



metro PLUS

THE HINDU

A feathered visitor from Mongolia?

The eastern marsh harrier was in Chennai **P2**

WHY PRINT PROJECTORS ARE MAKING A COMEBACK **P4**



Analytical play
(Clockwise from right) A game of boccia in progress; M Selvam takes aim; Lakshmi Prabha with her gold medal.
THAMODHARAN B



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Lakshmi Prabha smiles as she hands out bars of chocolate to the small group scattered around the auditorium at Vidyasagar, an organisation that works with persons of disability, in Kotturpuram. The chairs have been pushed aside and trainer Sathish Kumar is moving about on his wheelchair, getting chalk lines marked on the wooden floor, for a court.

The sweet treats, laughter and chatter is a Saturday fixture for a small but growing community in Chennai that comes together to play boccia every week.

This Saturday, the treats are courtesy of Lakshmi's recent victory at the eighth Boccia National Championship in Gwalior. She holds up her gold medal, which she won in the individual category.

"This is a sport I can play comfortably from my wheelchair. I was thrilled to go to the Nationals and win," she says. "I come here every week and have made many friends," adds Lakshmi.

Boccia was first introduced in

1984 at the Paralympics in New York as a competitive sport and at present, is one among two sports in the world that does not have an Olympic counterpart. The sport can be played individually, as a pair, or as a team and has categories for the same. Over the last few years, organisations working with persons with disabilities across the country, have taken up the cause of this interesting sport.

Back in 2016, Rajiv Rajan, executive director, Ektha (a disabled peoples' organisation), and Sathish Kumar, the current boccia

Eye on the prize

Chennai's small but steadily growing boccia community does not skip a Saturday training session and is winning laurels along the way

programme coordinator, both from Chennai, embarked on a journey to make persons with disabilities in the city, aware of the existence of this Paralympic sport. They believed that boccia would be a turning point for people who were unable to do other activities independently.

"It was originally designed for people with cerebral palsy. At present however, persons with a wide range of disabilities who use wheelchairs, enjoy playing the sport," Sathish says. "There is a lot of mind, and hand-and-eye

coordination involved."

On the temporary court at Vidyasagar's auditorium, five players arrange themselves at one end. Armed with red and blue balls, the goal is for them to throw the balls as close as possible to a white ball on the floor. There are prolonged silences as each player takes their time to aim at the white ball, and loud cheers when the red and blue balls inch close to it.

A common refrain, among players like K Dharmesh (a



The 10th edition of the Pondicherry Heritage Festival has an exciting line-up of events, including a boat ride through mangrove forests, a culinary trail, heritage walks, and more

Sangita Rajan
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The coastal town of Puducherry, often dubbed the Paris of the East, sees a huge influx of tourists on a weekly basis. The yellow and white buildings of French colonial architecture, artisanal cafés, and serene beaches, act as the perfect backdrop for one to break away from the monotony of life.

The essence of this quaint town lies in its heritage, and what better excuse than the 10th edition of the Pondicherry Heritage Festival (PHF) to do a deep dive.

The current edition of the festival will see a range of activities including a birdwatching and cycling tour, exhibition of handicrafts, photography exhibition, boat ride through the mangrove forests, culinary trail exploring the local food, heritage walks, street plays and dance performances.

"The wonderful ladies who had started the festival 10 years ago have taken a step back, and this is the year of a transition.



Strokes of heritage Pondicherry Sketchers at PHF 2024. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The baton is being handed over to a younger generation of volunteer-organisers" says Veda Aggarwal, one of the coordinators.

PHF celebrates the character of the town. The idea came from the tragic collapse of the Marie building (Town Hall) of Puducherry on November 29,

2014. Originally erected in 1870, the building housed the offices for the Mayor of Pondicherry.

The collapse sparked the realisation for the urgent need to preserve the heritage of Puducherry. This prompted the formation of a civil society group known as People for Pondicherry's Heritage (PPH),

The Pondicherry Heritage Festival is on till March 3. For details on events and registrations, log on to pondicherryheritagefestival.in

which then led to the conception of PHF.

The inaugural festival took place in 2015 with an aim to draw attention to Puducherry's architectural legacy, its spiritual and intangible heritage.

Since then, the festival has become an annual event, organised jointly by PPH, INTACH Pondicherry, and PondyCAN.

"We do not have any sponsors or funding. The organisers are putting in their time and effort," Veda says, adding that some events will be free while others will have a registration fee.

The main objectives of the PHF are to foster a strong local identity, showcase the town's diversity to visitors, and provide a forum for experts to discuss preservation strategies. Puducherry's architectural blend of European and Tamil styles, poses unique challenges for preservation efforts, as both Government and private buildings contribute to its heritage.

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New bird on the block
The full-grown eastern marsh harrier. R KARTHIK

City birder
R Karthik recently spotted the eastern marsh harrier, a visitor from Mongolia, at Madurantakam. It also posed for his camera

Harrier says hello

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It is just the thing every birder hopes for: the sighting of a rare feathered friend. For city birder R Karthik, it was the eastern marsh harrier. He spotted it two weeks ago at Madurantakam lake near Vedanthangal. "This is the first time a full-grown bird of the species was spotted in the region," says Karthik, who shared the information with fellow birders, all equally thrilled to hear the news. "This bird can be usually sighted in South Korea and Taiwan, and there is no record of it so far in Chennai."

Karthik, who regularly visits Madurantakam for birding, spotted the raptor late in the evening, when there was hardly any light. "It was roosting between the tall grass at the grassland inside the lake," he points out, adding that he had around 10 minutes to shoot pictures of it. "I did so with great difficulty since it is a shy bird. Also, other harriers and drongos were chasing it since it looked different from regular visitors at the lake."

The eastern marsh harrier is a

migratory bird. "It had travelled from Mongolia in October, entering India through Assam, passing through West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh before flying into Tamil Nadu, mostly taking the route along the shore over the Bay of Bengal," explains Karthik. The bird makes this long journey in search of food since it is too cold to hunt at its place of origin during this time of the year.

"Chennai is its last stop, and its return migration has begun," Karthik points out, adding that he initially shared the information only among serious birders since he did not want the habitat to be invaded by crowds. "Now that it is going back, birders in states such as Odisha and Andhra Pradesh can try to spot it too," he says.

Sighting the eastern marsh harrier is not easy. Karthik, who has been birding since 2010, says that this is possible only for experienced birders, mainly because the bird comes to roost towards dusk, when light is low. He shares that he also spotted the pied harrier around the same time which is another rare bird that has flown in from South Korea.



Fusion flavours in a wok

Set at VR Mall, Tapasme offers European and Asian menus, serving up dimsum, pide and cocktails

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In the nights that you are tempted to break-free from the dreariness of the everyday, there is nothing quite as comforting as digging into a warm bowl of egg fried rice and chilli chicken. Today, there is no dearth of choices if you want the Asian dine-in experience in Chennai, from Korean bbq to good old Indo-Chinese.

Tucked away in a corner of VR Chennai mall in Anna Nagar is the latest addition to the city's burgeoning Asian food scene. There are warm orange lights on the wall, wood accents, cosy cane furniture by the bar, and soft music playing, perfect for an evening of drinks, conversation and sushi at Tapasme.

With the focus on wanting to offer something for every palette, Tapasme's extensive menu has a

blend of European and Asian options. It includes dimsum, sushi, and hot pots alongside pastas, pizzas, and pides (Turkish flatbreads).

"We want to offer a different dining experience with European and Asian cuisine and a cosy ambience. People can just walk in, sit and relax with a drink," says K Balachandar, who is one among six



partners for Tapasme. When asked what sets Tapasme apart from the many Asian dining options across the city, Balachandar says their food and ambience will be the main draw.

"In Chennai, people are ready to travel for food and I expect people to keep coming back to dine here. The restaurant's location is inside a mall too, we're hoping, will give us footfall," he adds.

To go with your meal, the alcohol menu has a few interesting cocktail options. The Harmony Highball, which brings together whiskey, lime juice, jaggery, cinnamon syrup and ginger ale is fizzy and light. But we prefer the more heady Jazzy Up – a gin cocktail with martini fiero, triple sec, soda and gin.

First on the platter to taste, is a crunchy Thai raw mango and avocado salad, followed by a Thai seafood salad with a sweet and spicy sauce. Seafood is tricky to get right, but Tapasme manages this across all the Asian dishes we sample. The Sichuan style crispy prawn, the sunshine sushi with prawn and salmon, and an offbeat tuna pizza – with tuna and jalapenos on thin slivers of tortilla, with a wasabi mayo are all delectable. The savoury Prawn Har Gao dim sum however, is my pick from the seafood line up. Stuffed with juicy, small prawns, they come plated on a yellow curry sauce with sprigs of fresh basil.

Elevated comfort food
Tapasme also gets the basics right. Their Thai basil chicken fried rice is perfectly representative of Asian comfort food. From among their more elaborate main course offerings, we sample the Indonesian lamb rendang curry with roti prata. Plated theatrically, the meat is succulent and the flaky pratas are the perfect accompaniment.

Compared to their vibrant Asian flavours, their European fare does not stand out as much. The pollo-de-bufala, is generously coated in a spicy tomato sauce and blue cheese dressing, but the flavours feel too overwhelming. The pides, or Turkish flatbread too are not as tasty as the inventive tortilla pizzas we sample earlier.

We end the night on a rather dramatic note with the tub tim grob or sweet coconut cream and rose dessert which arrives in a cloud of dry ice fog.

Given how the restaurant wants its patrons to sit down for a relaxed dinner, Tapasme's dishes are best enjoyed as a group of at least four, given the extensive menu and generous portions of their main courses.

A leisurely dining experience at Tapasme, with its Asian flavours and cocktails, feels like a welcome addition to the mall and after some heavy-duty weekend retail therapy.

@VR Chennai Mall. Tapasme opens on March 2. A meal for two including alcohol, approximately costs ₹2,500. Contact 9092282727 for reservations.



Waves, serenades

Urur Olcott Kuppam Vizha returned to the shores of Besant Nagar beach after six years with spirited performances and sing-alongs

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The aroma of the salty sea breeze, milky tea and freshly-fried bajjis, welcomed guests who greeted each other like old friends at the Ururu Olcott Kuppam Vizha. Overheard as the slow building crowd settled, were words of nostalgia. One could hear the beats of Chandrasekara Sharma's ghatam in preparation for singer TM Krishna's performance as the waves crashed rhythmically in the distance.

Back after six years, this counter-culture festival by Besant Nagar beach, saw sonorous sing-alongs to film songs by Motta Maadi Music and spirited performances of parai attam, villu paatu, amba music and Krishna's Carnatic music on February 23. The venue for this crowd-funded

festival, was the Ellaiamman temple where a make-shift stage was set up against the backdrop of the gopuram in construction.

R Sundaramurthy, one of the lead organisers, arrived on stage, now beautifully set up, to announced the start of the festival.

The evening began with parai attam by students of Avvai Home. Parai attam is traditionally performed only by men. This all-girl crew effortlessly wielded the instrument, made of animal hide, with elan. They left the stage, with cheers from friends and family, having literally drummed up the excitement for the acts to follow.

The students of Olcott School came next, settling down with their bow-shaped instrument, the villu, for a spirited performance. Traditionally, villu paatu is used to entertain and educate people in rural communities,

passing down cultural and moral values through oral storytelling. At the vizha, the students recited stories and learnings from the *Thirukural*.

Soon, the stage was set for the most awaited performance of the evening. TM Krishna took the stage along with HN Bhaskar (violin), TRS Manikandan (mridangam), Sunil Kumar (kanjira) and Chandrasekara Sharma (ghatam). Residents of the area crowded balconies and rooftops around the temple to catch a glimpse of the performers.

Krishna performed a number of songs, among which was the first Carnatic song written about the Urur Olcott Kuppam. "This song was written by my friend [author] Perumal Murugan about this very fishing village," he said on stage as he launched into the melodic song.

"The vibe is brilliant. I loved it. Even if it is temporary and

Musical evening (Clockwise from left) Villu paatu by students of Olcott School; a performance by Motta Maadi Music; parai attam by the students of Avvai Home. THAMODHARAN B



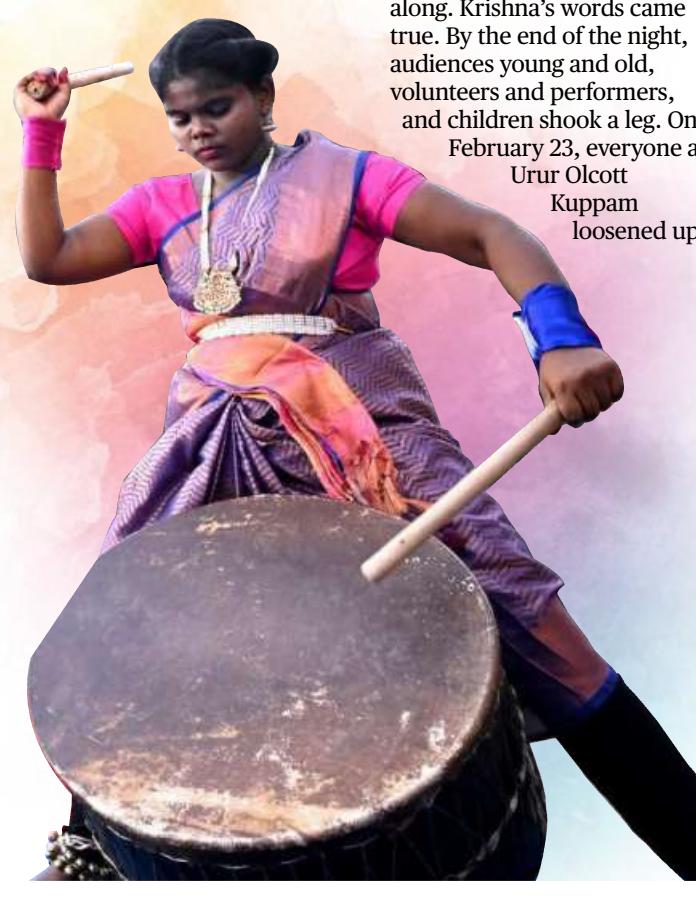
only for one evening, everybody loosens up. The stage here is part of the audience, and so the energy is completely different. There is laughter, fun, banter, and food," said Krishna as he waited in line at the *bajji* stall.

S Palayam, a *marathukkaarar* (hook-and-line fisher) from Urur kuppam, performed some

'songs of the ocean' known as amba paatu. His recital narrated stories from the sea, where fisherfolk would sing to keep their spirits up on rough waters.

The end to this lively festival was drawn by a sing-along concert by Motta Maadi Music. They performed a range of cinema songs while the audience danced and sang along. Krishna's words came true. By the end of the night, audiences young and old, volunteers and performers, and children shook a leg. On

February 23, everyone at Urur Olcott Kuppam loosened up.



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Across

- 1 Verbal pedant (6)
- 4 Total — number (6)
- 8 Imaginary place for forgotten things (5)
- 9 Packing stuff (7)
- 10 Declare unfit for use (7)
- 11 Picturesque and peaceful scene (5)
- 12 Vanish (9)
- 17 Starting point (5)
- 19 Carve up (7)
- 21 When the sun is directly above the equator (7)
- 22 Propose for discussion (5)
- 23 Jumble (6)
- 24 Light-hearted (6)

Down

- 1 Plan of action (6)
- 2 Ron came (anag) — court (7)
- 3 Bit of rock (5)
- 5 Kind of wine or cake (7)
- 6 Make one (5)
- 7 Kind of electric switch (6)
- 9 Plant container on a sill

Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated March 7, 2024.

Solution No. 13573

O	C	S	P	A	R	T	A	C	U	S
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Braille on wheels

National Association for the Blind and Madras Motor Sports Club (MMSC) organise the 33rd edition of Braille on Wheels car rally. Every car will have a visually impaired navigator who guides and collaborates on the rally route with the driver and the passenger-team in the car. @Savera Hotel, Mylapore. March 3. Flag off by 9am. Prior registration is mandatory. For details and fee, call 9841079163.



Whizzing past Participants who have taken part in previous editions of the duathlon. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Pedalling forth

Ready to put your fitness to test? WCCG

Aalam Deepam Duathlon's fifth edition is back on March 10



themselves. This time, they can run and ride in a larger race with the larger cycling community. The race will lead one back to Mayajaal," Priya says.

The categories include a five kilometre walk/run followed by a 20-kilometre ride titled 'sprint'.

The Olympic category involves a 10-kilometre run followed by a 40-kilometre ride. Participants can choose to tag along with a teammate for both these categories where one will be

nominated to run, while the other rides.

Running tends to be the less preferred choice for cyclists. Training has hence begun well in advance to ensure that everyone's cardiovascular health is high, says Priya, adding that those who are pressed for time should try the sprint category to begin with.

During their edition in 2023, a woman part of the OMR chapter took part from the United Kingdom as she was travelling. The coordinator says that they do not want to deter such committed participation. Hence, the virtual races will continue and must be completed within a day on either March 8, 9 or 10.

The virtual ride will be tracked and verified on the back end through Strava (a fitness tracker). All those who complete will receive a T-shirt and a finisher medal.

The proceeds of the event will go towards the Humans of Cycling initiative, started by WCCG during the pandemic in 2020, where cycles are given to working adults and students from disadvantaged sections of society. Last year, 125 cycles were distributed.

"The duathlon promotes two things – doing something to feel good about oneself and doing something to better someone else's life. It is also part of our Women's Day celebration," she says.

The last day for registration for WCCG Aalam Deepam Duathlon is March 3. The event takes place on March 10 at Mayajaal, ECR. Register at www.cct.chennacyclists.com for ₹649 and ₹1,199. For queries, contact 9789982110.

Sanjana Ganesh

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When the fourth edition of WCCG's (Chennai Cycling Group) Aalam Deepam Duathlon took place in 2023, the city was still reeling from the grip of the pandemic. Participants who had registered for this event, raced virtually and solitarily to the whirr of their cycle chain.

They sped down familiar lanes, huffing and puffing to finish the first leg – the run, and eventually completed with what they did best – cycle. "One could've been in Timbaktu and participated in the race. All they would've had to do was upload their statistics from a preferred fitness tracking app," says Priya Arjun, a member and coordinator of WCCG.

One year hence, this fitness event is back in Chennai. This time, participants do not have to ride solo. With their colourful helmets and sipper bottles, the athletes will have the opportunity to line up outside Mayajaal on the East Coast Road on March 10 for their first in-person race.

"Last year, the WCCG chapters organised mini races for

Serenity on display

Step into a realm of vibrant hues as artist Narayan Lakshman unveils his debut solo exhibition

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For 10 days starting March 1, Chennai's CP Art Centre will play host to an art exhibition by artist and journalist at *The Hindu*, Narayan Lakshman. Themed the Zen of Art, it features abstract expressionist works with colour blends that aim to bring a sense of tranquillity to viewers.

After having his artwork displayed at the Madras Art Weekend and at Gallery Veda, the upcoming exhibition will be Narayan's debut solo show.

He says that when gallerist Nanditha Krishna, head of CP Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation, along with curator Kausalya Santhanam approached him to do a solo show, he knew little about the challenge. "You need to have a certain number of works, and within those, you need to display a range of



Idyllic strokes First Light of Dawn – acrylic on canvas by Narayan Lakshman. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

qualities, techniques, materials, and composition, to keep all viewers engaged with that one artist's work, which is quite challenging," explains Narayan.

In total, 26 paintings are set to be featured at the Shankuntala art gallery, of which 19 have not been displayed

anywhere else so far. "The sheer shortness of time pushed me into a prolific mode, and I have produced 10-15 works in the last two months," he says.

Some of these works even seem to have pushed the artist outside his comfort zone. "For instance, one of the works is done through this technique called negative painting, in which instead of applying forms positively, you work on the background; and what remains when you fill out the background is the form," says Narayan.

But what was truly challenging about this journey, Narayan says, "was to articulate what my oeuvre is going to be, and what my body of work stands for. It's easier to say that I was inspired by Zen Buddhism and Vasudeo S Gaitonde, who himself was inspired by Zen and then added to it his unique take on landscapes. But I had to force myself to go one step beyond to understand the value addition that I bring in. In a solo show, people look for that."

At the Shakuntala art gallery, CP Art Centre, 10.30am - 7pm, March 1 to 10. All paintings exhibited are for sale.

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The write way

If pens are worth ₹19 lakh, they better write well. The fascination for fountain pens however, tends to go beyond their ability to glide on paper. It is also a statement of sophistication and a point of pride.

Chennai is set to host its first pen show, showcasing over 2,000 fountain pens across 70 brands and over 200 shades of ink to choose from.

Nitesh Jain and Sripal Jain, directors of Makoba India, have stocked up on luxury pen brands for several years.

They hence promise an event celebrating the art of writing and the joy of collecting pens for fountain pen enthusiasts, collectors, and sellers of pens, inks, stationery and accessories.

They will be launching two pens, Gladiator and Automobili Lamborghini 60°, both limited-edition writing instruments, designed and crafted by Montegrappa, the popular luxury pen brand from Italy. While the Gladiator is made of precious metal, the Automobili Lamborghini 60° is an ode to race car enthusiasts. They are among the most expensive pens available in India.

On display will be zero gravity space pens that write underwater, through grease, and in extreme temperatures.

There will also be a set of vintage pens, some over a hundred years, from across the globe. Brands such as Montblanc, Namiki, Pilot, Leonardo and Visconti will also be on display. They will be priced between ₹2,000 and ₹18 lakh. A nib restorer will be at the venue to bring your old nibs back to life.

The pen show is on between March 1 and 3 at the Makoba, Jhaver Plaza, Nungambakkam. Entry is free.

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Print projection is making a comeback at a few city theatres, which plan to re-release hit Tamil films

Srinivasa Ramanujam

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Ajith will woo Simran, and Vijay will sing a song for Richa Pallod. This March, it is time to go back in time and revisit some memorable old Tamil films on the big screen.

At Chennai's GK Cinemas, March is going to be exciting because of multiple reasons. But a brand new release featuring a big star is not one of them.



Back to the Nineties

"With exams around the corner, this has traditionally been a bad month for cinema, and thus, we usually have re-releases that fetch us footfall," explains Ruban Mathivanan of GK Cinemas. This time, however, he has reason to celebrate: not only will he showcase a special playback series, but he has also enabled his main screen with a print projector, thus bringing back to theatres a technology that has not been in vogue in the last decade or so.

"I was lucky that my father



had stored the old print projectors carefully. But we had to put a lot of time and effort in getting it to shape as finding spare parts were tough."

At the forefront of this playback series is GK Cinemas' S Kamalakannan, who has been its theatre operator for the last 12 years. Kamalakannan has been part of various theatre projector rooms since 1984 and has seen the winds of change. "It's nice to handle a machine I have handled when I was much younger," says Kamalakannan, even as he feeds a film reel into it, "I'm looking forward to seeing how today's audiences react to the print and sound quality of these films."

After a year of working on it, Ruban is ready to showcase films on it. He hopes to play *Minsara Kanavu*, the 1997 film starring Aravind Swami, Kajol and Prabhu Deva, and

Reel life GK Cinemas' theatre operator S Kamalakannan; (right) Ruban Mathivanan. S SHIVA RAJ

Ajith-starrer *Kaadhal Mannan*, among others. "I'm also trying to source a print of *Lesa Lesa*," he says. With tickets priced at ₹80, these re-releases hope to evoke nostalgia among older audiences and provide a new experience for younger audiences who are used to consuming films played through digital projectors.

The re-releases trend has clicked big-time among fans of Tamil cinema, who caught up with the release of films such as *Aalavandan*, *Baba* and



Vaaranam Aayiram, among others. However, it is a "passing fad", as Ruban points out. "The selection of films is vital. If you observe carefully, it is films such as 3 and *Vaaranam Aayiram* that have done exceedingly well – and that's because of chartbuster songs in them."

Elsewhere in Chennai, Vadapalan's Kamala Cinemas is also gearing up to dish out some nostalgia. They have revived print projection as well, and hope to fulfil the requests of audiences who are eager to catch a few Tamil classics.

Fans are looking forward to these sweeping changes in theatres, which are already grappling with multiple issues owing to the lack of big films and entry of OTT platforms. The day a re-release equals the footfall of a new release is not too far, according to some theatre owners. Says Ruban, "If I get to screen Rajinikanth's *Padayappa* or Kamal Haasan's *Kuruthipunal*, I'm sure they will give new releases a run for their money."



Joshua is here

Varun, who plays the lead in Gautham Menon's upcoming film, on the various factors involved in its making

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and hard work should all fall in place for something to happen.

Q: From the trailer, the film looks like an actioner in the same vein as BBC's Bodyguard...

A: I play a hitman in the UK who falls in love with Kundhavi Chidambaram, a woman whom he is assigned to protect as a bodyguard. Usually, a hitman is depicted as a normal, rugged-looking muscle-for-hire – it's the cliche, so I wasn't sure what sir was going for. That's when he showed me some references, like *John Wick*, *Extraction*, and so on. Joshua is a quirky, unique version of a hitman, and Gautham sir had nuanced details about who this guy is.

Q: You have worked with a director who has been in the industry for over two decades and has a following of his own. Was there pressure to prove yourself?

A: Initially, I was like, 'No matter what, Gautham sir has to like my performance'. But after a week, I realised that it wasn't enough. A film is a collective process of creating a magical moment that the audience should enjoy.

Q: The many postponements in the release of Dhruba Natchathiram seem to have unfairly affected the hype around Joshua...

A: With Joshua, Gautham sir only came in to direct the film and uncle (Ishari Ganesh) produced the film. With other films like *Dhruba Natchathiram*, Gautham sir had also produced them and there were some burden on him as well. So, there is no uncertainty about Joshua's release in theatres. I am sure this will be a treat for all fans of Gautham Menon.

This was quite a difficult journey because what else could you do when you cannot be certain of something? What I realised in this journey is that time, luck



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