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# EC to woo new voters

### Election Commission goes online for the first time for Tamil Nadu polls

MD. IBRAR ARSHAD

**Chennai, March 9:** With the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections scheduled for May 16, the Election Commission has come up with several innovative programmes to target the voters.

It has set up camps at colleges to help students of ages 18 and above to get their names enrolled in the voters' list. An online enrolment drive is also under way in many colleges. The students can apply online from their colleges, the applications will be processed at the zonal offices, and their electoral photo identity card (EPIC) cards will be delivered to them in person.

Also, the young and first-time voters could register themselves through an android app, recently launched by the EC, called 'TNelections'. This app provides the voters with a number of benefits, which also includes complaint registration.

"The voters could get information about the elections and about their constituencies through the app. The registration process is very simple, and the voters can avail themselves of all the services of the Commission," Chief Electoral Officer Rajesh Lakhoni said.

Lakhoni is hopeful of a huge turnout this year. "Our motto is 100 per cent fair elections and 100 per cent turnout."

The EC has set up a Voter

Verifiable Paper Audit Trail or VVPAT in 17 constituencies of Tamil Nadu, and in the Anna Nagar constituency in Chennai. Through this, the voters will be able to see and verify whom they have voted for. A separate VVPAT

influence of certain political parties, there have been complaints about posters and illegal graffiti art.

The EC has employed the Election Department of the Chennai Corporation to assist it in

Voter Registration Centers all over Chennai, where people can get themselves registered."

The Corporation has also allotted a number of teams for various election related activities. This includes 16 flying squads consisting of an executive magistrate, Sub-Inspector (SI) and a videographer. In addition, there are teams which will keep a watch on the movement of cash, illegal liquor and suspicious items. The teams will also capture footage of various election-related activities in the constituencies.

According to Kannan, the political parties should themselves pay the price for the removal of all illegal articles and advertisements.

"This will be included in their election expense," Kannan added. Lakhoni said "We have made sure that the images or names of political leaders are not displayed on the government schemes."

Complaints of non-payment of flood relief and health benefits have flooded the EC office at the Secretariat. Many people have complained that in the fear of violating the model code, the government has discontinued with its previous policies.

Tamil Nadu State Election Commissioner Lakhoni said "There have been allegations that predated orders were issued even one or two days after the announcement of the elections, by making it appear that they were issued before the announcement of the polls."



Posters being removed by the Chennai Corporation ahead of polls.

machine, along with the ballot unit will be placed where the voters can get a printed result of the vote cast.

The EC has also unveiled a mobile number - 9444123456; which the public can use to lodge their complaints. People can also send images or videos to this number through WhatsApp.

Over the past one week, since the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) has been in place, the EC has received over 400 complaints from all over Chennai. Particularly in areas, which have

removing illegal banners and flexi boards all over the city, especially in RK Nagar, Anna Nagar, Teynampet and Periamet, where over 4,000 posters have been removed.

"In the city area, any form of writing or painting cannot be done without permission on public or private properties," said K. Kannan, Deputy District Election Officer at the Corporation.

He also said, "We provide logistics and manpower to the EC. The corporation has set up 40



Luz Corner bus stop remains deserted as buses keep halting at the Mylapore crossing.

# Buses don't stop, traffic does

MD. AFFANUL HAQUE

**Chennai, March 10:** Metropolitan Transport Corporation (MTC) buses do not stop at the halts built for the purpose but at undesignated spots near traffic signals, disrupting the movement of other vehicles and inconveniencing passengers.

Near Luz corner, a new passenger shelter was constructed by the Chennai Corporation a few months back a hundred metres away from the crossing. But MTC bus drivers prefer halting the buses right near the crossing, where the old bus stop had been located. Unwary passengers waiting at the new shelter run after the buses which go past them and halt at the old stop.

"The shelter is in a wrong place because passengers wait at the signal. We stop there to get more passengers," says MTC bus driver D. Mayadevam, who has been driving on Thiruvanniyur - Broadway route for the past nine years.

Tamil Selvarajam, Assistant Director (Public Relations), MTC, said "The Chennai Corporation is in charge of building passenger shelters

at bus stops and have constructed over 400 bus stops in the past year. The response is not good as people prefer standing on the road rather than sitting in the shelter."

The traffic cop stationed at the Mylapore crossing blamed both the drivers and the passengers for the traffic mess at peak hours.

"Bus drivers rush to overtake, and are not able to stop at the passenger shelter. A new bus stop has been created by the drivers at the signal as they only stop here," he said.

Selvarajam however justified the location of the bus stop at Mylapore saying that its close proximity to the Vidya Mandir Senior Secondary School was the reason why the Corporation decided to construct the shelter there. Students and parents used the passenger shelter every day.

However Mythili Raghavan (76), who goes to Vidya Mandir Senior Secondary School to pick her grandson, gets annoyed each day because the MTC buses do not stop at the correct location.

"I am an old woman with a small child, I have to rush to get on the bus because they don't stop where we wait," says Raghavan.

At Gandhinagar in Adyar, the actual location where buses stop is 100 metres away from when the passenger shelter is located. Buses coming in from Madhya Kailash crossing, do not stop at the passenger shelter and race to cross the traffic signal before halting, thereby forcing the passengers to stand in the open rather than at the shelter.

Arun Daniel (45), works in the IT sector and travels to Guindy on the MTC buses. Each day is a new struggle for him to catch the bus. "Having to stand in the sun and not at the passenger shelter is irritating. Buses try avoiding the signals and overtake other buses to pickup more passengers, thereby making us stand in the sun."

Just outside Guindy Railway station, the old bus shelter was recently demolished to construct a new one. It has however been four months, but the shelter has not yet been constructed. Commuters have to wait for buses right on the main road, often causing traffic snarls.

Selvarajam was quick to pass the blame on the Corporation as MTC didn't have any say in construction of passenger shelters.



Mark Salter speaking at the panel discussion of his book, 'To End a Civil War'.

# The battle for peace

P NILESH CHRISTOPHER

**Chennai, March 8:** The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) supreme Velupillai Prabhakaran was warned many times to stop killing if he wanted the ban on his organisation to be lifted, said Erik Solheim, former special envoy to Sri Lanka.

Solheim was speaking at a panel discussion on the book, 'To end a Civil War: Norway's Peace Engagement in Sri Lanka' organized by the Madras Book Club at the Asian College of Journalism.

Solheim who worked to facilitate peace in Sri Lanka cited the inability of the two main political forces - Sri Lanka Freedom Party and United National Party - to work together and Prabhakaran's violent attitude as the impediments for peace.

Solheim said that Anton Balasingham - Chief negotiator of the LTTE - was the key person who brought in national experience and knowledge into the LTTE leadership.

"After his [Balasingham] death,

Prabhakaran came up with no political or military initiative [to resolve the issue]. LTTE was on the receiving side from that day onwards, nothing positive happened. It boiled down to the fact that there was no Balasingham to advise the leader," he added.

Countering Solheim's stand point, N.Ram, Chairman of Kasturi and Sons Ltd, said, "Balasingham did not represent the political programme of the LTTE at all. He could have never stopped Prabhakaran from carrying on with his terrorist activity and political stupidity."

Calling the Norwegian engagement with Balasingham as 'fatal' and 'miscalculated', Ram said "Balasingham was like Prabhakaran's external affairs minister, the way Sushma Swaraj is Narendra Modi's External Affairs Minister. His views don't count."

Criticizing the Norwegians for 'crossing the lines' as a facilitator, Ram said, "Instead of being facilitators with strict lines they went ahead and became mediators."

"Norway should not have

equated the state with the LTTE," he added.

Ram said the imposition of the proposal for a united Sri Lanka on the LTTE was due to the weight of International public opinion.

"This was not a break through. There was no way there was going to be a peace settlement. Prabhakaran never pretended to settle for any political solution other than a separate state of Tamil Eelam," he added.

However, "Norway did a good job in keeping the ceasefire going as long as it did, however flawed it was," he said.

Responding to session moderator Gopalkrishna Gandhi's question on the Norwegian peace talks enabling the LTTE to regroup and revitalize, Solheim said, it was a small price to pay to find a potential peace settlement to the conflict.

Mark Salter, the author of the book, backed Solheim and emphasized the importance of the role played by Norway in the peace process.

Salter said, "Sri Lanka wanted a light-weight facilitator, that way Norway did justice to its role."

# Elderly take MTC for a 'ride'

JOHN ABRAHAM

**Chennai, March 9:** Senior citizens are misusing the free bus-travel scheme implemented by the Metropolitan Transport Corporation (MTC) here last month, say officials who blame non-computerization of records as the reason for the problem.

The scheme that was launched on February 24 allowing citizens aged above 60 years to have ten free MTC bus-rides a month requires them to collect the tokens and the pass in person from the nearest designated bus depot or terminuses.

There are 42 such authorised stops in the city, now distributing tokens for three months in advance after verification of the credentials of the senior citizens with the documents submitted for proof. The data is however, registered in handwritten

records and can only be checked manually.

However, some beneficiaries are coming back to collect more tokens so that they travel more than the stipulated 10 times a month.

"Some citizens, after collecting the tokens, appear a week later to collect them again. Some, who get it in the morning, return that very evening. If you recognize them, something could be done about it. It's futile otherwise," said an official at the bus depot in Thiruvanniyur.

There are others who simultaneously visit different designated stops nearby and collect tokens by submitting separate documents at each place.

"They hold up to three passes collected from multiple depots," said Chandran, a senior MTC official.

The officials identify such

offenders from the different documents they submit.

"There are three to four people who have committed the act," he said. "They [the checking squad] seize their documents but don't fine them though. What can they do to senior citizens after all?" he added.

Officials at Pallavan House, the MTC headquarters, were unavailable for clarification.

Officials feel that the hurried implementation of the scheme after Chief Minister Jayalalithaa announced it as fulfillment of her 2011 election manifesto caused the confusion.

Chandran said every senior citizen should not have been considered eligible and an economic baseline should have been fixed.

"In the future, senior citizens will be asked to produce an extra

document for submission as proof," said Chandran.

The MTC would also look into computerized data entry although it needs to be seen if the scheme would continue, he added.

Reactions of the public on the free bus-travel scheme were diverse. "It is enough to have ten tokens a month. Since we travel little, we don't need much" said Antony (70), a retired telecommunications employee from Ayanavaram. Ravindran (63), a resident of Kelambakkam, said, "There is no direct bus to T.Nagar from here, and whenever I have work there, I end up taking up to three buses one-way alone. I will spend all the tokens within a day."

"Why does it [the scheme] have to come at the last minute? It is only an election stunt to woo the voters just before the elections," said Ravindran.

# Pvt. schools sing the National Anthem

GOKUL M. NAIR

**Chennai, March 10:** The Madras High Court order making singing of the national anthem compulsory in all private schools in Tamil Nadu has been received well in most schools in the city, with many already declaring that they have been following the practice for quite some time.

"It is very surprising that there were schools that didn't provide for the singing of the national anthem. Here, we hoist the national flag every Monday and sing the national anthem. It is the least respect that we can give to the country," said Ms. Amudhalakshmi, Principal of Chettinad Vidyashram in Adyar.

Most of the private schools mentioned by the petitioner K.Selvathirumal, including Chettinad Vidyashram, Maharishi Vidya Mandir, DAV Girls Senior Secondary School and Bhavan's Rajaji Vidyashram already have a tradition of singing the national anthem during assembly hours.

"We received a circular from the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) in November

2015, in which one of the points mentioned was to pay due respect to the country and the national anthem by singing it at least during the assembly and including it in the curriculum. Since then, we

part of their curriculum, if not since the beginning, at least since the last 2-3 months.

"I have been studying in Bhavan's Rajaji Vidyashram since the 5th standard, and we have always sung the national anthem during assembly," said Jaswanth, a class 12 student of the school.

Though it was not mandatory in certain Christian educational institutions, the recent order has urged the managements of a few schools to take steps to introduce it.

"We are yet to convene a meeting of the school administration. After that, we will definitely take a decision regarding the High Court order. Since the board exams are happening now, we will make a decision on it with respect to the new academic year," said Manoharan.S, General Manager of St. Patrick's Educational Institutions.

The High Court's decision was based on a petition from Selvathirumal, who said that it was necessary for every citizen to know the national anthem pay respect to the national flag.



PHOTO: GOKUL NAIR

Morning assembly at Chettinad Vidyashram in Chennai.

have been singing it every day at 8.45 am, after the second period. There is no question of disobeying the CBSE's directions," said a school official at Maharishi Vidya Mandir in Chetpet.

Students corroborate this view, adding that most schools have incorporated the national anthem as



## Illiterate emigrants easy target for fraudsters

MARIA KURUVILLA

**Chennai, March 10:** Workers from India, lured to other countries under the pretext of landing a good job and providing for their family, often end up returning empty handed with no visa or money to survive. Their inability to do the job offered to them often leads to them accepting menial jobs in order to stay on in a foreign country, leading to further exploitation, according to officials.

According to the office of the Protector of Emigrants (PoE), skilled and unskilled workers from rural pockets of Tamil Nadu often apply for jobs in foreign countries in order to ease their financial burden. While the age for eligibility of male workers is right after their education (class X), women are eligible to apply only if they are 30 years of age or above.

"Many of the people who come to the PoE are uneducated and are easy prey for foreign employers as well as agents looking to make quick money. Once they reach foreign lands, they are under the care of their employer," says P. Sajith, an official from the PoE, Ashok Pillar, Chennai.

While jobs for women are those of house-maids and nannies, men are offered the position of driver, cook or cleaner. Their inability to work in that particular field may force them to take up other less-paying jobs that are different from what they have

been granted a permit for.

"A person who has applied to another country for a job as a driver is given six months to acquire a permanent driver's license after which he can begin his job. However most of these jobs include computerized tests and practical work which is often difficult for the uneducated emigrant to complete following which he is either sent home or offered a menial job for a meager sum of money," an official from the Commissionerate of Rehabilitation and Welfare of Non-Resident Tamils said.

The procedure to apply for a job in a foreign country is usually taken care of by an agent who contacts the PoE as well as foreign employers. It is the duty of the employer to then provide all necessary documentation including a Memorandum of Understanding and a registration certificate to an Indian Mission office in his respective country.

A local agent from the worker's village will connect him/her to another agent who can then help the individual acquire a visa. Most of the work is done online making it easier for the worker as well as officials.

"For the past one and a half years we have been operating online except when a bank Chellan has to be paid for which the emigrant or his agent will come to us with the money required, depending on the job designation as well as the country.

The employers need to fill in the application on our website: www.emigrate.gov.in which makes it a much quicker process. We also have a list of registered agents under whom these people can acquire information and visas. We are doing what we can to avoid fraud of any kind," Sajith says.

According to the Emigration Act (1983), a foreign employer has to be registered under the PoE before recruiting potential employees. An application for this can either be submitted to the nearest Indian Mission office in the employers' country or to the office of the Protector General of Emigrants, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, Akbar Bhavan, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi.

Despite the efforts made by welfare organizations such as the Commissionerate of Rehabilitation and Welfare of Non-Resident Tamils as well as the measures taken by the PoE, people in rural areas continue to fall prey to unscrupulous agents.

Apart from problems arising due to their lack of knowledge and education, many of these emigrants also face a culture shock.

"It is a big leap, in both terms of faith and experience for these people and very often they come back with nothing except the hope to be rehabilitated or to get a better job," the official from Welfare for Non-Resident Tamils said

## ECR - scenic highway to hell

MD. AFFANUL HAQUE

**Chennai, Feb. 23:** The East Coast Road (ECR) connecting Chennai with south Tami Nadu has all the makings of a deathtrap. With insufficient lighting and proper medians, it records the highest number of road accidents in the city.

The ECR which records over 7,000 accidents annually has a number of sharp curves with poor signboards and uneven roads. The dangerous curves leads to head on collisions as there are no medians on the roads. S. Karuppuswamy, Regional Transport Officer (Chennai South) passed on the blame on the Transport Headquarters saying that the funds for constructing medians get approved from there.

To reduce accidents on the ECR, the government, in March 2015 introduced a road widening project till Mamallapuram. Dr. Narasimha Rao, Independent Director of Tamil Nadu Road Development Corporation (TNRDC) which handles 'Project ECR' said that it would take another three months to install proper lights and put up CCTV cameras along the ECR. At present CCTV cameras are installed only at toll plazas on the scenic highway

Last week, three Metropolitan Transport Corporation buses collided against each other on the narrow Muttukadu Bridge.



The East Coast Road connecting Chennai to Pondicherry

PHOTO:MRIDULA NARAYAN

Two new bridges are coming up on either side of the old bridge and Dr. Rao said once the new bridges were completed, the old bridge would be demolished and reconstructed.

Most parts of ECR lack street lights and become extremely dangerous during the night. "The government is phasing out the old lights and LED lights are being put on. Indian Road Congress handles lighting on highways and utilization certificate is given by the Traffic

Commissioner," said P. Vijayaraj, Joint Transport Commissioner (Road Safety).

Regarding proper signboards on the highway, Vijayaraj said that black spots were identified first and then only do signboards come up. "Signboards are placed where the village road meets the highways," he added.

Private operators running buses along ECR put experienced drivers on the route. "Drivers are checked for no consumption of alcohol before

the journey. There are always two drivers in the cabin," said Abdul Mohsin of Parveen Travels which runs buses on the ECR till Nagercoil.

M. Venkatarama who drives an auto rickshaw from Mamallapuram to Kovalam is witness to a number of accidents on the East Coast Road.

"Young boys from Chennai or Pondicherry get drunk and drive at [high] speed at night and early morning. There are no police to catch them," he adds.

## AAP protests to poll panel

MD. IBRAR ARSHAD

**Chennai:** The Tamil Nadu unit of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has protested to the Election Commission and presented a four-point chargesheet against the Government.

R M Swami, District Convener for South Chennai, said, "Today's visit is to stop the illegal tapping of electric supply by the political parties for their meetings and campaigns. It is public money that they are using."

The party's complaint list includes a demand to discontinue the licences of bar owners who have an allegiance to a particular party.

"Most of these bars are run by councilors or other elected officials. These people then provide free liquor to the public during the elections and manipulate their votes," said S. Thomas, AAP party leader.

The AAP accused some parties of offering money to the voters through chemist shops or provision stores. "If you go and buy a Crocin tablet or procure one kg of rice, then the



AAP members at the Secretariat.

PHOTO: MD.IBRAR ARSHAD

shopkeeper will discreetly give you a Rs 1000 note, and ask you to vote for a particular leader," Swami alleged.

In addition, the AAP asked the EC to stop the government from dropping the Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme. It complained that many

patients were unable to get the promised one lakh rupee health benefit, for the government is citing the model code as the reason for the non-payment.

"We have looked into all the complaints of the party and have assured it of action," Election Commissioner Rajiv Lakhoni

said. "All those policy decisions made before the enforcement of the model code can go on as before. We have stopped only the latest schemes. The enlisted card holders can get the benefits from the government; and for this the government has spent Rs 1.6 crore already," he added.

The AAP accepted that its presence in Tamil Nadu is very minuscule. But Swami is hopeful of a change in conditions.

"We lack a strong leader from the South, and for that we are planning to hold a State-level survey asking people about their demands and aspirations, while trying to create a new kind of politics, different from the Dravidian politics", he said.

**"AAP knows its presence in Tamil Nadu is minuscule. But is hopeful of a change in conditions."**

## BRTS to augment metro

HARSHIL D.

**Chennai:** The Chennai Metro Rail service could very soon be augmented with an additional transport network by way of the Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS) in the city. The officials at the Pallavan Transport Consultancy Services said that they had called for tenders to prepare a detailed project report.

The tender also seeks integration with non-motorised transport infrastructure, i.e. cycling and walking; and other public transport modes including the bus and suburban rail network. The Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP) has already done a feasibility study on the viable corridors of the city.

The BRTS mode of transport has a separate lane in the middle of the road for the buses to travel with the tickets being collected at bus stops that double up as stations. The features are almost similar to a Metro line but on the ground and most importantly at almost one-tenth of the cost for the Metro networks.

According to ITDP, with Rs. 1000 crore you can build only five kilometres of a metro line on an elevated stretch while a far larger 67

kilometres can be accomplished for the BRTS.

As per the ITDP recommendation of corridors, seven corridors have been prepared. The seven corridors are: Koyambedu to Poonamallee (14 km), Koyambedu to Ambattur (8 km), Koyambedu to Madhavaram (12 km), Saidapet to Siruseri (24 km), Saidapet to Tambaram (18 km), Thoraipakkam to Chromepet (11 km) and Koyambedu to Saidapet (9 km).

Rangarohini C, senior associate at ITDP, says "There is an umbrella organization among the transport networks called the Chennai Unified Metropolitan Transport Authority (CUMTA) that is making the government speed up the process of implementing the BRTS. CUMTA is headed by the city's Corporation Commissioner and several proposals have been discussed on the viability of integrating various networks in the city."

She adds, "We essentially see the BRTS network as an integrator and not a competitor to the existing bus network or the metro rail."

When questioned about the main arterial roads being narrow compared to other metros, she replied, "The idea that roads are too narrow and hence these projects

**"BRTS network is an integrator and not a competitor to the existing bus network."**

cannot be implemented is not a plausible argument. This has been achieved successfully in many other cities within India like Ahmedabad's Janmarg BRTS and the newly opened BRT network in Pune."

Daniel Robinson, a project manager at Chennai City Connect, an urban planning organization, explained "The portion from Madhya Kailash to Saidapet is very narrow especially near IIT and Anna University. The BRTS buses will move with the normal traffic and then move into the separate bus lanes as they reach Saidapet."

Rohini adds, "This network has proved to be successful in every city abroad and within our country provided there is high density and the proposed corridors are built according to the standard norms. We would like to see more people on the road rather than more vehicles. That is the core solution to the problem.

## RESETTLEMENT OF ADYAR BANK DWELLERS

### Residents contest Slum Board's claim

MD. IBRAR ARSHAD

**Chennai:** The Slum Clearance Board has claimed that the resettlement of slum dwellers living along the Adyar river bank, which was to be done by February 25, has been completed. However according to the locals, the resettlement is not yet complete, but has been stopped temporarily due to the Model Code of Conduct coming into force for the May 16 State Assembly elections.

According to Government data, there are 29,864 flats in the two areas, of which, according to the Citizen Consumer and Civic Action Group (CAG), 5,650 were already occupied. The resettlement plan was prepared by a team from the Chennai Corporation, the Slum Clearance Board (SCB) and the Public Works Department (PWD), after a survey was conducted with the help of the Zonal officer.

According to the survey, the areas along the Adyar River were unfit to live in, and thus the plans for resettlement were implemented by the Government in December.

On December 7, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha announced the resettlement of over 10,000 families living along the Adyar River in tenements at Ezhil



The buildings meant to house slum dwellers.

PHOTO:MD.IBRAR ARSHAD

Nagar in Okkium Thoraipakkam and near Satyabhama University in Perumbakkam in the outskirts of Chennai by February 25.

Heavy rainfall inundated the city and lead to intense water logging in areas along the river like Saidapet, Jaffarkhanpet, Kotturpuram and Perungudi. Several houses were washed away or damaged. Over 4,134 people from the 28 slums in these areas have been shifted so far.

"The resettlement is complete, and we have seen to it that all of the migrants get a home in the colony," said Poorni Bhaskar, the Ezhil Nagar councillor.

However, the resettled families said more people were yet to be

shifted from the slums. The residents said the colony at Ezhil Nagar lacked essential facilities. "We get water only every alternative day and the electricity supply has been better only lately," said Mastan Ali, a resident of Ezhil Nagar. Mastan, an erstwhile

resident of the Saidapet slum, is however wary of more people settling in the colonies after the elections gets over.

"Our electricity and water supply will be affected if the whole colony is filled with people. Then what will we do?" According to S X Rosy, Chief Community Development Officer at the SCB, "The houses at Ezhil Nagar and Perumbakkam were built by the Slum Clearance Board under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission at a cost of Rs 1,775 crores."

These houses, near the Tsunami Quarters at Kannagi Nagar, are allotted only to those people who have their names in the Biometric

database. The Biometric survey was conducted in all the Chennai slums by the SCB in 2012, under the Rajiv Awas Yojana.

"Those, who did have their names in biometric database were shifted to temporary settlements run by the Chennai Corporation," said Rosy.

The government provided the families with Rs 5,000 immediately after their resettlement, and a monthly allowance of Rs 2,500 is to be added in their bank accounts for 10 months. "The Corporation has been asking people to open their bank accounts, so that the money is not misused, and every family could get their promised Rs 30,000," added Rosy.

The residents of Ezhil Nagar and Perumbakkam were taken to the Mega Job Fair in Koppal on February 6; where over 6,822 residents got jobs as domestic workers, electricians, plumbers, painters and drivers. Also, women of the area have been enrolled as artificial jeweler makers, blouse designers and as mehendi design artists.

"We are seeing to it that the residents get the benefits that they were promised by the government", said T C Karna.

## E-business boost to India Post

MANSI CHOUKSEY

says Shrivastava.

**Chennai:** The Indian postal service is emerging as the top contender in the e-commerce logistics market. With 400 online retail customers, India Post is rapidly becoming the most reliable delivery service for the booming e-commerce industry in India. Around 126 online retailers have tied up with India Post in Chennai alone, the latest of which is Naaptol.

Kumar Krishnan, Assistant Post Master General of Tamil Nadu Circle (mails and business development) says, "India Post aims to capture the entire market, but it will take some time. We need to fulfill the needs of the customers and we have to augment our infrastructure."

For the year 2015-16 India Post has delivered delivered around articles worth Rs 3 lakh a month for Amazon.

Abhishek Shrivastava, payment investigation officer at Amazon says, "Amazon does not have its own, Amazon Transport Service (ATS) in all the cities of India. Therefore to deliver at pin codes where ATS cannot deliver, Amazon hires Indian Post as the third party courier service."

"The advantage of using India Post is that it can deliver bulk of orders in two days or on the same day of receiving it in cities where ATS is non functional,"

India Post has a huge network of 1,46,910 (as of 2014-15) delivery post offices and now a number of business post handling centers are being established to facilitate speedy delivery of couriers.

"We have dedicated business post centres to handle e-commerce parcels. There are around 50 such centres in Tamil Nadu and 18 in Chennai," said Kumar Krishnan. The Tamil Nadu circle alone has handled around 54.54 lakh consignments in 2015, he added.

The network and infrastructure of the postal service in small towns are giving India Post an edge over the private courier or logistic firms.

The Cash on Delivery facility is one of the targeted services India Post introduced in 2013 to attract e-commerce customers.

It has earned Rs 500 crore in 2014 under this service. According to Annual report till 15 December 2015, India Post has raised Rs 1000 crore in COD remittance, which is a double of its earnings under the COD segment in 2014.

Parcel revenue had registered a growth of 37 per cent in 2014-15. By October 31, 2015, the department noted a growth of 117 percent, owing to the revenue earned under COD and business post services.



# Government school runs in residential apartment

MANSI CHOUKSEY

**Chennai, March 10:** About 130 students at the new Government High School, Perumbakkam from class 6 to 10 are attending their classes in tenements of the State Government's slum rehabilitation residential building.

The school, which was started in December 2014, was temporarily housed in one of the residential buildings and was meant to cater only 33 students. After the massive rehabilitation undertaken by the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance board after the Chennai floods, the strength swelled up to 130. The poorly equipped school is now managing classes in tiny nine class rooms, without desks and benches.

Head Mistress G Kamakshi said "We had no problem in running this school in the nine rooms of this residential building earlier, when the school had only 33 children. Now we are trying to manage 130 children in the same infrastructure with great difficulty."

The school had a staff of five



Children of the government school attending classes in flats.

PHOTO: MANSI CHOUKSEY

teachers, but since the number of students has increased, two more teachers were transferred there. Teachers are now taking extra classes to cover for the shortage of the staff. While the Social Studies teacher S. Rajven checks revision test papers of the 10th class, he must

also take the Maths class for standard 8th, in an attempt to balance student-teacher ratio.

The space provided for the school in the building is so small that the board class students had been writing their revision test papers sitting in the corridor amid the

cacophony of junior classes.

The Class 10 Maths teacher S. Tulsi said it had become more difficult to keep discipline in class due to the sudden outpour of new students and lack of infrastructure to support them.

"Children are sitting scattered all

over the classes. They are not taking the school seriously as the temporary arrangement of the school lacks formal atmosphere," she said.

In a recent survey conducted by the school, on the reasons for absence among the newly transferred students, it was found that 12 out of 36 of serial absentees cited 'lack of interest' as their reason. "Some children do not want to come, as they feel this is not a formal school and it's alright to bunk it," said Tulsi.

The old Government Higher Secondary School on the next street to the new government school is also facing infrastructure problems. The old school was affected by floods and while the new buildings are being constructed in its premises. Two classes are conducted in shacks on the school playground.

The construction of the new Government High School is almost finished and Head Mistress G. Kamakshi said that the school will be moving there in July for the next session.

# Women's T20 scores low

HARSHIL D.

**Chennai, March 10:** The ICC T20 World Cup will be played in India for the first time. Still, none of the men's matches are being held in Chennai which has over the past few years had many matches. Only the women's matches will be held during the group stages of the T20 World Cup.

K K Prasad, South Zone Cricket Association, said "Last year, two matches were held in the city and we follow a rotation policy. We will not be having any international T20 match for the next year, at least."

On being asked whether the change in the management at TNCA and the ICC could have prompted the no-show of any of India's matches here, he replied "I am not sure but it could be possible."

In all, four of the women's matches would be played here. The practice sessions and pitch conditioning have already started at the stadium.

An official at the stadium said, "We decide the schedule for the matches almost one year before the tournament actually starts. So, we don't have the scope to change the

*"There does not seem to be a buzz about the World Cup this time like it was in 2011"*

ticketing prices in short notice."

The ticketing official at the stadium said "We have sold around 400 tickets so far. Today, only three people came till evening for purchasing tickets. Since only the women's matches are being held here. The tickets will not sell that much."

Prashant Narayanan, a college student, says "I would have definitely gone for the women's matches if India was playing. They should have opened a stand maybe for the school-children to get an experience of watching global tournaments like these for free. You see that a lot in Sri Lanka where children wearing uniforms come to see the match."

Sushil A, a class XI student, said "My exams are going on and there will be no chance to attend matches. There does not seem to be a buzz about the World Cup this time like in 2011.



Encroached area near Pallikaranai Marsh.

PHOTO: MITAKSH JAIN

# Land dispute mired in sensitive ecology

MITAKSH JAIN

**Chennai, March 10:** As much as 40 acres of land are a bone of contention between a private association and the Chennai Corporation as the land stands adjacent to 300 acres of Pallikaranai marshland in the Perungudi area here.

Claiming ownership of the land through a patta or a title deed to the land obtained back in 1966, D. R. Kumar, a member of the Beulah Nagar and Periyar Mutharamman Nagar Plot Owners' Welfare Association says they are being wrongly targeted because of the land being adjacent to the marshland.

"What is happening is that the water is seeping in from the Perungudi Sewage Treatment Plant nearby which is leaving no distinction between the marshland and our land," says D. Kumar.

The water flowing from the plant makes the whole area look like one big mass of the marshland which is an

ecologically sensitive area that houses nearly 115 species of birds, 123 species of flora, 21 species of reptiles and 10 species of mammals.

"I went to the plant officials repeatedly and yet no action was taken. I had to file a complaint with the Tahsildar office," adds D. Kumar.

A case has been filed in the Madras High Court which has asked the Chennai Corporation to resurvey the land although the officials from the Revenue Department of the corporation are yet to visit the site.

When asked about the complaints about building debris being dumped on the disputed land, D. Kumar retorts, "We are only doing that because we have the papers and we need to stop the water from coming in to our houses although the construction has been stopped temporarily after the court order."

With hesitance, D. Kumar points out how the MLA has been harassing them with repeated blank calls made by his goons. He

is demanding money to make the problem go away so that the construction work can begin on the 366 plots in question.

Two points of entry to the contested land have been allegedly blocked by the MLA. One entry point from the Telephone colony has been blocked by the garbage dumped there and the other point which is right next to D. Kumar's house on 4th Street, K.P.K. Nagar, Kallukuttai has been blocked by a shed.

When asked about the following issue, K. P. Kandan, the MLA for the Sholinganallur district, denies having any knowledge of the incident and the allegations against levelled against him.

The Chennai Corporation also declined to comment on the issue.

The Pallikaranai Wetland is a vital part of the Chennai city ecosystem and also acts as a conduit for rainwater and an aquifer for its groundwater reserves. Its area currently stands at an 80 square kilometre area.

# City enslaved to net addiction



Youth addicted to the internet

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

GOKUL M. NAIR

**Chennai, March 10:** Chennai has nearly 2 million people who are addicted to the Internet, making it the third most internet-addicted city in India after Mumbai and Delhi, clinical psychologist and research scholar N. Thamilselvan said.

Delivering a lecture on 'Internet Addiction' at the valedictory function of a four-day awareness campaign conducted by the students of Loyola College titled 'Fear Of Being Offline' (FOBO), Thamilselvan, who is currently doing research at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences in Bangalore, elaborated on the several methods he utilized to come to this conclusion.

"There are several standard tests that are used to analyze how much a person is addicted to the internet. These include the Internet Addiction Test, Chen Internet Addiction Scale, the Problematic Internet Usage Questionnaire, and the Online Cognition Scale. By applying these tests to a large sample size we can come to definitive conclusion," he said.

He urged the students to counter addiction by recognizing the four C's - Craving, Control, Compulsion, and Consequences.

"Students should know how to realize when they're being addicted to anything, not just the internet. They should realize when they start feeling the urge to be online all the time, and control it accordingly. Otherwise they will always feel the compulsion to keep checking their messages," he said.

Thamilselvan also added that there was a strong correlation between internet use and behavioral disorders like depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, anxiety, and anti-social behavior.

"People who are shy, easily bored and depressed tend to spend a lot of time on the internet. This, however, does not result in them being more social, but actually worsens their condition," he said. He also introduced his new venture, Services for the Healthy Usage of Technology (SHUT) Clinic, which helped with internet and gadget de-addiction for youngsters.

'Fear Of Being Offline' (FOBO), which was organized by the students of M.Sc Visual Communication of the college, also saw a bevy of psychologists and mental health experts deliver lectures on addiction among students during the four days. It also involved the 'FOBO Challenge', which urged students to spend as much time without their smartphones as possible.

# Ready to face summer!

MITAKSH JAIN

**Chennai, March 10:** Recently named by BBC as one of the "hottest" cities to live in for 2015, Chennai braces itself for what has been predicted to be the hottest summer with the average temperatures expected to soar over 40°C.

for myself. But this rarely happens and mostly I drink water and that too, a lot of it," says Ajay Prasad, who has set up his sugar cane juice stall outside Chotu Motu Sweets in Sowcarpet.

The year 2015 was the warmest year on record,



Chennai's hottest summer is coming.

PHOTO: MITAKSH JAIN

Fruit salad, lemon soda and sugarcane juice stalls have all sprung up at various locations providing a much-needed relief for Chennaiites on the move.

S. Shanthi, 37, a resident of Salavayalar Colony in Saidapet, sets up a stall outside Park Town Railway station on Pallavan Salai every year during summer.

"I set up this stall as it is a sensible business decision. Lemon juice helps in relieving thirst. This is an ideal place as I get people from both the stations: Park Town and Central."

When asked what she does for the rest of the year, she replies, "I try to find work here and there. Sometimes I work at construction sites, transporting bricks and carrying concrete wherever required. I have also sold vegetables at Koyambedu vegetable market."

These stall owners provide an effective way for its citizens in beating the heat but when it comes to their own health, there is not a lot they do.

"I cannot touch my source of income. At the end of the day, if there is anything left that I cannot use the next day, I make a glass

according to a report published by World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the reports from various other organizations such as NASA, UK Met Office suggest that 2016 is going to be, in all likelihood, hotter.

Climate change and the peaking of the El Niño weather phenomenon are expected to drive the global average temperature further above the record set in 2015, which itself beat a new record set in 2014.

The residents of Chennai are gearing up for the hottest year on record with different forms of remedies.

"I leave my home with two bottles of water. My wife packs a box of fruits for me to eat after lunch and I make it a point to go buy a soft drink," says Manish Agarwal, 29, owner of Arihant Garments.

Veena Jain, a resident of Purasawalkam, makes it a point to send her kids with juice or glucose school.

"I constantly advise my children to drink water every half an hour at school," says a worried Veena.

# Abandoned baby girls continue to lie in cradles

MANSI CHOUKSEY

**Chennai:** A six-week-old female baby on life support was rejected by her well off parents last week and dumped at a government shelter under the cradle baby scheme at Chengalpattu.

The parents, who work in the IT sector, did not wish to bother themselves with bringing up their daughter as she has Down syndrome. They cited the unbearable cost of surgeries as the reason for giving up the baby. The Child Welfare Committee to whom the baby was handed over named her Ashika and tried to counsel her parents to take back their baby, but their efforts went in vain.

The incident has once again opened the debate over the Tamil

Nadu government's 24-year-old Cradle Baby Scheme, which was at one time so popular with former Union Minister for Women and Child Development, Renuka Choudhry that she wanted to set up baby reception centres throughout the country.

The scheme was launched by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha in 1992, as a solution to child abandonment and female infanticide.

Child Welfare Committee member Virgil Mary D' Sami says that the scheme was launched in some pockets of Tamil Nadu where female infanticide was very high.

"If somebody has a baby they do not want, they can leave the baby in the cradles outside scheme centres and the baby will be taken



Cradle Baby Scheme in the State.

PHOTO: MANSI CHOUKSEY

care of by the government."

The initial motive of the scheme was to provide a system for parents to hand over their child to government instead of abandoning it on roads or killing it. Critics say the cradle baby scheme only helps parents who wish to get rid of their female child.

Dr P Manorama, former Chairman of Child Welfare Committee, says that she has seen a lot of people from all walks of life - educated, uneducated, the rich and the poor who give up their babies saying they cannot afford to keep it.

"The parents will anyway dump a baby if they have decided on it. I have seen abandoned children who were bitten by dogs and rats. Instead of dumping a child in a dumping ground or a dustbin, the

cradle baby scheme has helped parents to hand over a baby in a systematic manner. It is also a safe way for the unwedded mother to hand over their baby," said Dr Manorama.

*"The parents will anyway dump a baby if they have decided"*

"Every social scheme that is created could be used for both good and bad. It all depends on the attitude of the people who are using it," she added.

Babies left under the scheme are kept under the government's care for 60 days, and are subsequently handed over to adoption agencies. However, once the child is given

to the adoption agencies its link with the government is broken.

"The baby is put up in a children's home or given for adoption. How it is educated and taken care of depends on the organisation it has been handed over to," says Virgil Mary.

The shortcoming of the scheme is the lack of follow up mechanism to monitor a child's progress once it is adopted or sent to an SOS village or orphanage.

CWC bears the responsibility for a child only till it is given a clearance and hands the child over to adoption agencies. "If a child is not adopted it is brought up in Government Homes like other orphans," says Virgil Mary.

Baby Ashika is now off the life support. What will be her future is still a question.



# Breaking social barriers with the sound of music

MARIA KURUVILLA

**Chennai, March 10:** The Urur Olcott Margazhi Vizha organized in the heart of the Urur Olcott Kuppam, a fishing village in Besant Nagar, is a platform where stereotypes are tested and the celebration of art overcomes all. The festival aims at creating an environment where barriers are broken and friendships that surpass caste, class and wealth are formed, claim the organisers.

The Vizha is a collective effort by the fishing community of the Kuppam and the residents of Besant Nagar in giving the fishermen a chance to interact with others outside their community.

"The aim of this festival was mainly to bring the fishing village to people's notice. In visibility lies the vulnerability of the village. Everybody knows about Besant Nagar or the restaurant Dindigul Thalappakatti but the Kuppam, which is older than both of them put together, is unknown to the world. Our aim is to create awareness about the village and encourage others to form a relationship with the place and the people," says Nityanand Jayaraman, one of the organizing members of the Vizha.

The two day festival organized on February 28 and 29 saw a lot of talent from the fishing village



Carnatic vocalist T M Krishna performing at the Urur Olcott Kuppam

perform with senior Carnatic musicians and fusion artists.

The people of the Kuppam participated wholeheartedly in the festival by encouraging their children to showcase their talent and knowledge in the fields of dance and music.

"The Vizha sees participants from various Kuppams and areas around Tamil Nadu and is an open event welcome to anybody who enjoys art. Nobody expects the people of a fishing village to be well versed in any form of classical music or dance

and that is what we aim to break," says Saravanan, a member of the village panchayat and a member of the organizing committee.

The festival is crowd sponsored by influential and willing individuals and the stage is set in the heart of the Kuppam, between the village temple and the beach.

The music that is played by local artists like Vishnu Ramprasad caters to a mixed audience and is appreciated by members of the Kuppam who enjoy it just as much as anybody else.

For the festival's grand finale, which followed Vijay Siva's Carnatic performance, Anthony Dasan, a superstar of gaana music, and guitarist Sean Roldan made the college students in the audience go wild with their pulsating numbers.

"I have never listened to Carnatic music before but it was really soothing to my ears. The Vizha gave me the opportunity to be able to witness and participate in an event that I may otherwise have thought of as upperclass," says Sathya, a resident of the Kuppam.

# A big little book shop

MANIK SHARMA

**Chennai:** Nalini Chettur sits with a catalogue of books she is browsing as her guest, a sales coordinator from Pan Macmillan, sits opposite her in expectation. Inside the walls of Vivanta by Taj Connemera, Chettur has been running a bookshop for 41 years now. Sales agents like the one from Macmillan are regular visitors.

"A number of publishers are very kind to me. Although, I can't order books in bulk like megastores do, I can sell them unlike any other store in the city. I have a very unique customer base here," she says.

As Nalini, she scours through the catalogue, she talks about her journey. "I just wanted to have a place where I could keep the books I want people to read. Today I see a declining trend in reading. Chick lit or whatever it is called. I try to keep books that are not only interesting but also force you to think."

In 1975, Chettur left her job at a local bookshop to pursue her reading habits. Her passion to inculcate in readers a liking for literature from the world over is clearly visible in her collections. "Whenever a sales guy comes to me, I ask him for the world catalogue and not the catalogue they have for India."

To her surprise the Connemera Hotel let her have a 100-square-foot wedge inside its wall to run the bookshop from.

Chettur's regular customers are people who have been loyal not only



A niche for readers...at Giggles

to her bookstore, but to her choice as well. "This is pretty much my personal library. I read everything and every book that is stacked here is from my to-read list," she says.

When asked if there was anything else she'd rather have done Chettur smiles and says, "For 30 years now I have been trying to form a political party, without the knowledge of politics. Most of my regular customers are octogenarians. My oldest customer is a 103 year old gentleman. It is easy to get carried

away once in a while when you talk to such people."

From Granta, to the collection of the Pulitzer Prize winning poet Vijay Sheshadri, Chettur has an eclectic collection of books. Her personal favourite writer, and once a good friend of hers, is R. K. Narayanan.

"He always wrote to me and publicized the bookshop. I think he would have won the Nobel, but he didn't. To me he is the greatest writer that has ever lived," she says.

# PAINTING FOR A CAUSE

MD. AFFANULHAQUE

**Chennai:** For 12-year-old S. Pranav, "Art from the heart" has been the mantra of his life. His passion for painting has been there since the age of three. It was however only last month that he put his passion up for a greater cause.

The floods that ravaged the city of Chennai last December left a deep impact on the young child and like everyone else, he thought of helping the victims in his own way.

Pranav decided on selling his artwork to raise funds to help the flood victims and hosted his first solo exhibition, 'Art from Heart' at Hotel Crowne Plaza last month. Close to 35 of his paintings were sold in six hours as his exhibition raised Rs. 81,500. The entire amount was then donated to 'Chennai Rising', an initiative by The Hindu Group.

For the students of Velammal Vidyalaya where Pranav studies in Standard VI, he has become a hero!

"My friend paints nicely and we all told him to paint about floods," said Shishir, Pranav's friend who kept on forcing him to come and play with him.

While speaking about his latest painting, Pranav took out a folder from his cupboard and showed the certificates he had got for his achievements. Photographs with eminent personalities who congratulated him were laminated and kept in an album.

Pranav showed the paint brush he received from Gopalkrishna Gandhi with pride. When asked on what gave him the idea of raising



Pranav with a selection of his paintings

money for the flood victims, Pranav said that since his school had been closed during the floods, he started painting.

"I depicted the struggles of the residents and popular landmarks in the city that went under water," added Pranav.

"When I saw my city suffering because of the rains, I decided to do my part by raising money through selling my paintings," said Pranav, pointing to the picture of a painting of a flooded Chennai Central station that was sold for Rs. 5,000.

Pranav's father, Dr. Senthil Kumar is proud of the achievements of his son, "We never stopped him from scribbling on the walls. Slowly, he began drawing

and painting spontaneously. He has never been taught to draw or paint."

"I am a really proud father that my son at such a young age has a social responsibility of contributing money towards the flood relief," added Dr. Kumaran.

While one wall has all his paintings stuck, the wall just beside his bed is like a big canvas where Pranav showcases his talent. He prefers using acrylic paint at the moment, but says if he wants to become professional, he will have to start using oil paints.

While both his parents are doctors and are most of the time occupied with their profession, Pranav never felt that they are not there for him.

# Salter smelt 'a rat' in the book offer

JOHN ABRAHAM

**Chennai:** Paris-born author Mark Salter "smelt a highly graphic rat" when approached to write about Norway's attempts to bring peace to Sri Lanka; but he was convinced to go ahead write the book: 'To End a Civil War: Norway's Peace Engagement in Sri Lanka'.

Launching his book at the Asian College of Journalism, one of the three venues for its launch in Asia, Salter narrated how in 2012, his former boss and then Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen had asked the author if he was interested in writing about the Norwegian efforts to end the conflict in Sri Lanka.

"They [Norway] really wanted me to tell the story of their engagement in Sri Lanka and to be as direct and impartial as possible, under the circumstances," he said. "For better or for worse, that is what I set down to do," he added.

The former BBC journalist, describing his second book as "a big book that covers quite a little territory," said his sources were primarily interviews with people "in Sri Lanka, India, the US State Department, the EU, the UN - a whole bunch of acronyms actually!"

The book includes interviews with nearly 80 people. "I interviewed some of them on Skype. Ninety percent of them were one-on-one conversations though, with a recorder in hand," he said. It took him a year to do the interviews and another year to write the book, before it was published by Hurst in October 2015.

When asked about the book's relying on former Norwegian Minister Eric Solheim as a primary source, he replied, "They [Mr. Solheim and Mr. Hel-

gesen] were the leaders in the [Norwegian peace envoy] team. I talked to other Norwegians as well. He [Solheim] was the main figure in contact with [former LTTE leader] Prabhakaran. So, it was obvious."

Salter first visited Sri Lanka in 2002 while working with International IDEA, an intergovernmental organisation. "After the ceasefire agreement (between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE), everything opened up. We started doing training and workshops. I was working with issues of reconciliation. So, it [the Norwegian peace talks] was a good subject," he said.

When asked about his target audience, Salter said, "The Sri Lankans, the Norwegians, to those in international relations, conflict resolution, and to some degree, those in diplomatic and foreign ministries who deal with these kind of questions."

"The Rough Guide to Poland", a travel guide first published by Penguin in 2009 and running into its seventh edition now, is Salter's first book. When asked about the myriad interests, he remarked, "Some people do one thing. Some of us go broadly. So who knows where next?"

"Well, well, well," Mr. Salter said when quizzed about his plans for another book, before going on to say, "I have a proposal to write a book about Norwegian peace diplomacy, not just with the Sri Lankans, but with other countries and compare experiences with the Middle East, Sudan and Columbia and see what we can learn more broadly."

It is Salter's second visit to Chennai city and he finds its people "incredibly" friendly.

"I haven't got a chance to explore the city in great detail. Given a chance, I'd come back and do it," he said.



Mark Salter. PHOTO: JOHN ABRAHAM

# Walk on glass for empowerment

MANIK SHARMA

**Chennai:** An events and PR group that calls itself Ezone India, organised a glass walk for women across the city in the week running up to women's day. The exercise requires women to walk over shards of glass, and considered as being symbolically empowering. At least 7000 women from the city registered for the glass walk.

Edward , who heads the initiative for Ezone said, "Women have always known to be powerful, brave and bold. However, just how many times do they get the chance to be bold? We are giving them the chance to be bold here."

The group has organised the event mostly at corporate offices (like Hyundai and Larsen & Toubro) and the registration list comprises mainly of working middle-class women.

"The idea is that one shard is extremely painful to walk over, but if you distribute that pain, it becomes easier to walk," Edward said. The group requires a minimum of 100 women to volunteer for the walk.

"We have a psychologist, who takes an hour long class before the women go through with it," Edward added.

While the initiative may have found its backers in the middle-class (represented here largely by women working in corporate offices), a number of women who do not work in corporate offices find it hard to make sense of the idea.

Shruti, 23-year-old, and a TFI (Teach For India) fellow in Chennai said, "I don't understand the idea behind being subjected to pain just to feel empowered. Where does Bold even come into this? Moreover, why only bold? Why does a woman only need to feel bold and not anything else? To me this sounds like a stupid idea."

Fifty year-old Janaki, who works as an administrative officer in a government college said, "You don't need to have women walk on glass or be set on fire to celebrate."

# Annihilation of Caste: The story of Manimaran

NILESH CHRISTOPHER

**Chennai, March 11:** Buddhar Kalai Kuzhu, a Chennai-based group of paraiaattam artistes, founded and headed by folk artist Manimaran, organized three-day parai camps from February 22 to March 2 at multiple locations in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka.

One of the oldest folk art forms of Tamil Nadu, paraiaattam, has acquired a polluted identity over time. "Its association with dalits and death has tainted the identity of parai," said Manimaran, founder of Buddhar Kalai Kuzhu.

The parai camps which spanned for 10 days in total was organized at Tamil dominated provinces of Vavuniya, Trincomalee and Jaffna. When asked about the Sinhalese

participation in the camp, Manimaran said, "The Sinhalese visited the camp and congratulated us. They did not participate. The participants were only Tamils".

"A total of 120 people including students, children, females and transgenders participated in the event," he added.

During their 10 day visit, Buddhar Kalai Kuzhu was invited to perform at the 9th National Scout Jamboree held at civil war affected Jaffna.

"It was yet another accomplishment for Buddhar Kalai Kuzhu," he said.

"We know about parai through movies. Playing the instrument was a different experience. You start dancing automatically," said Jeevagiridharan, a participant from Tamil Nadu.



The Buddhar Kalai Kuzhu group playing at an event.

PHOTO: JEEVA

Manimaran wanted the parai to be perceived as an instrument of freedom, and not an instrument of oppression and discrimination. "Parai spreads the message of equality," he added, citing it as the reason for the camps and performances staged abroad.

**"Its association with dalits and death has tainted the identity of parai."**  
- Manimaran

In 2015, Buddhar Kalai Kuzhu organized similar three-day-camps in California, Washington and

Connecticut in America.

Manimaran said that on its mission to make the folk art respectable among other art forms, a one-year course was started in 2015 by Buddhar Kalai Kuzhu. The training centre now boasts of a mixed bag of participants - lawyers, engineers, doctors and unemployed.

The mission to make it respectable rests on the oath taken by its participants to not play the parai for death or when they are inebriated, he said. By doing this, Manimaran believes that the cast affiliation can be gotten rid of.

Every year Buddhar Kalai Kuzhu performs at the Ambedkar Manimandapam at Jafferkhanpet to commemorate the birth anniversary of Dr.B.R. Ambedkar. Buddhar Kalai Kuzhu has been functional for 15 years now.