK party of former actor Vijayakanth has been looking to go with the BJP, says Manivannan. But Krishnan says that while the BJP may ally itself with the DMKD, it cannot hope to win seats in the assembly with that alliance.

The People's Welfare Alliance's recent rally in Madurai drew lakhs of people, says A. Sathish Kumar of CPI (ML). PWA's emergence might indicate a change in people's mindset, Kumar says.

Will Tamil exams be held next year?

ANSHIKA RAVI

CHENNAI: The Madras High Court might have given temporary exemption to Class 10 students from writing the Tamil language paper in the academic year 2015-16, yet many schools across Tamil Nadu are debating whether to allow their students to write the exam from next year on.

St. Patrick's Anglo-Indian School in Adyar has Tamil as a mandatory subject for students from Standards 1 to 10. The school used to have French, Hindi and Tamil as optional subjects, but after the enactment of the Tamil Nadu Tamil Learning Act in 2006, it now has Tamil as a compulsory subject.

"Our school has scrapped French and Hindi because there is no space left in our curriculum for them. Most of our students are non-Tamil; needless to say, they face a certain level of difficulty in grasping Tamil. French was a lot easier to learn," said Margaret, junior assistant at St. Patrick's Anglo-Indian School. The Government's no-fail policy has only made things diffi-

"The no-fail policy has made the entire learning process flawed."

cult for the students who easily pass the subject till Standard 8 without having any, or little knowledge of the language. But they face problems when they have to write their exams in the higher classes.

"We're trying our best to prepare students for boards. But the no-fail policy has made the entire learning process flawed. Students are able to get through the exams till 8th standard, despite not knowing much. How do we make sure we've them ready before the moment comes?" asked Margaret.

Many schools are even conducting extra classes to cope with the challenge. Julie, a Standard 8 student at St. Patrick's said that there was no dearth of Tamil teaching teachers, but that did not make it any easier for the students.



Students at a Corporation school PHOTO: THE HINDU

"Pitting the minority linguistic group against those for whom the language is a mother tongue is unfair," she said.

Anjushree, whose son studies in the kindergarten, is worried about

how her son will learn the language which is absolutely alien to them.

"We are from West Bengal. It's just been 2 years since we shifted here. Right now, he is in the kindergarten, but I am concerned

whether he will be able to understand the language like others for whom it is their mother tongue," she said.

C.M.K. Reddy, Chairman of the Linguistic Minorities Forum of Tamil Nadu, had moved the court to exempt the students from taking up the compulsory Tamil paper last year. He said despite the temporary relief, the road ahead was not clear.

"We're not against the act, but against the way the act is being implemented. We want the court to give linguistic minority students more time before they are able to write their Tamil language paper. Also, to project a rosy picture, the government is getting schools to produce a successful account of Tamil exams being conducted," he said.

Some 7,000 students who would be appearing for the board exams this March will be benefited by the court order. These students are from 350 minority educational institutions, including Muslim educational institutions across Chennai, Vellore, Erode, Salem and South Arcot.

Flood-damaged cars sell for a song

Second-hand vehicle prices crash

ANURAG SAUKAT

CHENNAI: Prices of second hand cars have crashed in Chennai with even high-end brands such as Audi and Mercedes selling for just a few lakh rupees. But the catch is that it is a risky buy with most these cars having been damaged in the heavy rain and the subsequent floods in the city in December.

A month after the floods, Cardekho.com, an online portal offered to dispose of cars which had been declared as damaged beyond repair or as a 'total loss' by insurance companies. Cardekho.com was followed by various other used car dealers in Chennai, both online and

retail (brick and mortar) like Copart India and A&S Car dealers, auctioning up to 150 luxury cars. Auctions in Copart India included that of a five year old Land Rover worth Rs 1.3 crore for Rs 18 lakh, while Cardekho.com sold Audi A6's for as low as Rs.20 lakh at its yard in Tiruverkadu.

"It is a fairly good deal to buy an SUV (Sports Utility Vehicle) for Rs 8 lakh. We had mechanics check the condition and the damage was not catastrophic," said Nadira Rasheed, an Army Officer's wife from Meenambakkam, who is finalizing her deal to purchase a Chevrolet Captiva worth Rs 23 lakh.

Usually second hand car dealers repair and refurbish the used cars

and sell them. Dealers like cardekho.com have tied up with 16 insurance companies, including Tata AIG, Bharathi AXA and ICICI Lombard to sell and insure the vehicles.

However, insurance companies are urging people not to buy cars that were damaged in the floods, especially if they were declared as 'damaged beyond repair'.

"It is risky to purchase a car that has been damaged in the floods. Minute circuits and chips in the automobile tend to get damaged and can escape the eyes of a mechanic. There is a good chance that the parts can catch fire and explode at some point," said K.Vani, Chief Sales Executive, A&S car dealers.

Agreements with insurance companies forbid the sale of automobiles which are tagged as "total loss". "We receive a lot of calls every day regarding vehicles that are damaged beyond repair. Taking into account the safety of the customer we are not at the liberty to sell such vehicles," Ms.Vani added.

The sale of damaged cars at cheaper prices have opened a market, where the new owner tears apart the vehicle to salvage spare parts and sell the rest as scrap metal. Parts of the car, like disk brakes, magnets and other components are sold to manufacturers or garages where they will be recycled and used later as replacement, while the body of the car is usually sold as scrap. Parts of the car like



A long wait : Almost two months of repair time and expenses exceeding the insurance claims are what many car owners faced post floods .
PHOTO: ANURAG SAUKAT



Deep in trouble : The December floods left many cars damaged beyond repair.
PHOTO: ANURAG SAUKAT

"It is risky to purchase a car that has been damaged in the floods. There is a good chance that the parts can catch fire and explode at some point"

the logos or emblems of cars are also sold at a very high price to individuals who have lost their car logos. A BMW logo is sold for up to Rs 10,000.

Another fallout of the flood-damaged cars flooding the market is that even the prices of the used cars in good condition have fallen. This is because people are wary of being dumped with flood-damaged cars.

Long queues for repair

ANURAG SAUKAT

CHENNAI:The aftermath of the December floods saw damaged cars piling up at garages and automobile insurance offices for repairs and assessment of damage for insurance.

Over 10,000 automobiles were damaged beyond repair in the December rain and the subsequent floods in the city. In some cases the cars were written off as "total loss" and "damaged beyond repair".

The damage ranged from formation of mould and corroded interiors in engines and fuel tanks ruined by water logging. Owners who took their vehicles to get them repaired, a week after the floods, were given an estimated repair time of two months and costs exceeding the insurance claims.

The repair work was delayed in

many cases with the mechanics saying that they had to wait for the spares to come. The demand for the spares had shot up with the unprecedented number of cars being brought in for repairs.

"They said I would have to wait at least till mid-March for my car to get repaired, even though the damage was limited to destroyed interiors and required only change of a few parts," said T.Ravi, a textile merchant from Ashok Nagar who owned a Honda City.

With a large number of customers coming in every week to get their cars repaired, authorized dealers and repair shops do not have the space or work force to deal with all the vehicles. Manufacturers like Ford Motors have signed contracts with various service centers in order to compensate for this shortage and repair the cars.

"We had around 168 cars coming in for repair, a day after the water settled and we have not more than 40 mechanics in the workshop," said Rahul, a mechanic at A&S car services. With the repair work being delayed, many car owners together have hired trucks to transport the cars to get them repaired in Kochi and Calicut in Kerala.

Apart from the time constraint, the cost of repairs posed as a problem for many owners. With the cost ranging from Rs 3 lakh to Rs 4 lakh, insurance companies offered to pay up to 80 percent of the costs, depending on the area of residence of the owner and the water levels in that area during the floods. Most of the vehicles received for repair reported damaged interiors and engines, replacing which alone costs Rs.1.lakh and Rs.2lakh respectively.

Stricter action for caste crimes

Amended Scheduled Tribe/Caste act expected to have a positive impact

ANAMAJMAL

Chennai: The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (prevention of atrocities) Amendment Act came into effect on Republic Day, amidst mounting protests revolving around the suicide of Rohith Vemula.

Passed in the winter session of Parliament, the act will bring offences like hurt, grievous hurt, intimidation and kidnapping of SCs and STs under the purview of the Prevention of Atrocities (PoA) act.

Previously, these offences came under the wide umbrella of the Indian Penal Code and only offences attracting a sentence of more than 10 years imprisonment were treated under PoA for speedy court trials.

The amendment also ensures that stringent action is taken against those who prohibit lower castes students from entering educational institutions, hospitals, shops or any other public space.

"The enactment of the amendment comes at a much-needed hour but its implementation might not be successful because the act has gone unnoticed by a majority of people," said Deepthi Rajendra, a student of the Hyderabad University, where Rohith studied.

"Dalits are citizens of the country who have been socially, politically and economically oppressed for a long time and it is up to the State to uplift them," she added.

Education, thought to be the solution from the vicious cycle of poverty, is not always within their reach because of various factors.

According to G. Rajasekar, a taxi driver in Chennai, the only means to earn a livelihood is to drive a taxi for 14 hours every day.

"I have three daughters and I want to educate all three of them. When my eldest daughter, Sreedevi, finished her high school, I had to invest all my savings to send her to college and now I do not have enough to sponsor the college education of my younger daughters. I had initially asked for loans from various banks but my requests went unanswered by every manager because of my caste," he alleged, adding that he wished the government would take certain steps to make it easier for the financially unstable families to procure education loans.

Shadan Farasat, an advocate in the Supreme Court who has worked extensively with minorities, pointed out that the problem of Dalit alienation was a much deeper problem that could not be addressed only through amendments in the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

"The legal system in our country is not enough to deal with problems related to caste. Policies focusing on inclusion are the need of the hour as they will integrate Dalits and minorities into our social system," he said.

Some aspects introduced with the amendment like ensuring stringent action against tansuring of head and moustache, denying irrigation and forest rights, imposing economic and social boycott might have positive impacts in uplifting this section of society, he added.

Tamil Nationalists for 'language week'

ANANDI. C

CHENNAI: A Tamil nationalist group has demanded that a 'Tamil Language Week' be observed every year from January 25 to pay respects to martyrs of the Anti-Hindi movement.

This was to promote the use of Tamil in administration, education and day-to-day life apart from honouring the sacrifices of the anti-Hindi protestors, said P. Maniarsan, President of the Tamizh Theiya Periyakkam (TTP) at a commemorative event 'Mozhipor 50' in Madurai.

Keezhapazhuvur Chinnasamy and Viralimalai Shanmugam among others had sacrificed their lives in 1965 to make a strong statement against the imposition of Hindi as the only official language by the then Congress-led Centre at the time, said TTP leaders.

An assurance from the then Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, ended the protests and led to the continuance of English as the second official language for non-Hindi-speaking people. However, Maniarsan believes that this had not proved enough to remove the "imposition" of Hindi in Tamil Nadu by the Centre.

"Central government offices in the State should have Tamil as the official language. In most villages documents in post offices and public banks are all in Hindi, a language most locals don't know; it is being imposed on them even today," he added.

Another demand was to introduce the historical protests of 1965 in the curriculum of State board schools.

"About 300 people were killed in the anti-Hindi protests and 10 people sacrificed their lives by immolating themselves or consuming poison. People agitated against Hindi for 50 days, but the present generation doesn't know about this, so we want a chapter on the struggle to be included in the State Tamil syllabus," said Maniarsan.

When asked if the stress on the recollection of the protests would cause tensions in the present day Maniarsan questioned "If the very recollection of our history of sacrifice to uphold Tamil against Hindi hurts the sentiments of Hindi speakers today, what kind of national

unity must we be proud of?" Kotravan, Tamil scholar and campaigner for linguistic equality of all regional languages, felt that a Tamil Language Week might help in spreading awareness about the language and supported the increased use of the language in administration and education.

"If Hindi and English fluency determine job prospects, it is because they are official languages. Regional languages are not simply for decorative purposes. Only when they are used in administration and education, will speakers of regional languages get a promising job market."

Some like Sriram.S, a Tamil research student at Madras University, was skeptical about this idea.

"If Tamil groups and the State are serious about promoting the language, the condition of Tamil books in public libraries should be



Members of Tamizh Theiya Periyakkam (TTP), the group that raised the demand for "Tamil Language week celebration".
PHOTO:TTP WEBSITE

The North -South Connection

CHENNAI: If you are a North Indian in Chennai today, chances are you will feel more at home in Chennai than you did a decade ago. This change is evidenced in the higher prevalence of North Indian attire, food, entertainment and traditions even in the day-to-day life of Tamil people.

What has brought about this change?

Some feel the stigma associated with Hindi in the past was politically motivated and has vanished today. Development, education and the growth of the Hindi film industry have helped in covering whatever resentment remained after the anti-Hindi agitation in the Sixties.

A.K Roy proprietor of a spoken Hindi school 'Roys Institute of Spoken Hindi (RISHINDI)' says his 12-year old school has seen a bigger number of Hindi enthusiasts in the past five years than before.

"Mothers of primary school children insist on spoken Hindi training for their wards. They feel their children should converse in Hindi as fluently as English or Tamil. The stigma associated with Hindi is dying," he says.

Roy, originally from Delhi, has



Taste of India: North Indian delicacies have found their own place in the city's streets.
PHOTO: ANANDI C

been in Chennai since 1982. He feels that the Hindi-Tamil issue was a political tool to divide people but now access to education and overall development have led to more people opening up their minds to Hindi.

Raghu Smaran from West Mambalam says Bollywood films helped him strike up a conversation with North Indians in college and made it easier for him to talk to people who do not speak Tamil.

"I started watching Hindi movies when I was in school. It helped me make North Indian friends when I studied in the Institute of Hotel Management in Taramani.

Though it took me a few years to speak Hindi fluently, I can now manage when I have to talk to someone from Bihar, Assam or Rajasthan. I understand what it feels like when you do not know a language that everyone does."

Divya Radhakrishnan is the Co-owner of Mr.Papri, a popular chaat kiosk tucked into a narrow street near the Grand Mall, Velachery. She believes that an evening round of the North Indian Pani Puri is but a standard ritual in most youngsters' lives today.

"I am a South Indian managing a Chaat place because that's how much this food has permeated our

improved." "The Connemara Library in Egmore that boasts of a rich collection of books can be in better shape. The Tamil books there can be maintained better; the library does not even have a decent bathroom. The Anna Centenary Library in Kotturpuram on the other hand has a dated collection of books," he added

Guru Prasad, a software engineer from Adyar felt that at a time when more and more North Indian people were migrating to and settling in Tamil Nadu, sensitive chapters in history should be introduced in a responsible manner.

"It should not breed contempt or hatred towards Hindi and Hindi speaking people in students' minds," he said.

TTP is waiting for a response from the Tamil Culture department to its demand.

lives. In fact most of our South Indian customers are regulars."

An IT consultant from Adambakkam, S.Radha says that Kurtas and Salwar Kameez are garments that are now loved by South Indian women of all body types because of how practical these are.

"Pavada Thavanis are a wonderful part of Tamil culture, but they've been replaced by Kurtas because they're so much more practical. Especially in IT work places, they are viewed as professional clothing."

Pavithra Ravi, who got married last year, chose to have a saangeet function at her Tamil wedding much like others in her family.

"My cousins had incorporated Saangeet and Mehendi functions into their weddings so I was familiar with the idea. Besides, who doesn't want to dance to Bollywood and Tamil songs with the whole family? It's a fun way to prepare for the big day."

She added that it's been interesting to see more North Indians in the city take to South Indian culture. "I have friends from Uttar Pradesh here who love our food. They speak Tamil well and can make out when Tamilians are stereotyped in movies."

Mentally ill adults get little support

ANKITA PANDA

CHENNAI: There is an absence of support system for families with mentally challenged adults due to lack of awareness, according to mental health activists.

There have been recent cases of murder where old parents killed their own mentally challenged grown-up child as there is no support system for them after their death.

In Coimbatore, a couple was recently arrested after they allegedly beat their 41-year-old mentally challenged son to death because of his "unprovoked physical assaults" on them, police said.

The Times of India reported that the couple, Krishnasamy and Mahalakshmi, beat their son with a hammer and an iron rod, resulting in his death, in their house after he started attacking them without any reason.

There are far more homes for mentally challenged children in Chennai than for adults such as Samarpana—the home for spastic and mentally challenged children, Vasantham, BalaVihar and Siva Sakthi.

However, the staff of Siva Sakthi clarified that it was not just a children's home and said that mentally challenged adults also resided here.

Other places like Bangalore and New Delhi had residential homes for mentally challenged adults where workshops and seminars were held to spread awareness and to give some



PHOTO: GUARDIAN.TV.COM

"Due to lack of awareness in society, people don't want to openly talk about the issue," said Aruna, a psychologist.

financial stability to mentally challenged individuals and their families, said Kartik, staff member in Association for the Mentally Challenged in Bangalore.

There is a lot of stigma attached to mental illness, especially schizophrenia where patients are usually considered

violent.

"This is due to lack of awareness in society, people don't want to openly talk about this," said Aruna, a psychologist working in Mind Zone, Adyar.

The services of nurses who came home to take care of the patients were very expensive and a well trained nurse charges

around Rs 40,000 and more a month, according to Aruna. Not everybody can afford to pay so much.

In Mind zone, the treatment period depends on the type of mental illness and how well the patient responds. First the problem is diagnosed, the patient is given medication and then counselling is started.

The parents are also given counselling as to what to expect from the treatment.

However once the treatment is over, the patient is back with the family; there is no other support system and they are left to cope on their own, according to Aruna.

Aruna said the government had various schemes for the education and employment of disabled children.

But not many schemes exist for people suffering from mental illness.

Rehoboth, a home for mentally ill adults has mostly women residents who were found wandering on the streets or were abandoned by their families..

Radha, a volunteer with Rehoboth said, "We believe in trying to rehabilitate these women by providing them some support system to improve their quality of life through training in skills such as sewing."

16 water bodies to be cleaned up

AFRAH ALI

CHENNAI: The Environmentalist Foundation of India (EFI) has identified 16 waterbodies including lakes and ponds across Chennai for cleaning up in 2016.

The post-flood conditions of the already polluted water bodies triggered EFI into making an action plan for the year 2016, said EFI founder Arun Krishnamurthy.

"The research department of EFI conducted a survey and recognized the waterbodies that are absolutely vital to the people in the area. We are currently concentrating on these 16 target areas listed by the research department for the clean-up drive," Krishnamurthy said.

These water bodies are choked with weed and garbage including plastic waste such as bottles and carrybags.

EFI recently cleaned up the Ellai Amman Pond next to Kittu Park in West Mambalam and Keelkattalai Lake here with the help of volunteers who signed up via the EFI official website and the EFI's facebook page.

"It is through our Facebook page that we get maximum number of volunteers," Sharun Ichigo, an EFI coordinator said.

EFI has seen a spurt in the number of people signing up for volunteering opportunities with it after the floods, he added.

EFI is a self funded voluntary organisation. "All the expenses for the ongoing clean-up drive are managed by the EFI community only," Krishnamurthy said.

Prior permission from the Municipal Administration and Water Supply department has to be



Volunteers working near the Adambakkam Lake

PHOTO: AFRAH ALI

taken to proceed with the work.

"We get maximum number of volunteers through our Facebook page," Sharun Ichigo, an EFI coordinator.

"They also provide us with

vehicles to collect and transport garbage to dumping areas. In case of shortage of volunteers, they provide us with a few as well", he added.

Their immediate projects include Thiruverkadu Lake and Vilingiyambakkam near Poonamallee.

Malini Hari, one of the volunteers with EFI, said several residents' welfare associations were coming forward to help the initiative. On Saturday, many volunteers came together to clear the vegetation in the Adambakkam Lake



A spot-billed pelican skims the surface of a lake

PHOTO: FAREED MOHMED

Bird population declines

ARAVINDAKSHAN S.

CHENNAI: Residents of the Tiruvottiyur-Manali region say that the number of birds has declined in the heavily industrialised North Chennai area, amid diminishing tree cover and shrinking waterbodies.

"The numbers of birds native to the region as well as the birds that migrate during the monsoon have dwindled over the years," says E Shanmugamanathan, editor of the Tamil magazine Kaadu that covers wildlife. Shanmugamanathan says that there is a decline in nara birds (storks) in the region.

Lakes and ponds have also disappeared, he says.

On the Ennore-Manali Highway that cuts through the region,

container trucks stand still in lines that stretch for miles, waiting to enter the Madras Port. They carry

Disappearance of water bodies could have led to the fall in migratory bird population, which comes to the city every monsoon.

cargo to and from the companies that have mushroomed in the North Chennai area, including the large chemical plants and the smaller

iron mills located in the Tiruvottiyur-Manali region. Clusters of power grids flank the highway.

In Sadayankuppam and Burma Nagar, panchayat leader N Parusuraman says the formerly agricultural lands now see fewer birds than before. Amid the dumping of waste by fertilizer and petroleum products factories and the wastes filtering down to the soil, the trees have gradually disappeared, he says.

Even on lands without any construction on them, there are few trees and some scattered small egrets searching for food in tiny ponds. For the most part, seemai karuvelam (prosopis juliflora) plants dot the empty land in the island-like area of Sadayankuppam-Burma Nagar. These plants grow into trees that yield timber and fuel but they deplete the groundwater.

Maari, an Irular who cuts and sells firewood in Sadayankuppam, says, "Though some of the native tree species have survived, the thorny seemai karuvelam plants, which are an invasive species, have expanded in number. Their increasing presence might threaten other trees."

S Selvaraj, another panchayat official, says, "The Sadayankuppam eri that used to stretch over 80 acres has shrunk now amid mushrooming of the iron mills nearby. We have now about 3,000 birds visiting during the migrating season. There used to be more birds earlier."



An Asian open-bill stork prepares to take flight.

PHOTO: FAREED MOHMED

'Clubfoot can be cured at early stage'

AFRAH ALI

CHENNAI: Clubfoot, if treated within two weeks of birth, will not disable the person, according to Dr. G Nagaraj, who specialises in General Medicine and Occupational Health.

"Clubfoot, is a congenital deformity involving feet, in which the affected foot appears to have been rotated internally at the ankle. Without treatment, people with club feet often appear to walk on their ankles or on sides of their feet," he said.

"However with treatment, the vast majority of patients recover completely during early childhood and are able to walk and participate in athletics just as well as normal people," he added.

The treatment involved casting and bracing the affected foot in a plantigrade (normal walking) position, said Dr Nagaraj inaugurating a lantern fest organised by the student volunteers of Enactus Club from Rajalakshmi Engineering College (REC) as a part of a



Volunteers lighting a sky lantern.

PHOTO: AFRAH ALI

clubfoot awareness programme here.

Samyukta, Vice President of Enactus REC, said "The major issue with clubfoot is people confusing it with polio and having a misconception that it is untreatable. The right intervention at the right time will cure the deformity completely. And it is to inform people that we

have taken up this initiative."

Over 200 people took part in the awareness programme at the ground opposite the Kotturpuram MRTS station and lit lanterns that floated away in the air, symbolising enlightenment.

However, the Fire Service and police officials stopped further lighting of lanterns by the crowd due to safety issues as a few

lanterns got entangled with the electric cables.

Gayathri Rajagopal, President of Enactus REC, said, "Enactus REC took up this project as a follow up to the initiative of clubfoot awareness drive by St. Stephen's College, Delhi. The money collected here will be sent to the organisers at St. Stephen's College, which will then be distributed to a target group which has been identified by them as affected with clubfoot."

Enactus, known before as Students In Free Enterprise (SIFE), is an international non-profit organization that works with leaders in business and higher education to mobilize university students. This is done to make a difference in their communities while also developing their skills to become socially responsible business leaders.

Participating students form teams on their university campuses and apply business concepts to develop outreach projects that improve the quality of life.

No regulation on sale of drugs

Drugs like Ranitidine and Tinidazole cannot be sold without prescriptions

ANKITA PANDA

CHENNAI: Despite the ban on the sale of Schedule H and H1 drugs without prescription a lot of retail pharmacies continue to sell these drugs without any regulation.

Often the buyer is known to the pharmacy shop and the drugs are sold without any prescription. Pharmacies that violate the ban run the risk of having their licences terminated; but so far there is no indication of pharmacies being penalised.

Schedule H drugs were introduced as an amendment to the Drugs and Cosmetics Act and Rules in 2006, while Schedule H1 drugs amendment came into effect after March 1 in 2014. Under Schedule H drugs 536 medicines are listed while under H1, 46 drugs are listed.

Schedule H1 drugs is a combi-

nation of Schedule H drugs and Schedule X drugs. Schedule H1 drugs include anti-tuberculosis drugs and anti-biotics. Taking these medications without prescription leads to the body beco-

Some small pharmacies violated rules and made extra money by selling schedule H and H1 drugs without any prescription.

ming resistant to these drugs.

"In India, the selling of Sche-

dule X drugs is strictly regulated with the customer providing the chemist with duplicate copies of the prescription and a separate letter written by the doctor; these documents are stored for a minimum of two years with the chemist," said Ganesh from Sai Medicals in Shastri Nagar.

"Some of the schedule H drugs which are sold without prescription include Ranitidine, Minoxidil, Tinidazole and Ofloxacin. These medicines range from hormonal medicines to anti-bacterials," he added.

People prefer to go to their neighbourhood pharmacies where the chemist is known to them and can provide small amount of medicines without a prescription. Usually these medicines are taken to treat cold and stomach ailments.

Shruti, a resident in Gandhi Nagar, said her neighbourhood

chemist knew her and she just needed to show the prescription once. Then she can continue to buy the medicines.

According to Aruna, a psychologist in Mind Zone, a psychiatric clinic in Adyar, Mind Zone provided the medication to the patients and ensured that they bought it from them only instead of going to neighbourhood pharmacies because of unregulated selling of prescription drugs, especially psychiatric medications.

Kasi Ram of Adyar Drug House said the Tamil Nadu Association of Druggist and Chemist did not help in regulating small pharmacies, which easily violated the rules and because of this, the credibility of big pharmacies suffered.

He also added that some small pharmacies made extra money by selling schedule H and H1 drugs without any prescription.

Temples keep dresscode

DESPITE THE MADRAS HIGH COURT'S STAY ORDER, TEMPLES INSIST ON TRADITIONAL WEAR

ANSHIKA RAVI

CHENNAI: Many temples across Chennai are issuing notices forbidding visitors from wearing 'inappropriate' clothes despite a suspension of the Madras High Court's order that had prescribed a dress code for entry into the temples of Tamil Nadu.

At Piliyman temple in Taramani, people are sent back home if they walk in wearing jeans, skirts, or shorts. The officials even direct women to use a dupatta to cover their chests.

"We have rules clearly written out on the board inside the temple. Anyone who doesn't comply with them is not allowed inside. For women, kurta and chudidar are not sufficient. They need to carry an additional cloth to cover their front, too. We don't allow even men in jeans. They must wear dhoti only," said Radhakrishnan, an official at the temple.

"The rules exist, irrespective of the order's suspension. In fact, they do exist all over India, but they are particularly stricter in Tamil Nadu," he added.

The dress code was imposed in Kapaleeswarar temple in Mylapore immediately after the order was passed. Despite the court's stay on



Visitors inside the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam in T. Nagar

PHOTO: ANSHIKA RAVI

the order, the officials are still preparing notices to inform the public, particularly the foreign tourists, to come in 'proper' attire.

"Even after the order was passed, the effect was not widespread. Not many people know about the rules. That's why we are trying to spread the word by issuing notices. It is the foreigners who need to understand that they can't simply walk inside the temple in shorts or skirts," said Kaveri, who works in

the temple office.

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam in T. Nagar has chalked out no dress code as such, but the officials said girls wearing 'improper' clothes was an unacceptable practice, and that they tell them to wear 'decent' clothes, whenever they can.

"We have our main temple in Tirupati where even a minor transgression from the prescribed dress code is not allowed. Things are not as stringent here, but we can't ac-

cept girls in short clothes. We don't send them back, but we ask them not to repeat the same mistake again," said a temple official.

Things are no different at the Parthasarathy temple in Triplicane, where the officials talked only about girls 'stepping out of the line' by wearing shorts to temples.

"Obscene dressing is strictly unacceptable. We had deployed people to keep a tab on girls, but now that the order has been sus-

pending, we can't do anything. But we'd definitely want the dress code to be enforced again. It's a place of worship, after all," said a temple official.

While some of the visitors are annoyed at such an 'outrageous imposition' of dress code, most of them have no issues adhering to them.

Geetha, a resident of T. Nagar, said, "Ideally, the government should not decide what a woman or a man wears to a temple. As long as the authorities don't misbehave with them, and the people are allowed a second chance, I am fine with the rules."

The Madras High Court judge, Justice S. Vaidyanathan had ordered men to wear a dhoti or pyjama with upper cloth or formal pants and shirts, and women to wear a sari or a half-sari or churidhar with upper cloth from January 1 onwards.

While temples had put up sign boards specifying the dress code, the Tamil Nadu Government challenged the order saying it was not possible to follow a uniform dress code. A bench of the same court had suspended the order on January 8. Yet, in many temples, the dresscode continues to be followed unabated.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Artists say they face 'suppression'

ANVITA SINGH

CHENNAI: Artists and filmmakers are facing the wrath of the government lately and suffering action that infringes on their freedom of expression, say human rights activists.

In the latest case, S. Anwar Balasingam and his associates were arrested by the Tirunelveli police on January 23 for making a short film titled Kurinjakkulam.

The film is based on the murder of four Dalits by Caste Hindus in Kurinjakkulam village in Tirunelveli district in 1992.

The 21-minute film was released under the banner of 'Tamilar Thirakalam' on 'Facebook' and 'YouTube'.

Soon after its release, police received reports of tension brewing between two communities, according to various media reports.

The Hindu, quoting police sources said four Dalits were murdered by upper Caste Hindus over a dispute relating to the construction of Gandhari Amman Temple at Kurinjakkulam village in Tirunelveli district in 1992. But the accused in the murder case were acquitted.

Almost 24 years later, Anwar made the movie that portrays caste discrimination and how the four Dalits were done to death brutally.

"Describing one group of people as invaders who encroached and grabbed the property of Dalits to become landlords, the director reiterates the demand for constructing the Gandhari Amman temple at the same place," a senior police officer was quoted as saying by The Hindu.

The police have said that the movie had led to enmity brewing in the area.

"How can filmmaking be unconstitutional, especially if the movie is based on a real life incident? If the same incident was caught on the camera of a reporter who happened to be present during the horrific event, would that piece of news be banned as well?" asked Kancha Ilaiah, a scholar and an activist for Dalit rights.

"The police are working with the upper castes; what help can be expected from them?" he added.

On December 25, Tamil folk singer Kovan was arrested in the middle of night for penning and singing songs which criticised the

Tamil Nadu Government's liquor policy. He was slapped with sedition charges.

"Discrimination and religious hatred promoted by political parties are something that is allowed in our country, but if someone tries to talk about it or discuss the issue, they are silenced," said Nakul Singh Sawhney, whose documentary film Muzzafarnagar Abhi Baki Hai was banned in India.

The film is based on the riots

"Discrimination and religious hatred promoted by political parties are something that is allowed in our country, but if someone tries to talk about it or discuss the issue, they are silenced"
-Nakul Sawhney

which took place in 2013 in Uttar Pradesh.

"The duty of the police is to protect law and order in the country, and not suppress someone's creative ability," said Gnanisankaran, Tamil writer and columnist.

"In a democracy, everyone is entitled to their own interpretation of events. And even if the film were based completely on the filmmaker's imagination, as long as someone is portraying their version of a story in a peaceful manner, it should not be anybody's problem," he added.

Commenting on the Tirunelveli incident, a senior police official said that as the election year was drawing nearer and isolated incidents such as these would be given a political colour by independent parties to support their own vested interests by creating publicity for their cause.

A game of apps & bots

ABHA GORADIA

CHENNAI: Heavy weight robots wrestling on a hexagonal arena cordoned off with metal nets, robots facing-off to complete a task in a time-bound challenge, while flying bots attempt to pick small packages and drop it over specified circles.

These sights seem to be out of a science fiction movie. But the robots were real and were part of the final games organised at the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras (IIT-M) during its annual technical festival, Shastra held from January 23 to January 26 on its sprawling campus.

The robot themed events were the biggest crowd pullers. RoboWars was a wrestle mania between huge and heavy electronically controlled robots.

Robotic Face Off saw two teams making their robots pick and throw balls through three loops within limited time. Aerial Robotics Challenge saw small drones whirling in the netted hall, trying to pick packages one after another after receiving a colored signal from the shelf near the package.



A participant in RoboWars, IITM

PHOTO: ABHA GORADIA

"Over 20 teams from Chennai and neighboring states have participated this year in our events. Last year, we had greater participation, but our numbers have been affected due to the Chennai floods," says Jay Panji, the event co-ordinator at the festival.

This 17th edition of the festival also had Android-based apps and artificial intelligence-based exhibits headlining its Tech and Innovation

Fair.

Andro Aqua Robot, an Amphibious Robot that travels both on land and on water using GPS, was built by Sai Sreenivas, a student of St. Martin's engineering college, Hyderabad. The robot can be easily controlled with an Android Application using robot's special laser system for navigation.

"I designed to use it to click pictures, after the devastation caused by the floods. It can give volunteers a clear idea of where people are stuck, and how many," he said.

The Omni Presence Robot was a Virtual Reality controlled robot that had a headset to control direction of the robot by using live feed from robot's camera.

"No calls while Driving" an android App based service sent automatic messages to a caller - "The user you are speaking to is driving at the moment" - depending upon the travelling speed of rider using GPS. This was a creation by the IT students of Kongu Engineering College in Perundurai.

Drowsiness Detecting System, the show stealer at the event, alerts drivers who are nodding off and it can stop accidents.

DIY kit to promote roof top veg garden

APARNA ANIL

CHENNAI: Do it yourself horticulture kits are being distributed as part of a campaign for the promotion of roof top vegetable gardens in the city by the Horticulture Department.

"Currently we are facing a shortage in kits and we are waiting for new stock to arrive," says M Rajendran at the Thiruvannamiyur horticulture office.

"We expect to receive the new lot by next week," says Rajendran

"Each kit is sold at a price of Rs 500. A single kit includes vegetable seeds, bio-fertilizers, bio-pesticides, bio-fungicides, grow bags and other items essential for organic farming," he said.

Providing nutritional security through poison free vegetables and promoting self-sufficiency in vegetables among city dwellers are among the objectives of the campaign enacted under the Urban Horticulture Development scheme.

In a country like India glo-

bally-banned pesticides like DDT [Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane] are still rampant used, this initiative to achieve self sufficiency in vegetables is welcome, say activists.

'Niravu', a residential forum at Kozhikode district of Kerala has taken this initiative where every member household of the forum has taken organic farming, setting up a backyard vegetable garden in each house.

"We have proved that by cultivating in our own backyards or terraces using fully organic pesticides and fungicides and manure, it is possible to achieve self sufficiency in vegetables and fruits. Especially if you are doing it in small scale," says Babu Parambath, project co-ordinator, Niravu Organic Village.

Considering the various health hazards like congenital abnormalities, cancer and neurological and reproductive defects that exposure to such pesticide residues can cause, every a small step, towards toxin free vegetables counts, say the activists.

No guides or labels to help visitors to children's museum

ABHA GORADIA

CHENNAI: Lack of labels and inadequate staff at the children's section of the Government Museum in Egmore do not seem to be helping the visitors learn anything from the exhibits.

Last Saturday afternoon, primary class children from SVV School in Thiruporur came in two buses to the museum which is the only one in Chennai to have a building dedicated to children.

The kids formed queues and were led by their teachers to each section in the children's museum.

"Fast, fast, hurry up," said one teacher and the students quickly strode through the section; in a matter of fifteen minutes, they proceeded to the contemporary art building in the museum compound.

The teachers made sure that the students walked up and down each floor of the building, but they did not seem concerned if the students discovered or learnt anything as they passed the exhibits.

It was a similar scene on Wednesday morning, when students of SBOA School in Anna Nagar came to the museum.

When Stefan, an 8th grade student, was asked what mechanisms mean, in reference to a stall named



American culture portrayed with the help of ragged dolls showcased in Egmore museum

PHOTO: ABHA GORADIA

'Mechanisms' in the Science and Technology section, he said, "I have no idea," and trotted off to join his classmates.

It may not be Stefan's fault for not knowing anything about the mechanisms. The instruments on display in the stall were not labeled, nor did they have any information about the exhibit and its applica-

tion. The problem was not limited to just that stall. Various stalls in the museum have no labels, no information about the exhibit, and in some cases, there is just some jargon which fails to grab attention.

The Costume Dolls Gallery attempts to depict world cultures using dolls. The American culture

is featured with the help of a few ragged dolls. Similar is the case with the display of European culture, where certain dolls are bald. The Civilization section displays one monument from each community, with no mention of its name. Under the banner 'Traditional Costumes of India', we see a group of mannequins, apparently from South India, dressed only in vesthi and saree.

M. Kodhandan, curator for the children's museum, claims that in a month, over 12 schools visit the museum, and yearly over 4000 students visit the place. Students not only from Chennai, but also from states like Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala through the place.

Even though the museum brochure mentions that students and others can avail themselves of an expert or guide by giving prior intimation, Kodhandan admitted it was difficult due to the dearth of professional guides in the museum who were equipped to provide information.

"As of now, we have only one guide and one assistant curator to help with the service. Due to shortage of guides, the State transfers the employees to other districts," he said.



The entrance to the Pongal Book Festival at YMCA grounds, Royapettah

PHOTO: APARNA ANIL

Last day of book fair sees massive discounts

APARNA ANIL

CHENNAI: The last day of the Chennai Pongal Book Festival held at the YMCA ground, Royapettah, saw publishers giving huge discounts. The India Today stall had a 70 percent discount sign, while Maruti Book House sold many books for Rs 100 flat.

"Being the last day of the festival, we are selling hard bound books for Rs 250 and others for Rs 100. We still made a marginal profit," says, P.Mohan of the Book World Library stall.

However some visitors were disappointed that there were fewer English books at the fair this year. "There are huge discounts, yes. But this year's fair seems to have fewer English books. Most of the stalls

have mainly Tamil books and a non-Tamil speaker like me is left with few choices," said K.Sithara, a software professional.

"There are a lot of children's books and educational books in English though," she added.

The Indian Association for the Blind had put up a stall to display Braille books. Shops that sold education books and compact discs (CD) also pulled crowds.

A couple of stalls were selling second hand books. The treat however was for children, for there were stalls selling children's books at prices as low as Rs 30 a book.

The annual book festival is generally conducted by Booksellers and Publishers Association of South India (BAPSI) in January every year.

"This year owing to the floods, BAPSI postponed the event to April. That is when we stepped in to organize the event," said R.S Shanmugham, Managing Trustee of Tamil Nool Virpanai Membattu Kazhagam (TNVMK), the group that organized the book festival.

"The event was originally planned from January 13 to 24 but was later extended to January 26, considering the overwhelming response to the event. We had 160 publishers participating in the event and there were around 240 stalls. Around 25 lakh books have been sold," he said. The entry ticket to the event was priced Rs 5.

"Some money will be contributed to Chief Minister's Public Relief Fund for the flood victims," said Shanmugham.