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## AIADMK's appeal fading

PRIYANKA DAS

**Chennai:** Residents of R K Nagar constituency represented by Chief Minister Jayalalithaa say that not many have benefitted from the recent welfare schemes.

Earlier this week, Jayalalithaa had inaugurated works worth Rs. 180.41 crore and started projects worth Rs.193.26 crore in the constituency.

M Bhavani, a member of the AIADMK, said she has not received any flood relief yet. Bhavani had asked for an idly cooker to start a small business and was told by the party authorities that she would receive it on Amma's birthday, that did not happen either.

Other residents have different concerns.

Broken pieces of tiles, plastic and other construction materials lie around the buildings. Manimekalai too has not received any flood compensation and is not aware of the free Amma mineral water being supplied through the use of the smart card.

"I am not ready to vote for Amma. I will vote for the DMK," she added.

R Bhuvneshwaran, a 23 year old,



Party Boards put up in R.K. Nagar

PHOTO: PRIYANKA DAS

said "Last year also Jayalithaa came and inaugurated many things before the elections; it is the same this year too," he said, adding that college students were being taught in the nearby corporation

school, as the college building had not been completed yet.

"I don't want to vote for anyone," added the youngster, who is not aware of the welfare schemes in his constituency either.

R Balakrishnan, a fisherman said, "The drinking water sometimes gets mixed with the sewage water, and when we ask the authorities to check the problem, they are not prompt in their action."

A Sainiamal, a mother of five said, former MLA P Vetrivel had

asked her to vacate her house and was told that new quarters would be built for them. But now she along with many other families live in the Tsunami quarters for Rs 2000 per month as rent. "It has been six months and not a single brick has been moved."

"Vetrivel told us that we could wave at Amma from the first floor when she comes campaigning, but nothing has been built," she added.

There were some who voiced support for the Chief Minister.

V Pushpa sells fried snacks in and around the Tsunami quarters of R K Nagar.

"Jayalalithaa has given flood compensation in this area. I am aware of the mineral water through smart card but have not availed of the benefit."



Nanthini with parents addresses media PHOTO: R SARANGAN

## Student blames exam scam for failure

RAM SARANGAN

**Chennai:** Fifteen-year-old Nanthini, who alleged that her tenth board exam science paper (2015) was swapped making her fail, now plans to file a lawsuit against the State Department of Education.

Nanthini, a consistently good scorer at the Government Higher Secondary School in Tiruchi, applied for a reevaluation after she got two out of 75 in theoretical portion, even though she scored 25 out of 25 in practicals. Instead of processing her application, education officials instead insisted on meeting the family in Chennai.

"When we went to the office, they wanted to meet me separately. They said that the paper - which was written by someone else - was mine, and asked me to write a letter stating this. They threatened me they wouldn't let me write exams for five years," Nanthini said.

Nanthini had to sign the letter and take the repeat exam scoring 68 out of 75 marks. However, this also meant she would be at a disadvantage when it came to employment, as she would have a separate marksheet for the re-exam.

The Satta Panchayat Iyakkam (SPI) offered to help the family. Siva Elango, head of the SPI, wrote a letter to the Secretary, School Education Department on July 2015, asking them to issue a single

marksheet. However, the department did not respond.

"They have refused to perform a recount, which should be completed within 15 days by mandate. Nor have they refunded the recount fee. They have not accepted our phone calls. They also asked us to name the secretary specifically, saying the previous letter had not reached them," said Elango.

The SPI filed an RTI and received the paper that had been passed off as Nanthini's answer sheet, as well as the paper from the repeat exam. Her parents pointed out that the handwriting on the "fake" paper was completely different, as was the quality of the answers themselves. Nanthini's retest showed a strong understanding of the subject.

The fake paper, on the other hand, carried answers such as "Why are you asking tenth graders for the answers? It will be shameful for you to ask us." Nanthini's mother Anuradha said "My daughter has always scored high and was expecting 98. The authorities should merge her marksheets. If they don't, her future will be damaged."

The SPI sent a second letter in January 2016, addressed to the State School Education Secretary, D Sabitha. There was no response.

"If we don't get a response soon, we will initiate a case against the officials concerned on behalf of the family," said Siva Elango.

## Plan to fence banks of Adyar

Chennai: After the December

POUSHALI DASGUPTA

floods, the Government is planning to fence the banks of Adyar River here to prevent further encroachments once they are removed.

The Public Works Department (PWD) said that the huts along the 12 km river stretch from Nandambakkam to Adyar are being removed to begin fencing.

"The river boundary will be demarcated by our Department. Then, all encroachments will be removed. Not only slum-dwellers, but the multi-storey buildings will also be dismantled," said Er. M. Bakthavathsalam, Superintending Engineer, Water Resource Department.

The rehabilitation program includes house allotment, shifting charges, reimbursement for expenses and school education.

The project costs Rs. 28 Crore, to remove and resettle approximately 9,000 families said PWD. The eviction process for extensive encroachments such as Aathuma



Slums on Adyar banks near Saidapet bridge PHOTO: POUHALI

Nagar, J.J Nagar and Surya Nagar has already started.

"We have been living here for a long time now. Some people already left, but we won't leave. Our work is close to this place," said T. Manikavel, a resident at Surya Nagar in Kotturpuram.

Environment activist Nityanand Jayaraman said, "What actually

caused the flood won't be removed, like the multi-storey buildings. The government is trying to show that they are doing something, but they are actually not."

Nityanand said that there are other permanent structures also obstructing the river.

Prof. S. Janakrajan at Madras Institute of Development Studies

(MIDS) said that the liquid dynamics of the river was being obstructed by walls and fences.

The construction debris for the second airport runway had not yet been removed. The debris blocked the river flow and this led to floods.

"It will be disastrous. The river is a common property resource and therefore, everyone should have access to river," he added.

Talking about the Flood Plain Development Program in the United States, he said that there was no benchmark year system in India. "The flood plain area is not even earmarked in India," he said.

After the second runway was flooded in December, several questions were raised over its construction on the flood basin of Adyar River as it blocked the free flow of water.

Chief Engineer, V Shanmugan said that the second airport runway was constructed with proper vent way for the river flow.

"If it causes an obstruction, we will remove the second runway," he said.

## Assembly election dates

The polls for the Tamil Nadu elections this year will be conducted on May 16, according to the Chief Election Commissioner Nasim Zaidi. Addressing the media on Thursday, he also announced that the counting of votes would be held on May 19.

All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), has 234 assembly constituencies. Chief Minister Jayalalithaa is likely to face a tough fight in the State from the Kamunani-dhi-led Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), which is likely to join hands with actor-turned-politician Vijaykanth, who leads the Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK). Until recently, Vijaykanth was the leader of the opposition in the State Assembly.

AIADMK has formalized an alliance with Congress rebel leader G K Vasam. Another major contender in the State is the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), led by doctor-turned-politician Anbumani Ramadoss.

## No room for unidentified and unclaimed bodies

PRITHA BANNERJEE

**Chennai:** Around 15 mutilated unidentified bodies are dumped in the Rajiv Gandhi General Hospital morgue every day, according to a police official stationed there. The bodies remain there till they are identified and claimed. But if the body is not claimed within a month it is buried at the Hindu burial ground at Moolakothalam in North Chennai.

The reason, no documents to establish their identities are there,

said Sub Inspector S. Mohandoss.

He added, "A First Information Report (FIR) under section 174 is filed when an unidentified body is found. Under section 174 we draw up a report of the apparent cause of death, describing such wounds, fractures, bruises, and other marks of injury."

"Then, we click pictures of the body and publish it with the deceased person's height, weight and complexion. The body is sent for autopsy. The cause of death is mostly road and train accidents. If the

person was travelling by car, the relatives can be traced. When the person is not carrying any ID card it becomes a problem."

The FIR number becomes the only identity for nameless bodies.

These pictures are matched with missing persons' picture from the National Crime Record Bureau and State Crime Record Bureau, he added.

Due to the lack of space, most bodies are not kept in the morgue for more than a month, said M. D Babu, who works at the morgue.

However, few personal belongings like clothes, watches, etc. are generally kept and the details are published in newspapers.

"The bodies can be kept for many days if they are treated with chemicals. The police tell us for how long we need to keep them," said a doctor in-charge.

In the Central Railway Station one or two bodies are found every day. Several people die on the tracks while crossing. The Government Railway Police (GRP) tries to trace their relatives. But the identities

of some cannot be traced.

A Malika, working as a police constable for four years in Chennai Central Railway Station, said, "We try our best to trace the relatives of the deceased person; only when we can't find them we bury the body ourselves. In Chennai Central Railway Station most of the accidents occur when the person is not paying attention while boarding the train or talking on phone while crossing the railway tracks."

In his 10 years of service in GRP, Sub-Inspector N Annamalai has

buried more than 4000 bodies, according to news reports in The New Indian Express.

Annamalai believes, "Whether the deceased was a good person or not, the body should be buried in a dignified manner."

K Subramaniam, travels from Chennai Central to Tambaram every day, said, "Mishaps at level crossings account for about 40 per cent of train accidents and about 60 per cent of fatalities due to the failure of the railways to man these crossings or build road over-bridges or underpass."

Out of 708 unmanned level crossings in the Southern Railway zone, sanction has already been obtained for eliminating 625 spread across six divisions in 2016 Railway Budget. Union Railway Minister Suresh Prabu accorded sanction for eliminating the remaining 83. The target is to eliminate all unmanned level crossings by 2020. However, the Southern Railway zone is now poised to eliminate all the unmanned level crossings by 2018.

## New hangout by the lake

PRASANNA SWAMINATHAN

**Chennai:** Though the Chetpet Eco Park is still unfinished, it attracts hundreds of people from all

over Chennai despite the heat.

The park adjacent to the Chetpet railway station is spread over 15 acres and boasts of a boat service and a footpath around the lake.

The entrance ticket is Rs. 25 for an adult and Rs.10 for a child. Monthly, half-yearly and yearly passes are available for the regulars. The boat rides are Rs. 50 for an adult and Rs. 25 for a child. The cost for angling three fish is Rs. 300.

V. Sundar said, "My children could go on boats only when we went to some tourist spot. We can now come here boating whenever we feel like."

Within the park, there is an angler's store. Near the entrance, there is a detailed explanation of the fish that would soon be put into the park's lake. Some of them are rays, clown fish and star fish.

A children's park and a café is close to the angler's store.

The park will soon have a functioning seafood restaurant, a multimedia room, and an amphitheatre.



The new park in Chetpet

PHOTO: PRASANNA S

## EPF Tax roll back sought

POORANI BALENDRA

**Chennai:** The salaried class has expressed concern over the EPF (Employee Provident Fund) tax announced in the Union Budget but there are expectations that it would be rolled back.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley announced a tax on the withdrawal of funds from the EPF which was previously exempt from tax on all stages -- investment, interest and withdrawal.

Following widespread anger among the public, the Finance Ministry issued a statement which said only 60 per cent of the corpus withdrawn would be taxed.

It also added that if the 60 per cent corpus was invested in annuities -- an investment, like pension, that would ensure regular income for the rest of your life -- it would be tax exempt. After the death of the subscriber, no tax would be imposed on the amount (from the annuity) that would be

inherited by the legal heir.

In a separate press conference held on March 1, Revenue Secretary Hasmukh Adhia said that only the interest accrued on 60 per cent contribution to EPF after April 1, 2016 would be taxed and the principal amount would remain tax exempt.

Anand Kalyanaraman, who is part of the Research Bureau, The Hindu BusinessLine, said, "It is quite complicated, it will become clear when the Finance Minister introduces the bill in the Parliament. We can expect a partial roll back."

Anand saw this measure as a move to ensure parity between NPS (National Pension Scheme) and EPF.

NPS, until last year was taxable during withdrawal, but this budget has made it partially exempt - on withdrawal, 40 per cent of the corpus would be tax-exempt, the remaining 60 per cent of the corpus would be taxed, Anand said.

The new tax will affect only people in the higher income bracket.

"This will affect private employees who get monthly basic and dearness allowance of more than Rs 15,000. For employees who earn less than this threshold, there is no change," he added.

Anand said that EPF was "less risky" compared to NPS because the latter was market related. Although the rates for EPF fluctuated every year, the rate for one particular year would be kept constant.

Rajkiran R, a software engineer at Amazon Bangalore, said that this would hit him as he had not invested in any other financial instrument except EPF.

"I contribute about 20k per month (including employer's contribution) to EPF every month. So, I will lose a considerable amount," he added.

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# Health insurance plan gets mixed response

POUSHALI DASGUPTA

**CHENNAI:** The new health insurance protection scheme announced by the Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in the Union Budget 2015-16, evoked mixed responses from both the health and insurance industry.

After the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) scheme was transferred from Labour Ministry to Health Ministry in 2015, the Government introduced a health insurance cover scheme up to Rs. 1 Lakh per family and an additional protection of Rs. 30,000 for 60 years and above senior citizens.

Dr. J. Amalorpavanathan, Director of the Institute of Vascular Surgery in Madras Medical College, said "It can act as a bridge to cover up the gaps in our healthcare system but, I am not very convinced about the announcement because, in these types of model, insurance companies tend to make more money and only some amount reaches the marginalized and the needy patients. The new scheme will only cover the surgical and other medical ailments costs, what about the day-to-day healthcare needs of the poor?"

Even though states like Madhya Pradesh and Bihar would be benefited due to lack of proper healthcare facilities, Tamil Nadu already had a comprehensive health insurance scheme, he added.

The insurance scheme launched by the Tamil Nadu Government through the United India Insurance Company Ltd. provides free medical and surgical treatment with coverage of Rs. 1 Lakh per family to patients with an annual family income of less than Rs.72,000.

Jose Varghese, Senior Divisional Manager of United India Insurance Co. Ltd, said the company ran three schemes for the Tamil Nadu Government.



The Centre will launch a new health protection scheme under which up to Rs. 1 lakh per family will be provided. PHOTO: THE HINDU

vement. "First, an insurance scheme sponsored by the government, for Below Poverty Line (BPL) beneficiaries. Second, a scheme for State Government employees and third, a scheme for State Government pensioners," he said.

"The new scheme will be an improvement of RSBY scheme which provides a maximum initial coverage of Rs. 3,000 for every BPL family; 75 per cent of the insurance is covered by the center while 25 per cent is covered by the state. The Government has come out with a robust scheme," he added.

Sushil Kumar, a patient at Rajiv Gandhi Government Hospital, said, "I don't have enough money for my spinal cord surgery. But, I have been told that it will be taken care of. The only problem is I don't have a health insurance card. I lost

most of my documents during floods."

S. Kavitha, a patient's mother at Fortis Malar Hospital, said "The new insurance scheme seems promising, especially for the poor people who cannot afford to pay for healthcare facilities. But, it does not affect Tamil Nadu much as there is already a well-functioning insurance scheme in the state."

For the proper implementation of the proposed scheme, National Health Agencies will be set up by the Government. The total budget for the scheme over the next five years is expected to be Rs.23, 415 crores. Amitava Das, General Manager of National Insurance Company Ltd. said that the Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS) rates were low and therefore it could reach the marginalized beneficiaries.

"This scheme will help us achieve our social objectives. Through this low cost insurance scheme, we can reach out to the poor. There is a topline as far as premium is concerned. Also, if it is well managed, there is a profitability factor as well, but it is very less," he said. "It is a very powerful scheme. A healthy population will lead to higher productivity. Moreover, there will be improvements in the infrastructure of hospitals, money will be channelized and conditions will improve," he added. The budget allocation for the health industry went up from Rs.33, 765 crores in 2015-16 to Rs. 38,892 crores. Besides the health insurance scheme, the Finance Minister also said that 3000 new generic medicine stores would be set up and a National Dialysis Programme would also be launched.

# New schemes for welfare of farmers

PRANAMI TAMULI

**CHENNAI:** India's agricultural sector has received a major boost with the Union Budget introducing a slew of measures to improve irrigation and crop insurance, promote sustainable growth and secure the welfare of farmers.

Agricultural growth and farmers' welfare were the priority in Finance Minister Arun Jaitley's 9-point-agenda where he emphasised the need for better farming infrastructure and optimal utilization of ground water and fertilizers. The fund allocations to the agricultural sector have been increased from Rs.22,958 crores in 2015-16 (revised estimate) to Rs.44,485 crores in 2016-17 (budget estimate).

According to economist S. Vishwanathan, "The past years have recorded serious agricultural distress across the country. Last year, at least 10 states declared drought. The agricultural sector will benefit a lot from the increased funding. The focus on sustainability is a good step."

An estimated Rs 12517 crores has been earmarked to strengthen the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana with which the Government plans to bring 2.89 million hectares of land under irrigation. A long term irrigation fund under the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has also been initiated.

Sustainable ground water management is a major focus with the government pledging to develop half a million farm ponds and dug wells in rain-fed areas for water conservation and one million compost pits by using the allocations under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

Citing farmers' welfare as a top priority, the government has allocated Rs.5,500 crores to the newly launched crop insurance scheme Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) and promised another Rs 15000 crores to ease the loan burden on drought-hit farmers.

Finance minister Jaitley announced the launching of a National Agriculture Market to help farmers get remunerative prices. Jaitley promised that the centre will promote procurement at support prices, adding that an online procurement system will be introduced by the Food Corporation of India in April.

The Budget has allocated funds worth Rs 412 crore to promote organic farming in rain-fed areas under the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana in a bid to enhance



Farmers are likely to be more secure with the new crop insurance scheme. PHOTO:REUTERS

crop quality.

Agricultural scientist Dr M.S Swaminathan welcomed the move, especially the launching of Organic Value Chain Development scheme in North-eastern India.

"The North-east produces high value crops. Pesticide residue in these crops depreciates their value. Promoting organic farming will ensure that high quality crops are produced which will find better value in the export market," he said.

Another Rs 50 lakh has been allocated as prize money for a national level competition to be held among 674 Krishi Vigyan Kendras.

Dr Gopi, Scientist at the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, appreciated the move. "Krishi Vikas Kendras have contributed greatly towards agricultural development. This will encourage farmers and strengthen their association with the KVK near them," he said.

# Industries welcome rural thrust, disappointed about corporate tax

ONKAR SURVE

**CHENNAI:** Indian Industries have welcomed the Government's focus in the Union Budget 2016 to reinvigorate the rural economy but the proposals didn't meet their expectations with regard to the reduction of corporate tax rate.

"Focus on rural economy with a commitment to double the farmers' income by 2022, betting quite high on rail and road infrastructure and yet sticking to the financial discipline by retaining the fiscal deficit targets for 2016-17 are the most important takeaways from the Union Budget 2016-17," said Sunil Kanoria, President, Associated Chambers of Commerce & Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) in a press-release.

However, Kanoria added that rationalisation and simplification of tax rates would have benefited the overall ease of doing business; especially keeping in mind that GST implementation seems to have been pushed ahead.

Somit Mazumder, President, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) said in a press-release,

"Budget 2016-17 is well-balanced and comprehensively addresses all aspects that industry was looking for, including revitalizing the rural economy, infrastructure build-up, relief for stressed assets, and simplification of taxes."

At a budget analysis press conference in Chennai, K. Ramesh, Director, CII Tamil Nadu State Office, said that low-cost housing would be a huge demand multiplier.

CII welcomed the measures to revive infrastructure investment such as the new credit rating system and the commitment to issue guidelines for renegotiation of public-private partnerships (PPPs).

Speaking about the new taxes on the automobiles, Ramesh said, "The taxes announced in the Budget 2016 for automobiles would affect all the carmakers but the luxury tax on cars above Rs 10 lakh and 4 per cent tax on sports utility vehicles (SUVs) could go against carmakers like

Mahindra & Mahindra and Toyota who have entered big time in the SUV mHarshvardhan Neotia, President, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) said in a press-release, "Corporate tax rate reduction was something that we were looking at ... a clearer roadmap on how it is going forward...Going forward, we expect some clarity on how the exemptions will be eased out."

"We were also expecting the Government to indicate a gradual reduction and ultimate phase out of Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT). We hope the Government will look into this aspect favourably," he said.

FICCI added that the deduction of Rs. 50,000 on interest paid by first-time home buyers on home loans of up to Rs. 35 lakh was an encouraging move for house buyers in tier-two and tier-three cities.

Neotia said it was good news that the Government stood solidly behind public sector banks and was committed to enhance the capital outlay for recapitalisation of banks. Emphasising the need for a change in the lending norms to fix the problem of non-performing assets, Neotia added, "We still feel that the case for a National Asset Management Company (NAMCO) is strong for government to consider."

*CII said it would have liked to see faster movement on reduction of corporate income taxes, as promised in the last Budget.*

# Duty hike on tobacco

PRASANNA RS

**CHENNAI:** Around 41 per cent of the cancer cases at the Adyar Cancer Institute are tobacco-related, according to an official at the Adyar Cancer Institute.

"The average age of initiation [into cigarette smoking] is now 13 years. Nowadays, we are seeing many oral cancer patients who are in their twenties," said S. Prabhakar, psychologist at the Resource Centre for Tobacco Control in the Institute.

The World Health Organization (WHO) 2015 report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic said, "Raising



Cigarette prices increased by Rs.2 over the past year PHOTO: THE HINDU

taxes on tobacco is the most effective way to reduce tobacco use."

On the face of it, the Indian government has been following WHO's prescription and the taxes on cigarettes have been increased for the fifth consecutive year.

In the Union Budget 2016-17, the excise duties on various tobacco products other than beedi have been increased by about 10 to 15 per cent. The Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, in his budget speech, said that the reason was to discourage consumption of tobacco and tobacco products.

R Renuka, a petty shop vendor in Taramani, said, "The prices of different brands of cigarettes have increased by Rs. 2 over the past year, with a recent one rupee increase on February 15. After the budget, there is talk that cigarette prices would increase further soon."

Thomas Mampilly, a student at the Asian College of Journalism, said that the price of a particular brand, ITC's Gold Flake Lights, had increased from five rupees in 2010 when he first started smoking, to Rs. 12 now.

However, Dr. Rijo M. John, Assistant Professor at IIT Jodhpur and a public health policy expert, said that the tax hikes were not sufficient.

"The average incomes have increased. The cigarette prices have not yet caught up with the increase in purchasing power."

He pointed to the 2015 WHO report which said that cigarettes had become around 10 per cent more affordable in India between 2008 and 2014.

The WHO study measures affordability as the 'per cent of GDP per capita required to purchase 100 packs of the most sold brand of cigarettes in a country.'

Further, Dr. John said that the cigarette taxation system in India was complicated, with cigarettes taxed according to their lengths (<65 mm; 65-70 mm; 70-75 mm; 75-85 mm; > 85 mm).

The tax hike is supposed to serve as a deterrent. However, the companies take advantage of the differential taxation to reduce the prices, he said. "Lesser the length, lesser the tax. So, the cigarette companies cut the length of the cigarettes."

# App for women's health check up at Rs 8 only

PRITHA BANERJEE

**CHENNAI:** Docsapp, a healthcare smart phone application launched by former students of IIT Madras, celebrated International Women's Week by providing consultation with specialist at Rs. 8 for women across India. The application proved beneficial for women said Enbasekar D, co-founder of Docsapp.

"A large number of women seek consultations regarding menstruation problems, pregnancy planning or infertility consultation, pregnancy and post pregnancy care and lactation consultation."

Thus, as a celebration of International Women's Week this offer was started.

Nikhil, Public Relation manager of the company, said, "It has been

only a day since we have opened the offer and we have received over 250 consultation requests. We are hoping for more."

Enbasekar said, "Docsapp is the result of a college project where we developed the app only for cardiologists. As heart problem is a serious issue and it needs immediate action. The project got a lot of positive response and funding."

Now, the application has a network of 120 top doctors in Bangalore, Mumbai and Delhi, and more than 50,000 users. The service hours are from 6 am to 2 am.

"We started with two doctors in August 2015 but within six months we have reached out to six cities," added Satish.

Besides the cost it has helped save time for people.

K Laxmi, a Bangalore based tea-

cher, said, "It is a very convenient way for me as small problems are solved by just a phone call. It is better than self-medicating."

Dr. Santosh Katkar, a Mumbai based doctor, said, "I have been practising medicine for more than 10 years. Sometimes I prescribe medicine to my patients via phone calls, but I know the history of my patients. Through this app I am dealing with patients whom I have never met. It is difficult to prescribe medicine in such situation."

However Dr. T.S. Nagesh, dermatologist, said, "I have been associated with Docsapp for few months now. I feel 72 per cent of the problems patients come up with can be handled online. The app does not treat medical emergency in which case you can go to the nearest hospital."

# 138 portable e-toilets installed

NISHITA GUPTA

**CHENNAI:** Greater Chennai Corporation has installed 183 portable e-toilets around the city, unmanned and fully-automatic – with pre- and post-wash provisions.

Residents usually complain that most existing toilets maintained by the corporation are poorly maintained. They also point out that not enough toilets are available on main roads or in crowded commercial areas.

"It's difficult to use any of the toilets in the city because of the stench. Normally, I use restrooms of malls or hotels," said K Vijayakumari, a commuter in Anna Nagar.

The 183 toilets are part of the project was taken up by the Greater Chennai Corporation, which awarded contracts to set up and maintain 348 modern public toilets to four firms; Namma Toilet, Saraplast, Eram Scientific Solutio and

Wockhardt.

Eram Solutions has installed these near bus shelters, markets and open spaces in various zones including Royapuram, Anna Nagar, Teynampet, Kodambakkam, Adyar and Perungudi.

The self-cleaning and water conservation mechanism in the toilet is what makes it unique. The user has to insert a coin to open the door and its sensor-based light system is automatically turned on once you enter the toilet. It also directs the user with audio commands.

To conserve water, the toilets are programmed to flush 1.5 litres of water after three minutes of usage and 4.5 litres if the usage is longer. This "smart" toilet also washes the platform by itself after every five or 10 persons use the toilet.

Even the floors of these green-colored tin boxes get a thorough wash after each use, keeping them hygienic and stench-free. But



E-toilets near Tambaram Railway station PHOTO: TOI

the facilities come at a cost. Each of these smart toilets cost around Rs. 5 lakh, add to it, a monthly maintenance of Rs. 5,000.

However, the maintainance is not the only challenge e-toilets face.

"It was difficult for us to make people understand the importance of an e-Toilet. They are so used to the idea of a mop and a cleaning lady, that they found it difficult to

trust that this idea could actually work," Bincy Baby, Head Convergence Business Group at Eram Scientific Solutions said.

The e-toilets have solar power options, options to use reduced amount of water and a sensor-enabled system to conserve water and electricity usage. In spite of all this, interrupted supply of electricity and water often affect their smooth functioning.



# EC drive to get more voters

POORANI BALENDRA

**Chennai:** With the assembly elections all set to take place in May, the Election Commission in a bid to increase the voting percentage, has started an intensive awareness campaign to attract first-time voters to register and cast their votes.

The design contract for the campaign was secured by Opn Advertising, a 13-member organisation, the team behind the widely successful 'Whistlepodu' campaign for the now suspended Indian Premier League team, the Chennai Super Kings.

The team manages the Facebook page, TNElections-CEO, and the Twitter handle, @TNElectionsCEO, which are followed by about 27,000 people -- where they publish posters and videos.

After securing the tender, Opn Advertising analysed social media trends and found that people falling within the age group of 18-25 were not discussing elections on social media, said Bala Manian, Director of Strategy.

"People above 30 were talking about the elections. We thought that the youngsters did not even know that the elections were coming. So, we decided to design innovative posters inspired from memes, movies and recent events," she said.

For example, right after Leonardo DiCaprio won the Oscars after a long wait, they came up with a poster that read, "It took 23 years for DiCaprio to get his name on the Oscar winners list. It'll take you 15 minutes to get yours on the voters list."

"Memes and cinema dialogues are already popular on the internet. We just wanted them to talk about voting," Bala added.

The campaign that started around mid-January slowly started to attract the age group that Opn Advertising was targeting.

Among the people sharing and re-tweeting the posters, 67 per cent belonged to the 18-25 age group, said Bala.

a fraction of the total population.

So, to increase voter enrolment, the agency started a 'Registration' campaign followed by a 'Verification' campaign. In the future, it would also promote 'Ethical voting' -- a campaign that discouraged accepting money for votes.

On how rural youth were targeted, Bala said that the agency only designed the awareness material. After that, it was the responsibility of district collectors to promote the idea.

"After we ran the campaign, the registrations on the TN Election Commission website shot up," she said.

Sridhar S, Under Secretary at the Tamil Nadu Chief Electoral Office, said that the success of the campaign could only be measured after the elections got over.

He added that in the past there were not many online campaigns. The potential of social media was not tapped.

Sriram R, a mechanical engineer, said that he was surprised to see 'creative' election campaigns. "In the past, they [campaigns] were mostly preachy...these posters will definitely attract youngsters," he said.

However, Raja A, an engineering student said that besides running the campaigns, the Election Commission should also check how effective the process of issuing voter identity cards was. He added that he had applied for his voter card six months back and was yet to receive the card.



PHOTO: TNELECTIONCEO FACEBOOK PAGE

Besides running campaigns on social media and meme contests on their facebook page, they have also designed posters for 80 bus stands across the city.

"We have roped in famous sportspersons like R Ashwin, Dinesh Karthik and Deepika Pallikal for the campaign," she said.

She also added that the Nadigar Sangam -- the official body for actors in Tamil Nadu -- had offered to involve actors in the awareness campaign.

In the Union Elections held in 2014, the voting percentage in Tamil Nadu was 75 per cent. The number of people on the electoral roll however represented only

# Scramble for political space

NIRUPAMA VISWANATHAN

**Chennai:** Ahead of the Tamil Nadu Assembly Elections scheduled in May, numerous new political parties are hoping to make inroads into the State that has long since been the stronghold of the two Dravidian parties- DMK and AIADMK.

Former President Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam's Scientific Advisor V. Ponraj recently floated the 'Abdul Kalam Vision India Party' after students from various colleges in the State encouraged him to launch a party. The outfit, that aims to take Dr. Kalam's vision to students, is to contest from all the 234 constituencies in the upcoming state assembly elections.

Asked on how the party planned to take on the two Dravidian parties, K.Senthil, a member of V. Ponraj's core committee, said, "We will stick to the ideals of Dr. Kalam and not indulge in dirty politics."

Many of these new political parties are united in their youth-centric approach.

Nam Makkal Nam Nadu, another new party recently organized a rally, inviting the youth from across the city to fight against corruption.



V Ponraj at the launch of his new party.

PHOTO: THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

Siva. Ilango, a member of the Organizing committee of Puthiya Sakthi, an outfit that was launched last week, said, "Everyone is looking for a change and that's why we are here. We primarily focus on the youth and the middle class."

The party grabbed the spotlight for trying to recreate the Aam Aadmi Party model by roping in non-governmental organizations and youth activists and vowing to expose corruption in the Government and bureaucracy.

Saying that their cause was bi-

AIADMK.

S.Prakash, Treasurer in the Tiruvallur Town Congress Office, said that usually the smaller parties strike a deal with the bigger parties and sell off their seats but this time around things seem different.

"They know that after Jayalalithaa, there's no one to lead AIADMK and so with AIADMK out of the way, the small parties are vying for a respectable position in the line-up of parties," he said.

Puko. Saravanan, political analyst said, "In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, there was an overwhelming youth turnout so it was only a matter of time before people scrambled to tap the vote bank."

He said that since youngsters take to social media platforms to express their concerns know what problems need to be addressed.

"But for these youth-centric parties to bank on anti-incumbency, the people of Tamil Nadu should be in dire straits. That's not the case here since the State has been performing well overall except for very few sectors like the agrarian sector," he said.

He added that they will have to focus on strengthening their party's structure and build credibility before they stand a chance.

# Religion over fundamental rights?

NIRUPAMA VISWANATHAN

**Chennai:** With the Supreme Court asking the Centre to respond to a petition challenging the practice of 'triple talaq', the debate continues on whether Personal Laws are exempt from Article 13, that says that any law that violates the fundamental rights becomes void.

Triple Talaq is the practice where a Muslim man is only required to pronounce the word 'talaq' three times in order to divorce his wife. The law has lent itself to easy abuse with instances of husbands claiming validity of the divorce after simply writing the word three times in an email or a Whatsapp message to their wives.

"It is scary to even think that something that a man says, perhaps in a fit of rage or even otherwise, can lead to the dissolution of the marriage. Divorce should be based on mutual consent no matter which religion you belong to," said Aaliya Rahim, a mother of a three-year-old.

The practice has drawn criticism from various quarters for being unfair to women along with other practices such as polygamy and nikah halala, a Sharia law that says that for a

*"Judges in these bodies have exhibited an extremely wavering attitude in testing the constitutionality of personal laws"*  
- Mihir Desai (HR Lawyer in an article for 'India Together')

couple to remarry, the woman should marry another man and wait for him to die or divorce her before reuniting with her first husband.

Despite the criticism, lawyers said that it was reasonably difficult to challenge the Personal Law on grounds of violation of Article 13.

Mihir Desai, a human rights lawyer, in an article for 'India Together', wrote "Judges in these bodies have exhibited an extremely wavering attitude in testing the constitutionality of

personal laws"

Suhirth Parthasarathy, a lawyer practising in the Madras High Court, said, "It is difficult since the law is fairly clear in that Muslim personal laws may not fall within the meaning of law under Article 13."

It is not just Muslim women who feel discriminated against. The recent case against the restrictions on entry of women into the Sabarimala temple has also raised questions on the validity of religious laws against fundamental rights. However, in this case, the counsel for Travancore Devaswom Board argued that the entry laws enjoy protection under Article 26 (b) that guarantees a religious organization autonomy in deciding what rites and ceremonies are essential according to the tenets of the religion.

In reply to the board's contention that the restriction was a custom, the court had asked the Devaswom board to present proof that women did not enter the sanctum sanctorum 1500 years ago.

However, journalist and women's rights activist Kavitha Muralidharan said, "The Queen of Travancore reportedly visited the temple in 1940. If it had been a custom, how could they have bent the rules for the Queen?"

## SPORTS

# WC T20: No India matches in Chennai

PRASANNA RS

**Chennai:** None of the matches in the T20 Cricket World Cup, the sixth edition of the tournament starting on March 8, will be played in the southern metropolis, Chennai.

"Only a few matches of the Women's T20 World Cup [which runs parallel to the main event] will take place here," said the International Cricket Council (ICC) spokesperson, Raymond Palmer who was at Chepauk's M.A. Chidambaram Stadium to launch the Team Swachh clinic, an ICC-UNICEF joint initiative to increase awareness about sanitation and promote toilet use.

But the Chennai crowd will not get to witness even the Indian women in action as none of the four women's matches scheduled here feature India.

The reason -- three stands of the stadium (the I, J, K sections) which were constructed before the 50-over World Cup in 2011 had been sealed by the Chennai Cor-



The three sealed stands at M A Chidambaram stadium.

PHOTO: PRASANNA RS

poration for the past three years after a dispute with the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association (TNCA), and the ICC did not want matches with empty stands to be televised, said TNCA employees maintaining the Chepauk stadium.

The Chennai Corporation has asked the TNCA to create a space between the three stands and the Madras Cricket Club (MCC) in order to allow fire engines to come in, the employees added.

According to a report in the sports news website, ESPN-Cri-

cinfo, the MCC's gym was to be demolished and 'the approval of the heritage committee was needed' as MCC is a heritage structure.

However, Dr. R.N. Baba, former Team India Media Manager and TNCA office bearer, said, "Though there are heritage structures nearby, the library, which is to be demolished, is not one."

The ball was now with the State Government, he added.

A lawyer at the Madras High Court said that it was a shame that

no matches were going to be held in Chennai and added that it was essentially a political issue.

V Harish Kumar, who works at Capgemini and has been to Chepauk more than 20 times, said it was a major disappointment.

"I came here to watch the 1999 Test Match against Pakistan. The knowledgeable and sporting crowd of Chennai, which even applauded Pakistan after their narrow victory, has now been denied a chance to watch the Indian team in action."

Harish, who is also a member of a cricket fan club, added that even IPL matches would not be held at Chepauk this year.

The local team, Chennai Super Kings (CSK), has been suspended from the IPL for two years by a Supreme Court appointed committee after the owners were allegedly found involved in betting.

Harish said that he planned to go to Bangalore and Mumbai, along with other members of the fan club, to watch some of the World Cup matches.



Cricketers Dinesh Karthik and Mithali Raj at the Swachh clinic event.

PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

# Batting for a clean city

PRIYANKA DAS

**Chennai:** It was a different innings for cricketers and officials at the M A Chidambaram stadium at Chepauk here: they were on a country-wide tour to promote sanitation and stop open defecation.

Swachh Clinic a joint effort of the International Cricket Council and UNICEF reached the city on March 1, as part of the T20 World Cup host city tour.

Chennai was the sixth stop on the city tour.

"It is important to use the incredible platform of cricket to promote sanitation and toilet use," said Raymond Palmer, the ICC spokesperson.

A specially designed double decker bus arrived at the Chepauk stadium along with school children and the WT20 Men's and Women's trophies. Mithali Raj captain of the women's team and Dinesh Karthik wicketkeeper - batsman of the

men's team interacted with the children, played cricket, clicked photographs and demonstrated the five steps of washing hands at the event.

M Sangita, a class eight student at the St Josephs School, said she was happy to have gotten a chance to come to a place like this.

"I will inform my friends about washing hands properly," she said.

Sugata Roy, communication specialist, UNICEF, said the campaign brought together cricket and children to create awareness on the issue of sanitation, as the latter were powerful agents of social change. When children propagated the message, it had a cascading effect on the community, Roy added.

Job Zachariah, Chief of the UNICEF Field Office, said this time, 'the cricket for good' was focusing on sanitation; later it could be menstrual hygiene, malnutrition, child labour and others.

"Cricket is a popular medium and the reach is wider. We view the

initiative as a social mobilization activity," he said.

The Chennai event is just the curtain raiser. It will be replicated during every match of the World Cup with prominent players. Around 10 to 20 crore people watched the sport, and even if 10 per cent of them could translate the sanitation message into action, it would yield a positive result, said Roy.

Arun Dobhal, UNICEF's Water, Sanitation and Hygiene specialist (WASH) said the event was an advertisement and part of a strategic plan to create an enabling environment and improve the field level awareness. Many educated people were also not aware of sanitation issues.

The ICC-UNICEF collaboration on sanitation which began last month has roped in Sachin Tendulkar as the ambassador. The partnership was for five years, Palmer said.

# Swimmers complain about unclean pool

ONKAR SURVE

**Chennai:** Badly maintained swimming pools at the Velachery Aquatic Complex (VAC) in Guindy have become a major problem for swimmers.

B. Vivek, fourth year mechanical engineering student at Anna University said, "There were rashes on my skin after swimming in the pool."

He added that the pools were not properly cleaned. "I stopped coming here after that incident," he said.

However, authorities at the VAC claimed that the swimming pools were cleaned daily.

R. Abhishek, a swimming enthusiast who used to travel from Tambaram to swim at the

VAC, said that once the cleaners started adding bleaching powder to the pool water while he was swimming.

"My eyes started burning because of it," he said.

Others said the changing rooms were unhygienic and very badly maintained. The changing booths didn't have doors. The hourly rate for swimming at the VAC was Rs. 100 but swimmers said that the authorities didn't give a receipt.

However, K. Umapathy who heads the inquiry desk at the VAC said that though the visitors weren't given a receipt, the VAC maintained a proper record of all the visitors.

R.V. Veerabadrhan, Stadium Officer, VAC said, "The aquatic complex is built to meet in-

ternational standards. Last December the Tamil Nadu Government sanctioned more funds for upgradation of the VAC and after it is upgraded we'll hold international competitions here."

The VAC, operated by the Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu (SDAT), is a premier aquatic sports complex of Chennai.

According to the VAC website the complex was built in 1995 at a cost of Rs.11.32 crores. Four thousand spectators can watch aquatic events in this complex which consists of one 8-lane racing pool of 50m x 25m, one diving pool of 18m x 25m and one warm up pool of 25m x 25m. Besides these facilities, one fitness centre and an indoor hall for gymnastics are also available in the complex.



# Beyond the camera lens

RASHMIKA MAJUMDAR

**Chennai:** Bonnie Chu, Nayantara Kakshapati Gurung, Karoline Klueppel and Smita Sharma are photographers from different parts of the world. But a common thread that brought them together in an all

## Photo Expo

women's panel at the Beyond Boundaries symposium in the first Chennai Photo Biennale was that they embodied the spirit of human rights through photography.

All four of them have used photography as a means to further human rights issues. They have also photographed women and marginalised communities, covering a wide range of little known cultures and practices.

Bonnie Chu talked about breaking the stereotypical portrayal of women from developing countries.

"When we look at where a person comes from, there are many nuances and we need to understand the history and the whole story of this person's life," said Bonnie.

She talked about her journey in Turkey where four girls clicked pictures with her, and they later contacted each other through Facebook.

"They are Muslim girls with head scarves, but through photography, I got to know much more. By bringing out these narratives women through powerful images, we change our perception about a woman or a person belonging to a certain religion," she added.

German photographer Karoline Klueppel chose a combination of staged photographs and reportage in her series which featured young girls from a Khasi village in Meghalaya. The girls are captured by Klueppel while surrounded by items from their daily life.

"I had initially decided to stay in Meghalaya for two or three weeks



An Indian survivor of sexual violence PHOTO: SMITA SHARMA

but I ended but staying for six months in the village. I could connect very easily with the girls. The Khasi culture is a very friendly and open-minded one," said Klueppel.

Going beyond the boundaries of political power was Nayantara's aim. Through the Nepal Picture Library project, the Nepali photographer aims to record the history of the most marginalised tribes in Nepal and go beyond just Kathmandu, the nation's economic and

political centre. "My concern has been identifying lines that have been historically drawn and exist in the present, spilling over to gender, political and representational issues. This is relevant because we have a new constitution, and we need a more inclusive past in order to look forward," Nayantara said.

Transgressing boundaries of violence and choosing women who are survivors of rape and sexual vio-

lence from the most marginalised societies as her subjects, former Indian journalist and photographer Smita Sharma, now based in New York, chooses to tell stories which are ignored by the media.

"Except for the Park Street rape case, few victims received media attention. I never ask the women how they were raped. But when I talk to the families of survivors, they open up to me," said Smita.

Smita spoke about going beyond her role as a photographer when an 80-year-old woman in a village in Uttar Pradesh was raped, and her family was ostracised for years.

After her death, Smita organised an event in her honour and talked about the injustice that the woman had to suffer. The villagers understood through dialogue and discussion and the discrimination stopped eventually.

Smita photographed her subjects in color as she learned to appreciate colours when she was in New York, taking care to conceal their identity.

## INTERMIXING SPACES

# More than just a bookstore

RAM SARANGAN

**Chennai:** Bringing customers to explore historical, cultural and political spaces has been the driving force behind the Panuval Book Store, in Tiruvanniyur.

"When the store was conceptualized, the owners didn't just want it to be a place for business transactions. They wanted to reach out to the local community and involve them in reading as well as an awareness of the issues around them," said Rajkumar (30), a manager at the store.

The bookstore, opened in 2013 by three retired IT workers, set itself apart as a space that focused on pressing issues, primarily environmental ones. It has screened documentaries, invited environmental activists to talk to people, and has even begun to publish (once every two months) a magazine called *Kaadu* (Forest).

The store has also gained a reputation for providing a platform for alternative voices such as Dalit and feminist authors, supporters of a Dravidian nation and communist writers. Pulp favorites such as the *Vikatan* magazine or *Kungumam* magazine are absent, as are many other commercial writers one might normally expect to find in a Tamil bookstore.

"We want to surprise customers by showing them a selection of books outside of their expectations. Many of our first time customers choose to come back, by asking us to notify them about events we hold, or by becoming a member," said John Moses, another manager at the store.

The store hosts everything from book readings, to movie screenings, to interactions with personalities. An event sees an average of 60-65 people attending, and the store holds four events a week, from Thursday to Sunday. According to the staff,

most visitors were students, and over 2500 people have joined the notification list.

"Once in a while, we hold a discussion on a pressing current issue. Soon, we're planning to host an event related to the JNU struggle," said Rajkumar, adding that they also helped student-run organizations circulate their newspapers.

Panuval also raises awareness about local history and culture. Apart from inviting Tamil historians to speak at their events, it takes people on tours to historical locations in and around the city, explaining their significance and references in classic Tamil literature.

"Apart from places of historical significance, we also try to re-educate people about siru dhaniyanan (types of millet grains) and the local produce of the region. We plan to hold a food festival where we will be bringing in the specialties of many regions in Tamil Nadu, and re-acquaint people, especially the younger generation, with their roots," said Rajkumar.

While many retail bookstore owners have cited decreased reading levels for a fall in sales, the Panuval staff have a different take. For them, a book store cannot simply confine itself to acquiring and dispensing books. Their aim is to turn the space of a bookstore into a community space, where people will feel connected to other people and other media as well. This format has already appealed to other bookstore owners, who are planning to emulate the concept in some form.

"The concept of conducting events that connect to the kind of literature and causes they represent is a good experiment, and something that has succeeded with positive results for both the store its customers," said Prof. A R Venkatchalopathy, one of Panuval's visitors.

## MRTS turns gallery of photos by Down's patients

RASHMIKA MAJUMDAR

**Chennai:** An idol of Ganesha peeps out from behind a row of neatly arranged red pomegranates; behind the Ganesha idol, a boy peers curiously at the photographer.

This photograph is among the several with everyday subjects from the streets and slums of the city that adorned the stained and dingy pink walls turning the otherwise desolate Thiruvanniyur railway station into a photo gallery.

The photographs were clicked by women with Down Syndrome from the Mathru Mandir, and NalandaWay Foundation, which work for the rehabilitation of children with



PHOTO: RASHMIKA MAJUMDAR

the genetic disorder. The 14 women, aged 30 and above, were trained in photography at a two-day workshop conducted by Lensational, a Hong Kong based not-for-profit organisation which empowers women through photography.

The women captured moments of everyday life around Kapaleeshwar temple at Mylapore, Nageswara Rao Park and the slums at Perambur and Kodungaiyur dump yard.

One of the pictures shows a disfigured statue of the Laughing Buddha while in another, a girl holding a pot looks on as garbage surrounds her, depicting her living conditions. Scattered rose petals, a caged idol and children holding cameras were among the other subjects that the women chose, finding a new way to express themselves.

Lavanya, one of the shutterbugs at the station, said, "Flowers, I love clicking flowers. I love clicking pictures. I love colours."

Lavanya's mother, Vanaja, who was at the station on the day the photographs were unveiled, said, "Even as a kid, Lavanya loved her pictures being clicked. At home, she always takes the phone away and starts clicking pictures. After learning the art of photography, she is clicking pictures of everything around her and it is interesting to see the world through her eyes."

"Pictures that only family members would see, will now be seen by a large audience,"



A LAUGHING BUDDHA PHOTO: RASHMIKA MAJUMDAR

she added, smiling proudly.

The co-founder of Lensational, Bonnie Chu, who met the women for the first time, couldn't stop smiling as she saw the fruits of the initiative.

"It is so wonderful to see all these moments come to life. We are currently looking for organisations and individuals which can purchase these photographs and in this way, economically empower the women," said

Bonnie.

Lensational trains women from developing countries such as Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Thailand and Kenya to empower them through photography and to give them a voice.

The President of the Down Syndrome Association of Tamil Nadu, Dr Rekha Ramachandran, whose two daughters have clicked pictures said that she was amazed at the new avenues that have opened for the women.

"Every optometician has told me that both my daughters, Babli and Arti, have no vision. And see how

perfectly they have taken photographs. All the women were so confident with the camera, and they are telling us something in their own language. It is amazing," Ramachandran said.

The photo exhibition, which will be open till March 13, has been organised by the Chennai Photo Biennale in association with Goethe Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan.

## 'Harrowing time' for flood hero

PRANAMI TAMULI

**Chennai:** The December floods in Chennai saw some unlikely heroes leading from the front in the operations to rescue people and animals.

A member of the Blue Cross Rescue Squad, Motiur Rahman claims he has rescued over a thousand animals in the three years he has worked at Blue Cross.

But in December, the 21-year-old from the Barpeta district of Assam, said it was the first time he had saved human lives and the experience was harrowing.

"I had to decide who to save first. It wasn't easy."

Talking about Motiur, Dawn Williams, General Manager of Blue Cross, said "He is one of my best boys. During the floods, he jumped into the Adyar river to lead a stranded buffalo across it. He didn't have to do it but he did."

Motiur said he didn't think twice about diving into a river in spite.

"I spent my childhood swimming in the Brahmaputra. It is an angry, unpredictable river. The Adyar river was not a challenge."

Floods are not new to Motiur. "We have floods every year at home. For three months of the year, our houses and fields lie submerged in water. When the floods happened in Chennai, I was in my element."

However, the helplessness of the city was painful to watch.

"Unlike Assam, nobody here was prepared for the floods. People were stranded for days on their terraces, on trees and bits of high ground. Some were hysterical, others were struck dumb."

Motiur describes how he swam almost two kilometres to reach an old woman who had been stuck on her roof for four days. "She was weak and could barely move. I wrapped her across my back and



PHOTO: PRANAMI TAMULI

was about to swim back when I saw that she had a child with her. I had to hoist the girl around my neck. It took me two hours to bring them back to safety."

Another disturbing incident was when a boat carrying both animals and children capsized. "We were able to save the people but most of the animals were swept away."

Motiur came to Chennai three years ago to visit a friend who was working at the Madras Riding School. He was drawn to the Blue Cross, its premises being just opposite to the riding school.

Dawn Williams asked him to stay on as an attendant but a dramatic incident changed that.

"A rescued bull suddenly went on a rampage, injuring the attendants who tried to restrain it. I grabbed it by its horns, subduing it long enough for others to tranquilize it," said Motiur.

Impressed with his courage, Williams made him a part of the rescue squad. There has been no looking back ever since.

"Chennai is like home now. I miss my village but the rescue squad is like family. I won't go back because my work here will never be done. There's a new life to save every day," he said, before leaving to rescue a goat that had fallen into a well.

## Popularity of Sanskrit courses rising steadily

NISHITA GUPTA

**Chennai:** The Ramakrishna Math commenced a new batch for its sixth month Vivekananda Sanskrit course here on Wednesday.

In a small function, prayers were offered to the Holy Trio for an auspicious beginning and a welcome address was given by Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj, the Adhyaksha of Sri Ramakrishna Math.

Students from previous years' batches addressed the gathering and shared their experiences. K Arusmani, a 54-year-old retired teacher said, "The Math helps people understand our scriptures. Lessons get lost in translation but reading scripts in their original language helps understand them better."

The course is divided into two levels - Level I helps learners speak in Sanskrit and understand simple shlokas. In Level II, learners will be taught to read and understand texts like Ramayana and Bhagwad Gita.

"Classes for Level I take place on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and for Level II on every Tuesday and Thursday," said Balasundaram, a volunteer.

There was a Shibiram (introductory classes) for 10 days prior to the function. "We introduce learners to Sanskrit even before they start learning, it helps immensely in regular classes," he added.

The course hosts students of various age groups. R Ganesh, a resident of T Nagar, who has joined the classes with her daughter, a student in Class VIII, said, "It's a nice way of keeping children grounded. She is learning a new language and understanding her culture better."

Exams, both oral and written, will be held from time to time. "These classes take me back to school days. It's really nostalgic, at the same time, the course suits my age!" said Somasundar Rao V, a 64 year old retired librarian.

## Revival of typewriting courses

PRASANNA S

**Chennai:** Typewriters are still in use and several institutes continue to conduct classes in typewriting.

For the past six months, there has been a steady increase in the enrollments at the Indira Nagar Typewriting Institute, despite an earlier decrease in numbers.

T. S. Satyanarayanan, an instructor at the institute said, "For the past five years, there had been a steady decrease in the enrollment of students. But we wanted to continue the legacy of the institute."

Started in 1974, the institute held classes throughout the day. Shorthand was also in huge demand. But after computers came into vogue and students began flocking to engineering institutions, the number of students lessened.

The institute had to cut down the number of classes due to the decrease in numbers, and stopped shorthand classes three years ago.

"A student has to devote a lot of time to practise shorthand and it is



Students at Suresh Typewriting Institute PHOTO: PRASANNA S

very difficult. The engineering courses demand their attention a lot and they drop out of the courses," Satyanarayanan said.

"After completing engineering courses, students do not get good jobs and work for Rs. 8000/- per month. They have begun to realize that learning typewriting and shorthand helps them secure government jobs with a starting salary of Rs. 25,000/- per month," he added.

Satyanarayanan said that there was a huge demand in various government institutions for secreta-

ries who have certificates in Typewriting (Higher) and Shorthand (Higher), but such people were often found at present.

S. Adam, an instructor at the Suresh Typewriting Institute in Porur, said, "Having certificates in typewriting and shorthand gives automatic employment in government institutions. It is a basic requirement in various TNPSC examinations."

He added that there was a very high demand for people qualified in Tamil typewriting.

## Ruining a postal worker's Sunday

PRASANNA S

the Postal Assistant to get a card for me so that I have first-hand experience with the ATM.

As I was waiting for my card, I

### Humour

went through my notes. There was something that could be asked, I thought, because I didn't want to sit there, feeling awkward. And I found one.

"Are the ATMs open on Sundays?" I asked.

He thought for a while. "I don't know that myself," he said and rang for his PA.

Enter PA.

"Are the ATMs open on Sunday?" he asked his PA.

"No, sir," he answered, cautiously.

"Why?"

"Sir... I don't know, sir."

"Ask Jayanthi to come here."

"Yes, sir."

Exit PA.

"They must keep the post office open on Sundays," he tells me.

I nod.

Enter Jayanthi.

"Sir, the Deputy Postmaster asked that the ATM remain closed on Sundays."

"Was it written order?"

"No, sir."

"Then the ATM must remain

open. The banks will be closed on Sundays and what use would that be if the ATM is also closed? Appoint someone for an 8-8 shift for Sundays also."

"Yes, sir."

Exit Jayanthi.

The Chief Postmaster spoke with the Deputy Postmaster over phone and came to a consensus about opening the ATM on Sundays.

After he hung up, he said, "This is the work of a journalist, bringing about a change, for the greater good. Now the ATM will be open on Sundays under someone's supervision!"

And that's how I ruined someone's Sunday.