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'T Nadu funds crunch due to Amma schemes'

Opposition blames AIADMK Govt as deficit crosses Rs.36,000 crore

SWETA AKUNDI

Chennai: The AIADMK Government has come under attack for mismanaging the State's finances and launching schemes to promote the "Amma" brand. Presenting the interim budget on February 16, Finance Minister O Paneerselvam said that the state faced a fiscal deficit of Rs 36,740.11 crores. The revenue deficit, highest since 2011, was Rs 9,154.78 crores. DMK spokesman T K S Elangovan said "The Government is not handling finances properly. The government not only faces a deficit but also has to borrow Rs2,47,000 crores from the Centre. This is because the Government has launched unplanned and impractical schemes to promote the brand 'Amma'." However AIADMK spokesperson, C R Saraswathi, insisted that the various schemes launched under



Finance Minister O. Paneerselvam announced the Interim Budget on Wednesday in the Assembly PHOTO- THE HINDU

the brand name of Amma (Chief Minister Jayalalithaa) were for the benefit of the poor people, despite the dent they caused on the budget. Economist Venkatesh Athreya

dismissed the AIADMK claim. "That's all bogus. The subsidized products given in Amma schemes add up to very little," he said, refuting the suggestion that the 'freebies' rolled out were the reason

for the deficit.

According to AIADMK, the State Government is facing a funds crunch because the money that it was to receive as flood relief from the Central Government has still not reached it.

"Out of the requested Rs 25,912 crores, the Tamil Nadu Government has only received Rs 2,000 crores," said Saraswathi.

To this, political analyst A Paneerselvam said, "The floods are just an excuse. It is essentially the complete mismanagement of funds over the last two years."

"Ever since the disproportionate assets case against Jayalalithaa, the administration has gone into a state of paralysis and that shows."

Athreya agreed to the fact that it might be true that the State was lacking support from the Centre but he said there was no evidence of the AIADMK Government fighting the Central Government for a better share of the budget for the State

DMK-Cong alliance to fight TN poll

THOMAS MAMPILLY

CHENNAI: The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the Congress seem to have buried the 2G hatchet that had once rocked their United Progressive Alliance when they announced that they would fight together the coming Tamil Nadu Assembly elections.

The 2G scam and the investigations landed former Telecom Minister A Raja of the DMK in jail. This soured relations and the DMK quit the UPA in 2013.

"We still have our differences but we have aligned ourselves since the political situation in the state demands that we join hands to fight against the corrupt AIADMK government. The alliance is only a compromise," said T.K.S. Elangovan, DMK spokesperson.

"But in politics, what alliance is not a compromise?" he added as an afterthought. The same sentiment was echoed by Congress partymen who are but thankful that the alliance with the DMK has worked out.

"This is an issue based alliance which is the result of talks at the highest level. For us and the people, the AIADMK's removal is the primary aim," said S.S. Ramprasad, General Secretary of Thanjavur DCC.

The Congress party in Tamil Nadu has gone through a major upheaval, starting with senior leader GK Vasan's split from the party and revival of the Tamil Maanila Congress in 2014. In late 2015, there have been calls for the resignation of the state Congress

chief E.V.K.S. Elangovan. While the parties are upbeat about the prospects of the alliance, others are not easily convinced. "This is an alliance forged by the second-generation leaders of DMK and Congress (Stalin and Rahul Gandhi). This is nothing but a 2-G connection," said BJP National Council member L. Ganesan, with a chuckle. A. Soundararajan, CPI(M) MLA from Perambur, was milder with



Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad met DMK leader M. Karunanidhi at his residence in Chennai PHOTO- NDTV

"We have our differences but we have aligned ourselves since the political situation demands that we join hands to fight the corrupt AIADMK government." T.K.S. Elangovan, DMK

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his reply.

"Everyone knows the problems that rocked both parties. How could they just forget all that and get together?" he asked.

Both Congress and the DMK are looking for more alliance partners to better their prospects in the polls. "The DMK party workers all want an alliance with us to work out but Vijaykanth is not making his stance clear," said Prakash from Congress.

"Freebies are poll promises"

YASHASWANI SEHRAWAT

Chennai: The AIADMK Government's "freebies" are not a gimmick to attract votes, according to some people but others feel they are strongly that they are gimmicks. After the Amma canteen and pharmacies, mixies, table fans, television sets and laptops, the latest in the list of freebies is the Amma Kudineer Thittam (Amma drinking water) under which free drinking water would be provided daily to the poor. Under this scheme which was launched on February 13, each family would get 20 litres of treated water everyday, for which reverse osmosis (RO) purifiers would be installed in as many as 100 localities in the city. Even though the scheme was one of the major promises in the AIADMK's manifesto for 2011 assembly elections, it has been launched only this year, just before the assembly elections expected to be held some time in May.

B K Sabharish, who works for Cognizant, felt that the scheme would influence the voting preferences, particularly among the poor.

"This is definitely a gimmick, and I think it would turn out to be in favour of the AIADMK Government. They have directly targeted the underprivileged people and when such a scheme comes into effect, the beneficiaries start believing that the Government is concerned about them."

The 29 year-old added that not everybody considered manifestos and ideology when it came to voting. "Freebies have always helped in gathering votes." Forty nine year-old Nazeemuddin said "People welcome all the freebies. The voting preference changes depending on what the party is offering you."

A watchman by profession, he said that such schemes were very common and "we, who are poor, usually get persuaded by it." He,

however, added that lately, more people were getting less influenced by such gimmicks and instead voted on the basis of a party's performance and promises.

S. Chennaiyah, an auto driver, thought that such schemes did not have much of an impact on the voting. "We are intelligent people. Nobody can buy our votes with any scheme. But the government has come out with many schemes which are helpful. So, I don't think this is any trick to get votes."

The AIADMK refuted the allegation that the scheme was a gimmick. Its spokesperson, C R Saraswathi, said "You can't term it as a gimmick. There are many programmes that are there in our manifesto, and we launch them gradually, one by one. It is merely a coincidence that this scheme was launched when elections are near." Another contentious issue with regards to this move is the funds for such populist schemes and freebies. The state is already facing a

financial crunch with a very high fiscal deficit of Rs 36,740 crore.

DMK spokesman T K S Elangovan said that these schemes added to the budget deficit. "The government is launching these schemes only to promote Amma brand. They don't think what impact it will have on the financial situation."

On the other hand, many feel that these freebies don't have a major impact on the budget. However, they point out that providing free water won't solve the problem. K Nagaraj, an economist, said "This scheme doesn't require a huge amount. The money is there. But the larger question is that providing anything for free, particularly water, isn't the solution to the problem."

"What is required is proper restoration of pipelines, long term planning. This is not an alternative to a proper systemic way in which essentials like water should be provided."

TN rejects one medical exam plan

SNEHA S GEORGE

Chennai: The Tamil Nadu government has objected to the policy of a single-national level entrance examination for medical courses, NEET (National Eligibility and Entrance Test). Chief Minister, J Jayalalithaa had even written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi regarding the same. Two schools of thoughts exist on

this issue.

"This isn't fair for the children who come from a poor economic background. Among the students I am teaching now, there are students who want to become doctors, but their parents cannot afford the entire fees, and you cannot expect them to compete with the bright and elite group," said a teacher at Zion High School. "We can also never be sure if the

corrections are done in a fair manner. Everything has always favoured the rich people and the government seems to be fine on compromising even with education," she added.

Many are of the view that the students from a richer background can afford to go for tuitions from good academies and institutes and therefore will have an advantage over the remaining

students during the exam.

Geeta Mohan, whose children go to Crescent High School, had this to say: "My daughter, Sreelekshmi in 11th grade wants to become a doctor, the younger one Divya wants to be a teacher. I cannot send her for coaching because I cannot afford it." She also added that she expects her daughter to concentrate in class and grasp all she can at school".

Some residents still waiting for flood relief

SIDHARTH BHARADWAJ

Chennai: The relief of Rs 5000 announced by the Government for people affected by the floods in December has been distributed in an arbitrary manner, say residents.

Two months after the floods that ravaged Chennai, many people are still waiting for the money.

The Collector's office, responsible for the distribution of compensation money, is distributing money even in areas where there was no severe damage such as Adyar, Indira Nagar, and Thiruvanniyur, say the residents.

Thyagarajan, who owns a pharmaceutical shop in Adyar, was given Rs.5000 even when his shop was open. "The money was distributed to ration card holders. I was asked to give in my account details and the money was transferred in it after a few days," he said.

While Thyagrajan received the

money, people on Kasturba Gandhi Nagar 1st Main Road denied getting any relief money.

"The area was largely unaffected by the floods. Neither any money was offered to us nor do we require it," a resident of the area said.

While many people refused to

take the compensation money as they didn't require it, people who need it are still waiting for it.

Sivakumar, who lives on 12th Cross Street, Indira Nagar, complained that they were still waiting for the officials to collect their details.



Flood compensation has been distributed even in areas where there was no damage PHOTO- INDIAN EXPRESS

"We will fight back with our pen"

SHOUNAK MAJUMDER

CHENNAI: Around 50 journalists and writers from Chennai gathered at the Chennai Press Club on February 17 condemning the violent attacks on journalists at the Patiala House Court, New Delhi and the mass branding of the media as an anti-national machinery. At the event conducted by the Chennai Union of Journalists, the protesters raised slogans like 'Give us the right to dissent' and 'We will fight back with the power of our pens'. Senior journalist and columnist Sashi Kumar said, "We stand here to protest against the unwanted repression on the fraternity of journalists of India by goondas. We

stand in solidarity with those who were asserting their rights, performing their duty as journalists and were attacked. We hereby state that we won't be quiet. We won't watch the repression of freedom in this country. We not only have to right to free speech but the right to sustain free speech."

Shruthisagar Yamunan, a journalist working with The Hindu, said, "Who are the tyrants of the country? The ones who enforce their autocratic governance on us or those who fight against them and indulge in free speech?"

"Freedom of speech is our birth right and nothing can curb it. You are no one to brand us anti-national. In a way, the leaders of our

country are diverting our attention from core issues like the slumping economy."

Tamil writer and playwright, Indira Parthasarathy expressed his concern over the possibility that another emergency period might be in the offing.

"We are heading towards dark times. While the voices of a section of students are being curbed, ABVP (a right wing student's group) leaders are gaining infamy. In short, those who support the ruling party are the only nationalists in the country," he said.

A.Kumaresan, editor-in-chief of Theekathir, a Tamil Daily said, "There is a popular saying in Tamil. When a person is asked

'Can you sing in the dark?' the other person said 'I can sing about the darkness.' If the government curbs our freedom and thrashes us, asks us if we would continue writing, we will say that we will write about the bureaucratic nature of the government of the country."

Akshay Deshmane working with The Economic Times was one of the journalists assaulted outside the Patiala House Court.

"I was on my way out when a bunch of rowdy lawyers pushed me to the ground. One man in a black coat came up to me and asked me whether I was a supporter of Pakistan. I don't know what scared me more, his bigotry or ignorance. At that moment I felt utterly helpless,"

said Deshmane.

Ushinor Majumdar, working with Outlook India magazine, said "The media is a non partisan group whose main function is to report news. That day, we were within our professional boundaries but the lawyers who beat journalists up committed a gross violation of their professional ethics and should be pulled up by the Bar Council." "Journalists report at conflict zones taking great risks to their lives. We do it because we believe it is our duty. Now, if we need to defend ourselves from physical violence as well, it's a shame," he said.

A witch hunt against students: Page 02



Journalists protesting in Chennai against the attack on their colleagues in New Delhi PHOTO- SHOUNAK MAJUMDER

Govt staff want pay anomalies removed

REECHA ARYAL

CHENNAI: Nearly 350 members of the Tamil Nadu Government Employees Association (TNGEA) were arrested on February 15 on the sixth day of their indefinite strike. They were arrested on Kamaraj Salai on a charge of blocking the road, police said.

"During their strike, they were trying to block the road, so we arrested them in order to smoothen the flow of traffic," said Jagadishan, Inspector of Police, D2 police station, Anna Salai.

The TNGEA members started their strike on February 10 urging the state to fulfill their 20-point charter of demands including withdrawal of the new pension scheme, correction of pay



Around 350 TNGEA employees were arrested by the police at D2 police station at Anna Salai.

PHOTO: REECHA ARYAL

anomalies, filling up of vacancies, and making temporary workers permanent.

Around 4,00,000 employees from the Revenue, Highways, Public Works, Social Welfare, Agriculture and Education and

even teachers from primary and government schools and colleges have participated in the strike, according to K M Thyagaraja, TNGEA vice-president.

As many as 68 associations are in the struggle committee from all

around the Tamil Nadu. Their slogan is to "Give Jobs to Jobless".

"We will continue our strike, until the state government fulfills our demand and signs an agreement," said Thyagaraja.

According to him, TNGEA had discussions with senior ministers of Tamil Nadu on February 9 and the ministers assured it that their demands would be looked into.

The ongoing protest comes after a rally and hunger strike organised in Chennai on January 22 in which employees from all around Tamil Nadu participated.

Thyagaraja said that TNGEA members might boycott the coming state assembly elections if the Government did not fulfill the TNGEA's demands. They are still on a strike.

JNU row: 'Govt on a witch hunt' say students

SHOUNAK MAJUMDER

CHENNAI: The BJP Government's action against students of the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi is a "witch hunt" and "highly condemnable", say students in Chennai.

On Feb 9, at an event marking the death anniversary of Parliament attack convict Afzal Guru, who was hanged, a group of JNU students including the JNU Student Union President Kanhaiya Kumar were booked under sedition charges on grounds of purportedly chanting 'anti-national' slogans after a complaint was lodged by the Akhil Bharatiya Vidhyarthi Parishad (ABVP).

Since then the social media has been abuzz with hashtags such as #ShutDownJNU. This has sparked outrage and debate among students in the country over Freedom of Speech and issues like State control over academic institutions.

"The arrest of the JNUSU President, suspension of eight students and detention of seven students is the latest in the series of witch-hunt against students in universities across the country," said Athikesavan, a student of Law at Madras University and a member of the Revolutionary Students Front.

"The ongoing crackdown in JNU bears testimony to the loss of autonomy in institutions of learning which owes its reason to the ideology and acts of the present ruling dispensation. The JNU community has shown remarkable



Protests at Madras University.

PHOTO: ONKAR SURVE

resilience in the face of onslaught on their democratic rights," he said.

After the incident in New Delhi, the Madras University Students Union staged a protest outside their

campus on Feb 16. Student union members condemned the arrest of students under Section 124A (Sedition) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and

ABVP's active involvement in crushing student dissent and labelling it 'anti-national'.

"It's unacceptable to follow the definition of nationalism set by one partisan group. The RSS and ABVP threatening other groups holding different viewpoints with help from the Government is highly condemnable," said Sam John, member of the Madras Students Union.

Abhinav Surya, a 3rd year Mechanical Engineering student at IIT Madras said, "Let's not make the notion of 'nation' into something sacred. I think human rights are more valuable than the idea of a nation."

Thanks to social media activism students these days find it easier to voice their opinions.

Sanjana Gautham, a 3rd year student of Journalism at MOP Vaishnav College for Women said, "Often protests open up dialogue and discussion for a limited period of time and then the importance of these issues slowly fades away. Thanks to Facebook, students are being found in a larger participatory role than before."

Speaking about how duress can be lessened on University campuses with regard to student dissent, Athikesavan said, "The minimum remedy we are looking forward to is that education be brought under State List from Union List."

"Though the Union will still have control over the educational reforms, this could be the effective change to start with."

The great coalition game begins DMDK in demand

THOMAS MAMPILLY

CHENNAI: With the elections to be held sometime in May, Vijayakanth (a.k.a. Captain) is a busy man. As the chief of the most sought after party – the DMDK – in Tamil Nadu politics, he has kept his cards close to his chest, keeping everyone from political analysts to rival parties to even his own co-workers, guessing.

"Except for the AIADMK, every other party has been trying to get us into their fold," said Professor J.K. Ravindran, Secretary of the DMDK Teacher's Wing.

The party had parted ways with the ruling party soon after securing a win in the 2011 Assembly elections. Their relations, which soured then, have never improved after the last assembly elections.

Even with the AIADMK out of the picture, the DMDK is not short of suitors. Parties like the BJP, Congress and the People's Welfare Front (PWF) led by the MDMK, VCK and Left parties, have all made overtures to Vijayakanth, making no secret of their invitation.

After shaking hands with senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad, the DMK's heir apparent, M.K. Stalin, had said that the party supreme expected the DMDK to join their alliance.

"It is no secret that even the DMDK cadres want an alliance with us. The sooner Captain (Vijayakanth) realises this, the better for everyone," said T.K.S. Elangovan, DMK spokesperson.

Chief of the Congress party in Tamil Nadu, E.V.K.S. Elangovan,



DMDK leader Vijayakanth.

PHOTO: WWW.ONEINDIA.COM

addressing presspersons soon after the alliance was formalised, said that he would personally approach the DMDK chief.

The PWF, which is lacking in leadership, sees in Captain a leader who can take the idea of a Third Front forward. For now, political analysts brush it off as an inconsequential group.

"If he decides to align with the PWF, he will automatically lead the Front. Whether or not to bestow the Chief Ministerial candidacy on him will be decided after deliberations although the chances of it are high," said A. Soundararajan, Perambur MLA from CPI (M).

Backed by the Central leadership, the BJP too is pushing hard to forge alliances with major parties in the State. Senior leader Subramaniam Swamy's idea of forming a DMK-DMDK-BJP alliance was laid to rest when the Dravidian major shook hands with

the Congress.

"Now, we are in talks with other parties including the DMDK," admits S.R. Sekar, Treasurer of the BJP in Tamil Nadu.

For now, the DMDK is spoilt for choice. But by keeping everyone waiting, Captain is playing a risky game.

Without a major party backing it, the chances of the DMDK making a big impact is questionable but officially, the party says it is ready to be the lone wolf in this election.

"We have a sizeable following which we will surely be able to convert into seats, even if we fight the elections alone," says Prof. Ravindran.

With major parties trying to appease Captain, all eyes are now on the General Body Meeting of the DMDK to be held on February 20th.

The Captain is expected to take stock of the cadres' sentiments and take an appropriate decision.

Protest against eviction and inadequate relief

YASHASWANI SEHRAWAT

CHENNAI: A peaceful protest was organized by the People's Welfare Front (PWF) on February 17, outside the Government Estate here, against the state government's inadequate flood relief and slum relocation policy.

Amid heavy police presence, hundreds of protesters raised slogans and waved placards and party flags. The protestors demanded that relief be provided to the flood-affected people who haven't got it yet and that slum dwellers who were evicted be resettled in the vicinity of their earlier homes.

Although the four parties which form the PWF, CPI, CPI(M), Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), and Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) have protested independently on several occasions in the past; but this is the first time they have come together on these two issues.

T. A. Latha, a member of CPI (M), said "Earlier, there were gatherings by parties, now there is a consolidated protest."

Latha said "The government has gone on a slum eviction drive throughout the city, and those who have been displaced have been given houses in far off areas. And these are the most downtrodden people. We urge the government to give them houses within 3 km of their earlier settlements."

Latha said that the Government was helping the corporate houses which were constructing apartments and offices near the lakes and canals.

Another demand raised was adequate relief for the flood-affected people.

"Many people lost houses during the rain, and the government has not provided adequate compensation," Latha said.

G.Mohan, CPI (M)'s Area Committee Member of South Chennai agreed. "Even though Rs. 5,000 was announced per family, the compensation hasn't reached the people. People have been waiting since December," he said.

A MDMK member who refused to be named shifted the blame on the Centre.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi has announced only Rs. 2,000 crore

for one of the biggest calamities in the state. No more funds are being given. The Centre must act responsibly," he said.

He, however, added that the state government too had failed in handling the situation. So many families had not yet received the meagre compensation they were supposed to.

K. Purshottam, a CPI member, expressed anger and said that they had all waited for more than two months for the people to receive the relief material.

"But even now the people haven't received their dues. Enough time has been given to the Government," he said.

T.J. Thangavel, another protester, raised the issue of slum relocation. "They evict people out of the slums and put them 30 km away on the outskirts of the city. What about their livelihood?" he asked.

"The slum dwellers must be relocated within 3 km of their earlier residences. Otherwise, the whole purpose of relocation fails. The city is as much for them as it is for people living in posh localities," said Thangavel.

Visaranai: Interrogating the system

VISHNU SWAROOP

When Paandi, the protagonist of the movie 'Visaranai', is assaulted by a stranger, he protests in anger. But when one of his friends tells him that the stranger is a cop, Paandi is terror-struck.

This scene sets the tone for the terror that is to follow; the terror that arises when an individual realises he is powerless before the 'system'.

Custodial violence and encounter killings have become a trend in the past decade. Mohanraj, a driver from Coimbatore who kidnapped and killed two kids, was killed in an encounter in 2010.

The Andhra Pradesh police killed 20 men from Tamil Nadu, alleged to be Red Sanders smugglers, in the Seshachalam forests last year.

Dileepan Mahendran, a 25 year old who uploaded photographs of himself burning the national flag, was arrested by the police on February 1. He was allegedly tortured.

The movie Visaranai, which has won Amnesty International's 'Cinema for Human Rights' award in the 72nd Venice Film Festival, is a realistic portrayal of police brutality and fake encounters. It is based on an autobiographical novel written by M.Chandrakumar, an auto driver from

Coimbatore.

In 1983, when Chandrakumar was 18, he and his friends were detained and tortured by the police in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh. They had committed no crime and were 'prisoners of suspicion'. He turned this experience into a novel called 'Lockup', published in 2006.

Chandrakumar says, "Only about 60 per cent of my novel has been used in the movie. But the way the scenes have been polished and intensified makes me feel that there is 120 per cent of it in the film."

Chandrakumar also feels that while the readership for his novel had been limited, the movie had taken his story to a much wider audience. "I think at least 50 lakh youngsters have watched the film," he says.

Ponniiah Chandran, president of People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) Coimbatore, says, "A movie about custodial torture would not have worked in any other way. The authenticity of Chandrakumar's account is what stands out in the film."

Chandran also says that there are two important questions to be dealt with. "Given the brilliance of the shots that involve violence, does the film sensitise or desensitise one to violence? And the sense of helplessness that creeps in after watching

the film, is that good or bad?"

The real assessment of the movie will be to ask students how their perception of police has altered after watching the film, he says.

Srivatsan, a college student, says "I had whistled and applauded in the past for cop-centric films that glorified the protagonist. But the brutal reality in Visaranai reformed my perception of police."

Chandrakumar himself acknowledges the fact that public's fear of police might get heightened after watching the film. But he has a positive approach to this paradox.

"Even if people's fear of police is elevated after watching this movie, it will manifest itself as a resistance in some other place," he says.

On February 14, the movie was screened in the Government Music College in Chennai, to an audience of 100 trainee judges. Vetrimeran, director of the movie and Chandrakumar attended the screening.

"I felt that it was a historic moment. The struggle that I started 30 years ago has reached a magnificent place. The judges said they would consider the issues the film speaks of, when they hear a case. This is the real victory of the film," says Chandrakumar.



The movie has won accolades for its realistic portrayal of police brutality and fake encounters.

PHOTO: WWW.LOGICALMOVIEREVIEW.COM

Metro work shuts down shops in Anna Nagar

Construction work in Second Avenue started in 2010, but is nowhere near completion

SIDHARTH BHARDWAJ

CHENNAI: Construction of the Chennai Metro Rail Line in Anna Nagar West is affecting business establishments in the area. The construction work, which has been going on for the past six years now, has prevented people from getting to the shops on the main road, forcing many shops to shut down permanently.

The project, which started in 2010, has missed several deadlines and is far from completion even now.

"The main reason is the lack of funds due to change in political leadership in the state. The project was started by the DMK government but as soon as the AIADMK came to power, it started creating problems in releasing funds for the project. Now the elections are coming up and work will be hit. It will still take at least six more months," an on-site engineer said, on conditions of anonymity.



One of the few remaining shops along this stretch of road.

PHOTO: SIDHARTH BHARDWAJ

The line, which features the first underground segment of the Chennai Metro, is being constructed along the Anna Nagar Main Road, which houses jewellery shops, restaurants, boutiques, health clinics and shopping centers for about two

kilometres. The construction work has resulted in barricades being put up right in front of showrooms leaving no or very little space for anyone to visit.

"I had two shops on this road but recently had to sell one to keep this

one running. I bought this one in 2012 but six months later the workers erected barricades right in front of the shop. Since then sales have fallen drastically. Yesterday, there were no sales. Today it has been Rs.700 so far. I'm just holding

on to this shop in the hope of good business when the metro project is completed," said Praveen, owner of a boutique.

According to the Anna Nagar Merchant Welfare Association, 25 per cent of the shops have closed down. Two-way roads have been converted into one-way which shop owners say has added to their problems.

Shahul, who is the manager at a mobile showroom, said the construction work had left no space for people to visit shops in the market.

"The Second Avenue, which is the main road, has been narrowed down to a single-lane-one-way road due to the ongoing work. This has led to people not stopping at the market at all because there is no space left to stop or park the car. Our shop is 11 years old. Since the work started, business has declined and apart from a few regular customers, there is no growth here."

Metro Officials were not available for comment.



A ban on fishing and trading of sea cucumbers was brought into place in 2000.

PHOTO: THINKSTOCK

Fishermen for lifting ban on sea cucumber

YUVRAJ SAKHARE

CHENNAI: After the Madras High Court's recommendation that the Central Government revoke the ban on fishing and trading of sea cucumber, a marine endangered species, there are voices of dissent among activists and fishermen.

The ban on fishing and trading of sea cucumber was introduced in 2000. After the Nagai Seafood Catching Association filed a petition before the Madras High Court, the court directed the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, and Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, to pass suitable orders on the petition within three months.

T. Subbarayan, a member of Tamil Nadu Fishermen Federation said, "Because of the Central Government's ban on fishing of sea cucumber, the livelihood of lakhs of fishermen is getting affected."

The association has argued that the Zoological Survey of India, which was commissioned to undertake studies on the sea cucumber, recommended alternative methods of conservation instead of banning its fishing altogether.

"ZSI had recommended the ban only on trawl fishing and they suggested several alternative scientific measures for managing and maintaining the sea cucumber population," added Subbarayan.

V. Balaji, who is associated with the Greenpeace India, said, "Sea cucumbers are largely found in the Bay of Bengal and Gulf Of Mannar. They play a key role in preserving coral reefs from the devastating effects of climate change."

"They also play a vital role in reducing the harmful impact of ocean acidification on coral growth. If we revoke that ban it will affect the marine diversity in the Bay of Bengal as trawlers are many in number and they could catch hundreds of kilograms of sea cucumber every day."

Before the ban, sea cucumber was being exported to countries including Japan, Australia, China, the US, Egypt, Fiji and the Philippines. The fishermen communities which were largely depend on the export of sea cucumber are the worst hit by the ban.

There have been many incidents of smuggling of sea cucumber prevented by police as it is a delicacy in many South East Asian countries.

Intellimeters to keep autos in check

REECHA ARYAL

CHENNAI: IIT Madras and Gyan Data, a private firm, have teamed up to install Intellimeter in autorickshaws to monitor the traffic congestion, condition of roads and safety of passengers in Chennai.

As many as 10 vehicles have been fitted with the Intellimeter - a dynamic fare setting system with wireless calibration.

This meter is a kind of minicomputer with a camera and a sensor which detects ultraviolet rays, light, air quality, temperature and humidity. It also detects the traffic congestion and updates data on traffic flow and maps unlit and unsafe zones. It also analyses the state of roads and helps re-route the traffic.

IIT Madras and Gyan Data started the 'pilot project' 15 days ago.

"We came across the potential of using these meters as a tool for data gathering and analysis," said Professor Raghunathan Rengasamy, who is leading the project.

The project was initially limited to solving the problem of meter tampering, out dated tariff rates and traffic. But now it has been expanded to include a larger objective: data col-



A 'Namma Auto' fitted with an intellimeter.

PHOTO: REECHA ARYAL

lection and data analysis on how the city's traffic system behaves so that better solutions could be found for the age-old

problem.

The Intellimeter will now be a data collection tool to understand the city's traffic system and make the city a 'smart city'.

"It will help to understand the city traffic system deeply by collecting the data of different road conditions through the camera and sensor," he added.

Basically, it will record the data while the autorickshaw is engaged. Then, it will transfer the data to a main server, which is operational 24/7, within five seconds.

"Since it is a pilot project, we first have to meet every challenge and have to make sure that the meter works properly," said Shahul Hameed, Project Coordinator, who is also in charge of Namma Auto Services.

"Once it is successful, we will implement it in 100 more autos around the city," he added.

However, the Intellimeter installed in the autos now are in addition to the old fare meters and will not affect the billing system now.

"For now, the main idea is to collect the data and observe if it works or not. When it comes into use and becomes the norm, we will fix it as a meter with the sensor and camera in it," said Shahul.



Pycrofts Garden road in Nungambakkam was relaid recently.

PHOTO: SNEHA GEORGE

Damaged roads being relaid

SNEHA GEORGE

CHENNAI: The Chennai corporation is currently relaying 92 flood damaged bus route roads at the cost of Rs 160 crore. Damages ranged from, layers being washed away from the roads, making it difficult for vehicles to travel on them and holes being formed, like in Kotturpuram. Some of the damaged bus routes include P.T. Rajan Salai, Dr. Lakshmanasamy Salai and Anna Main Road.

Relaying will also be done on Cathedral Road, Kamaraj Salai, Eldams Road, Ormes Road, North Usman Road flyover, Kutchery, roads on Virugambakkam, Mogappair, Egmore, T.Nagar, Kodambakkam and Anna Nagar.

The State assembly elections are near and the corporation will have to finish the work on or before February 23.

"Yes we do have a tight deadline,

but we will complete the work. And we will not compromise on quality of the roads," said M. Srikanth, an engineer at Chennai Corporation.

Talking about the method of relaying the roads, L. Nandakumar said, "We are using the Benkelman Beam Test which determines the extent to which the roads are damaged. This gives us accurate measures and also helps us to assess the amount of tar required for relaying."

He also said that they would be milling the road instead of directly putting tar on top of the damaged roads. Milling is the process by which the top layer of the roads will be removed first, before tarring to avoid increase in the height of the roads.

The corporation is also relaying around 3000 interior roads in areas like Andal Nagar, Mahalakshmi Nagar and Nungambakkam which will cost Rs 380 crores.

SAPTAK GHOSH

CHENNAI: Entrepreneurs, who own small and medium industrial units, are wringing their hands in distress, unable to recover from the loss inflicted by the heavy rain and floods in December.

Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) account for investments of over Rs 20,000 crores annually and guarantee employment to more than 80 lakh people in Tamil Nadu.

In the Guindy industrial estate, more than 150 units were under eight feet of water and machinery and raw material worth more than Rs 30 lakh were damaged.

"A majority of manufacturing units at Guindy, Ekkattuthangal, Ambattur, Padi and Thirumudivakkam have faced staggering losses after flood waters damaged equipment, submerged factory units and destroyed everything from VAT documents to sales tax records and other important papers," said M. Ganeshan of CMC Info-tech, who lost two units.

It took Ganeshan nearly two months to resume work.

"After the waters receded, we have heard that a representative from TANSTIA (Tamil Nadu Small and Tiny Industries Association), a member from Cholamandalam Bank and a state-level industry representative will have a meeting to discuss the losses we faced. But none of that happened," he added.

Factory owners said interest free loans should be given to those units which lost machinery and material in the floods.

"Much of the equipment that I need regularly for my rubber factory have gone waste. Even if I sell to scrap dealers, it will be a great loss to me," said Shekhar Bhadravan of ILP Engineering Products.

R.Kumar, owner of Raja Plastic Pvt. Limited, who has been running his unit since 1977, said that his entire factory was under eight feet of water.

He said he had incurred a loss of more than Rs 2 crore from which he is yet to recover.

"We heard from SIDCO (Small Industries Development Corporation), that factories that suffered total loss of equipment will be treated as new units, which would make us eligible for a 25 percent capital investment subsidy from the state. However, nothing tangible has been done so far," said Kumar.

Several MSME owners recalled how Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had urged the insurers to settle claims within four weeks during his last visit to Chennai after the floods.

However, even after more than two months, payments had not been processed despite numerous surveys being carried out.

This has affected more than 50 per cent of the MSME sector and the owners fear they will plunge into deep debt if something is not done immediately.

Saravanan, who has been running a wire manufacturing company in Guindy since 1985, says despite the fact he was insured, he hasn't been provided a bit of help from the insurers. Moreover, he had to pay Rs 3 lakh a machine on repairs to resume work.

"I still find it difficult to pay wages to my workers. Normally, small scale industries like ours fully invest in our trade; as a result of the floods, all of my investment has gone to waste overnight," he added.

Officials from SIDCO and TANSTIA were unavailable for comment.

In the Guindy industrial estate, more than 150 units were under eight feet of water

Flood takes a toll on MSMEs



Damaged equipment and material piled up in one corner of the room of a machine shop at the Guindy industrial estate.

PHOTO: SAPTAK GHOSH

'Banks, insurance cos don't help'

SAPTAK GHOSH

CHENNAI: For nearly a month, Kumaran, owner of Durga Plastic Industries, has been running from pillar to post to borrow money from friends, relatives and other sources to repair his machines and buy new ones.

Kumaran's small unit in the Guindy industrial estate was hit by floods in December. He is one of the many small entrepreneurs still struggling to resume their work. While many owners are facing labour shortages, the majority of owners feel they have been cheated by SIDCO, TANSTIA and the state government.

"Banks have not come forward with help and the insurance firms are asking for documents which most of us have lost. I have not only lost the documents but also the loan papers which were kept in my office here. When I contacted the insurance firms, they kept on asking whether I have any photograph of the damaged machinery as

proof," said Kumaran.

With a labour force of more than 50, Kumaran's father started the business in 1975. Kumaran took over in 2006 after his father's death. Like every small businessman, he also availed himself of a loan of more than Rs 70 lakh from Cholamandalam Investment and Finance Company Limited in 2010, to buy new machines. Things went well for five years and he got his firm insured as well. However, the floods changed it all.

"Little did I know that I will be given such step motherly treatment by the banks, insurance firms and the Government. I am still paying the interest rates for the loans I took," Kumaran said.

Reji Varghese, owner of Forms & Gears, a firm established in 1974, had a different experience with the insurers.

"I lost more than Rs 2 crore as my firm remained shut for nearly two months. After the incessant rains, water started rising on December 2; and after a day it rose up

to eight feet, submerging all the machines worth lakhs. These precision machines, once damaged, have to be replaced," he said.

"The insurance company offered me a few lakh rupees for my losses, only after much delay. It seems like a tactic to make us accept whatever little they give," he added.

According to Varghese, although banks were instructed by RBI to disburse loans, they have not done it.

Several meetings took place between State Level Bankers Committee and SIDCO, but, nothing has taken shape.

"Although I managed to recover somehow by starting the work after a couple of months, most of the important documents I had, have been lost in the flood waters," he said.

"Recently, Chief Minister Jayalitha had announced a loan of Rs.5 lakh for people starting new units. If this loan could be given for the existing units still affected by the floods, it would be a great help for every owner," he said.

A 'monumental' misnomer

SWETA AKUNDI

MAMALLAPURAM: The famous monuments in this ancient town are not what they are said to be representing, according to the Archaeological Survey of India.

Krishna's Butterball, Pancha Rathas and Arjuna's Penance, have been named after stories originating from the Hindu epic, Mahabharata. However, according to ASI, the Pallava kings who built them intended to tell other legends, not from the Mahabharata.

The Pancha Rathas are actually five half-built temples dedicated to five Hindu Gods - Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Durga and Indra. But these structures have taken the name of Rathas because of their structural similarity to chariots.

"Since the Pandavas (characters from the Mahabharata) were also five in number, people started comparing these five temples to the chariots of the Pandavas. In reality,



The five rathas in Mammallapuram PHOTO: SWETA AKUNDI

there is no connection," said Ravichandran S, a Junior Conservationist Assistant at ASI.

Even though it started as a myth,

the temples are now officially known as Dharmaraja Ratha, Bhima Ratha, Arjuna Ratha, Draupadi Ratha and Nakul-Sahadeva

Ratha.

Despite a plaque at the entrance of the complex announcing that the structures are not related to the Pandavas, the name seems to be a cause for confusion.

"The temples are for the Pandavas," said Ramesh, a local tour guide. Not all visitors knew the exact history of the place.

"I drive many tourists to this place. They want to see the Pandava chariots," said a driver.

A local tour guide insisted that Arjuna's Penance was not about the story of Arjuna and his penance to appease Shiva, but of Bageerathan, a king who performed a penance to bring down the Ganges River to Earth. Ananda, an ASI staff member, corroborated this version.

However, T S Subramanian, a veteran journalist specialising in archaeology, dissented with this view. "This was a matter of conflict but now it's been settled that the story is about Arjuna," he said.

The town also has a huge uncut almost-spherical rock balancing itself on a slippery slope. It goes by the name, 'Krishna's Butterball', even though its history is still unknown.

"Before ASI got these lands, they used to be owned by the local zamindars, who might have given them their current names. Since then, they have spread by word of mouth. The Pancha Pandava Mandapa is another example of a misleading name," said Ananda.

"People like to associate the Pandavas with a lot of historical sites and monuments whether or not they actually have any relation to them. Jain monks used to travel to India and live in caves here. We know this by the various letters which have been cut in Tamil Brahmi script on the brow of the caves. However, wherever anybody sees a cave, they call it a Pandava cave, without knowing. These are all myths," said Subramanian.



Kuffir Nalgundwar talking to the audience PHOTO: YUVRAJ

Debating Ambedkar

YUVRAJ SAKHARE

CHENNAI: "Misappropriation" and "brahminisation" of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar's ideology came under attack at the launch of the book 'Hatred in the Belly' at ICSA Centre in Egmore on February 13.

The book release was followed by a discussion on the topic 'Appropriation of Dr. Ambedkar's writings'. The book, published by the Shared Mirror Publication, is a counter attack on Navayana's edition of Dr Ambedkar's book 'Annihilation of Caste' with an 'introduction' by author Arundhati Roy titled 'The Doctor and the Saint'.

Navayana's edition of Dr Ambedkar's book has triggered several debates among Ambedkarites after it was published. The book 'Hatred in the Belly' is a compilation of essays written by activists, students and journalists in response to the "distortion" of Dr. Ambedkar's writing by Navayana publication and Arundhati Roy.

Punitha Pandian, publisher Dalit Murasu, said, "More than 16000 copies of the Tamil version of Dr. Ambedkar's Annihilation of Caste have been sold; but, there seems to be no coverage in the mainstream media about it."

"When intellectuals like Arundhati Roy talk about it, it becomes a matter of debate. The book with the foreword by Arundhati Roy is nothing but a brahminisation of Ambedkar's writing. Ambedkar's original book talks about annihilation of caste, but the book with Roy's foreword focuses only on the Gandhi-Ambedkar dialogue."

Kuffir Nalgundwar, editor of Round Table India website, pointed out that there have been several attempts to destabilise and destroy Ambedkar's rising socio-political constituency by appropriation and misappropriation of his thought and struggle. Because of this he felt a strong need to clarify the issues raised in Roy's introduction 'The Doctor and the Saint'.

Nalgundwar said, "We don't deny Roy's right to write. She has every right to write, but we also have the right to criticize. Critics claimed that our work is not a scholarly work. Is Arundhati Roy's a scholarly work? Who is a scholar? The one who stands by the Brahminical elite? Then certainly in those measures ours is not a scholarly work."

Nalgundwar said Roy had compared Gandhi's Ram Rajya to Ambedkar's casteless society and called Ambedkar's idea utopian and Gandhi's idea more feasible.

Dr Ezhilan Naganathan, a social activist, said that brahminisation had always engulfed Bahujan ideology.

Arundhati Roy's book was an attempt in the same direction and 'Hatred in the Belly' was the weapon to stop that engulfment.

R M Karthik, a contributor to Round Table India, said that not only the right wing but even the left wing had tried to appropriate Dr. Ambedkar's ideology.

"That Ambedkar was opposed to brahminism, but not brahmins, is a lie propagated by the leftists; this is something the leftists don't want us to see. The leftists are as much a problem as the rightists", he said.

App to help destitutes

SREEDEVI JAYARAJAN

CHENNAI: Twenty one year old Abilash of Udavum Karangal has designed a mobile app to provide aid to and rehabilitate destitute people in the state.

Called Helper's Choice, the app was launched on February 8. It already has 20 users and has helped rescue a 35 year old mentally unstable homeless man in Janakiram Colony, Arumbakam, based on information provided by a resident.

People who download the app can pass on details of homeless people they find on the street.

Abilash said "I have always lived at Udavum Karangal and I used to observe closely the rescue and rehabilitation activities that happened. One thing I gleaned was the death of or delay in receiving information of missing or homeless persons. I decided to create Helper's Choice to enable speedy transmission of information."

"It took an initial investment of Rs 50,000 (which was funded by the organisation) to develop it. We divided the app based on six separate operations that we undertake;

but rescue of homeless and missing persons is our primary focus."

"Once we receive details of the person to be rescued, our two member team goes out to the field, collaborates with the police force of the specific jurisdiction and undertakes the mission. We also share the news on our Facebook page and publish it in local newspapers to spread it," he added.

Although the team is focusing primarily on cases in Chennai, they have also set up teams in Coimbatore and Thiruvannamalai. Other sections of the app include collection and distribution of food, donations in cash and kind, surprising loved ones on special occasions and inviting people to join our network.

"As of now, we've had seven donors. Our food collection and distribution programme is also quite successful. We've had four cases till now. Three of them were requests to collect excess food after weddings. After receiving information, we collect the food and distribute it where it's required," he said.



Usman Sait, a fourth generation draper

PHOTO: VARUN CHIRUMAMILLA

A vanishing breed

VARUN CHIRUMAMILLA

CHENNAI: Tailors who measure you and custom-stitch your clothing are now a slowly vanishing breed. The proliferation of multi-brand clothing retail outlets since the 1990's has provided a convenient and quick alternative to buying your clothes and rather than having them tailored. However, for special occasions people still rely on tailors for the perfect fit, but at a cost.

Usman Sait is a fourth generation draper and proprietor of Joonus Sait & Sons, who have been in business since 1905.

"Readymade retail has absorbed a lot of tailors into the industry, and it is very difficult to find an established master tailor with a disciplined team to work for you, as they are so much in demand," he said. He added that this was one of the reasons why his firm abandoned tailoring in 2000, and started focusing on woollens and rainwear which is equally profitable.

"Draping and tailoring is an exact art, and one is always in search of a perfect fit. I remember having to do six or seven trials before delivering the perfect suit to a customer, and we would have to rip out every stitch after each trial, this

is not possible in the readymade world," he added.

R. Mukesh of Hong Kong tailors (established in 1963) said "While people are buying readymade clothes for casual or semi formal wear, good tailoring is very much in demand for special occasions such as marriages and festivals or when they require a perfect fit."

"The only thing that has changed is that they want things in a hurry and where we had three days to execute an order 20 years ago we have 24 hours now, and we have adapted without compromising on quality."

Mukesh added that without adapting, it would be difficult to remain competitive and survive in the market.

Sait agreed. "I had an event to attend in Calcutta a few weeks ago, and needed an outfit in a hurry. I walked into the celebrated Syed Bawker store on Radhakrishna Salai and told them I had 24 hours, and they obliged."

However, it is expensive to get a shirt or trousers stitched, especially in the high-end shops.

The charge is Rs 3500 for a shirt, Rs 4000 for trousers and up to Rs 30,000 for a suit. A small tailor, on the other hand, will charge only one-tenth of this price for stitching

the shirts and trousers.

The small tailors are perhaps the most affected by the readymade business because people find the ready to wear clothes less expensive.

Many of the smaller and less established tailoring firms have tried to supplement their incomes by selling some readymade products as well and altering and refitting clothes.

"Even ten years ago we used to get a lot of readymade clothing to alter but this does not happen anymore as there is an in-house tailor who does the job in most readymade outlets today," said R. Balaswami, proprietor of Balaji tailors in Kalikundram.

Balaswami has a ready-made clothing store next to his tailoring store and also sells shoes, socks, boots, laces and undergarments to supplement his income.

M K Narayana Rao, who has a hole-in-the-wall shop in Triplicane, still survives stitching women's clothes.

"Traditional women's clothing like blouses and even salwars are a bad fit when they are readymade. So women prefer to get them stitched and this is how I manage to eke out a living even at my age," said the 70 year-old Rao.

High taxes bring down the 'high'

SREEDEVI JAYARAJAN

CHENNAI: The city has a growing pub culture with many restobar chains having set up shop in the last one year; but high taxes have a sobering effect on the tippers.

Yakub Sheikh, manager of Hop-pipola, a pub in The Spring hotel, Nungambakkam, said "We opened in July last year and on an average, we earn about Rs. 15 lakhs to Rs 16 lakhs a month from the retail sale of liquor, but in places like Mumbai we earn roughly about Rs. 70 lakhs a month from sale of liquor in four franchises."

Sheikh said that this was partly due to the heavy VAT (Value added tax) of 58 percent on Indian made foreign liquor and imported liquor (basically any liquor sourced from outside the state) levied by TAS-



Plan B, one of the popular bars in the city PHOTO: PSP DESIGN

MAC, the state-run company that has monopoly over liquor sales in Tamil Nadu.

"With the increase in choices of resto-bars, people are going out, but the heavy taxation policy isn't helping much as customers refrain

from consuming imported liquor due to high VAT and other charges," he said.

Besides, procuring a bar licence in the city is both expensive and time consuming, said Lyndon, manager of 10 D in T Nagar.

"Hotels with attached pubs should pay an annual privilege fee in order to retain their bar licences. This fee can range anywhere between Rs 1 lakh and Rs 5 lakhs depending on the star rating of the hotel," he said.

Apart from this, sometimes it takes some hotels at least three months to procure imported liquor through TASMAL from a central warehouse in Delhi and the Customs warehouse in Chennai.

"This is why, sometimes when we run out of imported liquor in the bar, we have no choice but to wait," said Lyndon. He added, "this is not a concern for hotels with direct import licences like The Park and the Taj group which enables them to stock up a better variety of foreign brands than many other pubs in the city does."

Veena goes global with Bach and more

VISHNU SWAROOP

CHENNAI: "We should throw out our instruments," a musician remarked on Facebook after he shared a video of a woman shredding and tapping as she sped up down the frets and pulled the strings of her veena. It was a jaw-dropping performance that will put into shade many who play fretted string instruments.

Chennai-based Veena artiste Punya Srinivas, who is featured in the video, was trained as a classical musician. But she has gone global with her style of playing and prefers to call her music 'Carnatic Progressive'. Her debut album, Veena in Vienna, was a success. Global Gear, a track from the album has attained the status of an anthem for fusion music.

The story behind the album is as interesting as its tracks.

"Once during a recording session, I asked a technician to set up the microphones in a particular way so that the sound of veena is proper. He got offended by that and asked me if I

had released any CDs," says Punya.

"That got me thinking," she says. "I understood that only an album will take me to people."

Punya did not wait for a producer. She started working on the album, with her husband D A Srinivas who is also a musician.

"The album went around without being accepted. People listened to it and said it was good, but they did not know how to take it forward," Punya says.

Then, she says, she contacted music director James Vasanthan, who referred Punya's album to Think Music India which went on to produce it.

Punya's bonding with the veena started when she was six years old. Her mother had learnt veena. But after her marriage, the veena was idle at home. As a kid, Punya would play it. Seeing this, her mother wanted to put her in the Music Academy.

"The Music Academy did not accept me as I was too young. But my mother made me play

a geetham on the veena. Only after that they accepted me. For four years I learnt in the Music Academy."

After this she learnt veena under Kamala Aswathama and also did a course in the Government Music College in Adyar. She started recording for films when she was 15.

When she was learning under Kamala Aswathama, she was selected by Carnatic musician T.V.Gopalakrishnan to play in his band. It was Gopalakrishnan who took her to Ilayaraja.

"When I first met Ilayaraja, I was 15. I had hardly seen any movies. I did not know about Ilayaraja. But after seeing him personally and working with him, I was intoxicated by him. I was in the 'Ilayaraja bliss' for those 10 years."

The track 'Mad Mod Mood Fugue' in Veena in Vienna is a tribute to Ilayaraja, Punya says. The track was taken from Ilayaraja's fusion album 'How to Name it'. Punya has replaced the violin with Veena.

"Ilayaraja blessed me before the release of the album and later he demanded a copy of the

CD," Punya says.

One another musician that Punya is in love with is Bach.

"For me he is the ultimate musician. Anytime I speak of him, I am moved to tears. Even if I want to listen to other composers, I can't. I'm just trapped in him," she says.

Did she find it difficult to move from Indian to Western classical music?

"There were no problems as they are totally different styles of playing. Indian classical music is full of gamakas. But I had to have a very different fingering technique to play Western classical music."

"I can play Bach, Hindustani and folk all on the veena."

After her hugely successful debut album, she released her second album Sound of Swan in 2014.

Punya was awarded the Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar by the Sangeet Natak Akademi in 2011. She has also performed in international music festivals in Paris and Israel.



Punya Srinivas...pioneering work on the Veena PHOTO: SRINIVAS'S FB PAGE