



metroPLUS

THE HINDU



Anna Nagar turns into a dessert haven with carts that attract crowds after dusk **P3**

WHY SATHYARAJ IS BETTING ON WEAPON **P4**

A hopeful bite Most of the harvesting is underway in the first week of June, this year; (Far right) Jayanth Kaaliappan at his farm in Theni; (below) an assortment of mangoes from Cholayil Farms. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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Susmera Cholayil has been patiently waiting to harvest mangoes. While the harvest is usually in the third week of April, this year, there has been a delay of over four weeks at her family-owned, 90-acre mango grove in Vengal village in Tiruvallur, Tamil Nadu.

“In 2022, the yield from our farm was average, and last year it was good. But this year, the yield is less than average due to drastic changes in climatic conditions,” says Susmera who offers a variety of kathergoa, Kalapad, swarnarekha, senthuram, arka aruna, imampasand, alphonso and Banganapalli mangoes at the Farm to Table store in Anna Nagar.

Whether it is organic or commercial farming, mango farmers are disappointed by the plummeting yields this year, a result of South India being hit by insufficient rains and extreme heat waves.

“My 35-acre mango orchard yielded just 3% (17 varieties including native varieties), while last year we had an above average harvest and the reason for this is unseasonal rains and extreme fluctuations in climate,” says Jayanth Kaliappan, an engineer-turned-organic farmer, whose farm is located in Bodynayakanur, in Theni.

Jayanth says that they will be harvesting mangoes only during the first week of June. “Though the yield is low, the quality and the taste of the fruit is good,” says Jayanth adding that due to less produce available in the market, the rates of the fruits are higher than usual.

“We sold the Bengalura variety of mango at ₹10 per kilogram last year, but this year we are selling it at ₹50. As the yield is less, the season also will be shorter this year,” says



Seasonal rains, mist and a heat wave have reduced mango yields by almost 80% across South India. Nevertheless, we help you spot the best mangoes in this brief season

Susmera, who has just started harvesting and distributing to customers, who placed orders much in advance. Though the cost has tripled this year, mango lovers seem undeterred.

According to Gopi Devarajan of Safe Foods, an organic store in the city, the procurement from farmers has reduced by almost 75% this year, which explains the reason for the higher price. “We source imampasand from a small farm in Salem. Normally they would harvest 200 kilograms during the season, but this year it was less than 20 kilos,” he says.

Co-founder of Organic Farmers Market and ReStore, a volunteer-run, non-profit organic retail outlet in Chennai, Anantha Sayanam says, “The overall yield in mango is just 10 to 30%, or I would say the farmers harvested no more than three or four tonnes this

season. At OFM, we stock a few varieties such as Kalapad, Banganapalli, imampasand, alphonso and malgova.”

Co-founder of The Organic Shandy, Hari Sethuraman, who manages a 70-acre orchard with over 6,000 mango trees in Punnamai village in Cheyyur taluk, says that

based on his experience as an organic farmer for the past 28 years, he observes that the yield this year has been lower than normal, though he adds that their farm has



Order at:

- Organic Farmers Market has 12 outlets in the city: 9884010355
- Cholayil Farm to Table Store, Anna Nagar: 7550155005
- ReStore, Kottivakkam: 044-2492 1093
- The Organic Shandy, Mylapore: 7708612348
- Safe Foods, Ashok Nagar: 9790900887
- Spirit of the Earth, Mylapore: 044-2498 7955
- Jayanth Agro Farm, Theni: 99620 08974
- Hanu Reddy Mangoes: 9884020848
- Mango Point: 044-6620 5755

Spirit of the Earth, which has been popularising heritage rice varieties, has also been focussing on the revival of native mango varieties this season. At their farm in Manjakkudi in Thanjavur, the harvesting is being planned for June. Priyanka Navneeth from Spirit of the Earth store in Chennai, says, “Though the mango season is going to be brief, the quality and taste of the fruits are excellent, especially gulab khas, panchadhara kalasam, kesari and Kalapad,” says Priyanka. At their store they have stocked kesar, banganapalli, Kalapad and imampasand.

Prasanna Venkatarathnam of Mango Point, which offers single origin, carbide and chemical-free mangoes sourced from Tiruvallur, Kanchipuram and Chengalpet districts of Tamil Nadu says they cover 9,000 hectares of mango groves and source 50,000 metric tonnes of mangoes. Though the yield has dropped by 25 percent this year, he has a range of popular mangoes on sale. The best sellers are imampasand, Kalapad and senthura, though other varieties such as Banganapalli, alphonso, neelam, mallika and rasalu are also available. He adds that the consumers seem to prefer senthura and imampasand to Banganapalli over the last few years.

Nirupama Reddy of Hanu Reddy Raghava Farms near Chengalpet, says that the yield from their farm which has over 2,000 mango trees, has been reasonably good compared to the previous year. They predominantly grow the Banganapalli variety by using traditional farming methods and bio-pesticides. They sold 15 tonnes of mangoes last year, are positive about selling the same amount this year.

had an average yield compared to other farms in the neighbourhood. He says that yields vary from farm to farm depending on soil quality and how well the trees are nurtured.

Treasure hunt
There is a wide variety available – if you look in the right places.

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In front of about 8,000 people at Chennai’s Nehru Stadium, Abby V sang. At the recent audio launch of the much-awaited *Indian 2*, starring Kamal Haasan, this young singer – who grew up in a Tamilian household in Toronto, Canada – impressed the who’s who of the Tamil film fraternity.

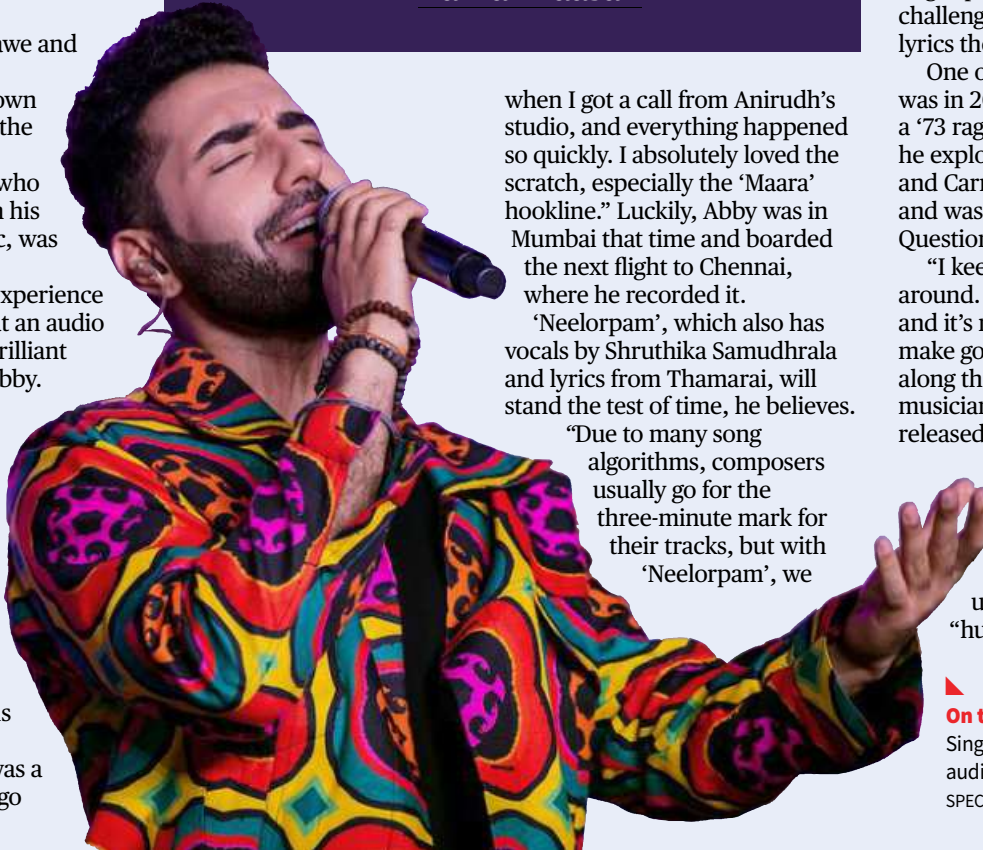
Watching his performance with awe and happiness were his parents who had flown in from Canada for the big day; his father, Venky V, someone who was instrumental in his initiation into music, was present as well.

“It was my first experience of performing live at an audio launch and it was brilliant experience,” says Abby.

The singer crooned ‘Neelorpam’, the only melody in the Shankar-directed *Indian 2*, which has music by Anirudh. While he has sung a couple of tracks in other films previously, this is his first major breakthrough. “It was a couple of months ago

The voice of Indian 2

Abby V, a singer-songwriter from Canada, has crooned for Anirudh in the upcoming film *Indian 2* starring Kamal Haasan



when I got a call from Anirudh’s studio, and everything happened so quickly. I absolutely loved the scratch, especially the ‘Maara’ hookline.” Luckily, Abby was in Mumbai that time and boarded the next flight to Chennai, where he recorded it. ‘Neelorpam’, which also has vocals by Shruthika Samudhrala and lyrics from Thamarai, will stand the test of time, he believes.

“Due to many song algorithms, composers usually go for the three-minute mark for their tracks, but with ‘Neelorpam’, we

went for more than five minutes, a rarity in film songs today. Singers are usually told to keep it simple but this track has some intricate vocal nuances, for which Anirudh gave me complete freedom.”

On a high note

Regulars on Instagram might be aware of Abby’s musical prowess; if he drops a Carnatic music-based Reel that sees him exploring a *raga* one day, he might put out a ‘water balloon’ challenge of guessing song lyrics the next day.

One of his most viral videos was in 2020 when he dropped a ‘73 ragas with Abby’, in which he explored both Hindustani and Carnatic ragas back to back and was a fun take on the 73 Questions by Vogue series.

“I keep changing things around. I am an entertainer and it’s my responsibility to make good art, and have fun along the way,” says the musician, who also recently released ‘Nee Nee Nee’, an original track that he performed along with Andrea Jeremiah.

He considers his upbringing in Canada a “huge blessing”,

On track
Singer Abby V at the *Indian 2* audio launch
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

something that helped him get exposed to different styles of music. “Even when I perform, I try to incorporate things I have imbibed as I grew up. People have commented on how my hand gestures resemble those of an R&B or hip-hop artiste. You can see all those influences in my singing too,” says Abby, who is currently listening to the other tracks of *Indian 2* and AR Rahman’s *Chamkila*, apart from pop music.

A fresh sound

Abby has vivid memories of listening to AR Rahman’s soundtrack of the original *Indian*, which released in 1996. “Pretty iconic songs, right,” he says, “We have watched all of Shankar sir’s previous films, and my father is a huge fan of Kamal Haasan. When I found out that this song of mine was for *Indian 2*, I was like, ‘Oh my god, that’s a lot of pressure.’ But for this second part, we just wanted to put out a fresh sound and style of singing.”

‘Neelorpam’ might have just released, but Abby has already recorded a few more film songs that will be out soon. “With film work, there is so much of collective energy that comes in, because the director and producer too gives feedback, and that involvement helps shape up a number. I really enjoy that process and am looking forward to more of that.”



Tunes from the mottamaadi

This weekend, groove at the live performance by Chennai-based band Motta Maadi Music founded by Badhri Seshadri. At this event titled, Ragalai, you can enjoy an evening of soulful music ranging from an Ilayaraja song to an AR Rahman composition by the nine-member band. The event is produced by Chennai Art Theatre.

@Sir Mutha Venkatasubba Rao Hall, Chetpet, June 7, 7pm onwards. Tickets on Paytm.



Strings of joy

Guitarist Prasanna will be performing a multi-genre live concert in Chennai this weekend. Titled Around the World in 80 Songs, the musician will take you across diverse landscapes that include Carnatic music, Latin jazz, Tamil film music, metal, blues, bollywood, reggae, rock, bluegrass, funk and more. Entry is only for 21 years and

above with a valid ID proof as per the venue rules.
@Bay 146, Saveria, Mylapore. June 8. 7.30pm onwards.
Tickets are priced at ₹499. For tickets, call: 9710976876



This World Environment Day, meet the duo behind India's first biosphere in a tiger reserve

Life in a biosphere

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About a decade ago, New Delhi-based entrepreneur Jai Dhar Gupta became a clean air activist when he was diagnosed with bronchial asthma. His motive was to spread knowledge about the need to ensure our cities breathe easy. He was also on the air pollution think tank of the Delhi Government (wherein he helped bring into effect the odd-even rule for vehicles).

Over the past few years, Jai has been working on yet another project: creating India's first biosphere within a tiger reserve. "Rajaji Raghathi Biosphere (RRB) is a 35-acre private forest initiative led by ecologist Vijay Dhasmana, who is known for restoring the Aravalli landscapes. We have identified rare and endangered species of native trees and are attempting to revive them, and protect the area from poachers and mining," says the 51-year-old.

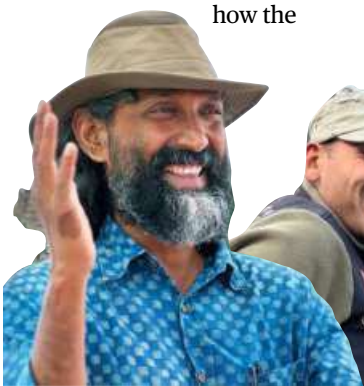
Situated within the Rajaji



National Park in Uttarakhand, the biosphere overlooks the rocky white Raghathi riverbed, nestled in the Shivalik foothills. Jai says when they started, the land earmarked for RRB was barren and in a state of degradation. "It had been previously flattened, eroding natural contours and leading to severe soil erosion. Moreover, since monoculture agro-forestry with non-native eucalyptus trees was practised on the land, it deteriorated the ecosystem's health further," he says, adding, "Thousands of non-native eucalyptus trees

were removed within days of acquiring the land. Subsequently, the land was contoured to retain water, prevent erosion, and promote groundwater recharge." The duo and their team conducted extensive surveys to identify suitable native plant species, especially those rare or disappearing in the region. "We collected seeds, established a seed bank, and collaborated with biodiversity parks to germinate and cultivate saplings of trees such as haldu, rohini, mala, saal, jamun, pangana, etc, which

were then planted across the biosphere," says Jai, who has also banned combustion-engine vehicles in the region. In 2023, the duo initiated the first phase of plantation, introducing approximately 80 species. "This upcoming monsoon season, we plan to incorporate an additional 35 to 40 new species in the biosphere. However, transforming an area into a thriving forest ecosystem is a gradual process. It's estimated to take another two to three years for the forest to truly resemble a natural habitat," adds Jai. Once the plantation is complete, the team needs to be mindful about how the



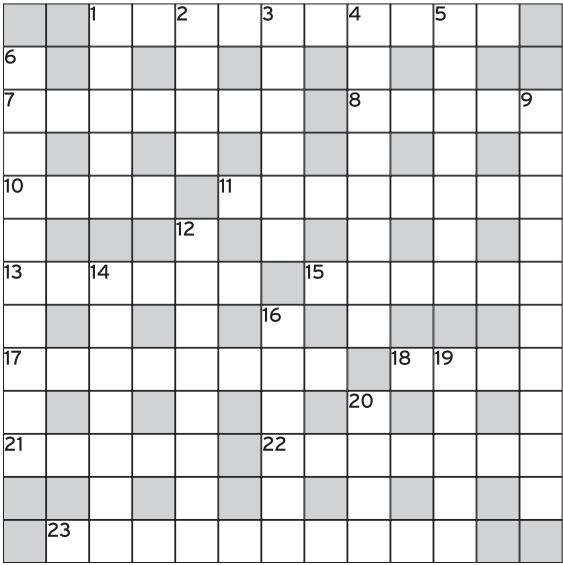
Scent of the earth (Clockwise from left) An elephant in the Rajaji National Park; Jai Dhar Gupta (left) and Vijay Dhasmana (right); a view of the biosphere. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

plants will interact with wildlife in the area, says Vijay. "The final result will be a mosaic of forest communities within the land, with self establishing and self nurturing abilities, as found in the adjoining forest patch of Rajaji Tiger Reserve," he explains. "The focus of this agricultural land extends beyond combating climate change to establish a harmonious model of cohabitation," says Jai, adding that they are relying on the knowledge and skills of the local nomadic community – Gujjars. But, why does India need such biospheres? Jai explains how forest models such as RRB offer a promising approach not only to combating deforestation, but to growing our forests too.

The process of getting it all together has not been easy. "Logistical hurdles like land acquisition, regulatory compliance, and long-term sustainability planning could impede the widespread adoption of the private biosphere model," says Jai, adding "Collaborative efforts among governments, private entities, and local communities are crucial in overcoming these hurdles and realising the potential of private biospheres."

Jai and Vijay are also working on a second biosphere atop the Western Ghats: above the Koyna River in the buffer zone of the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve near Pune, Maharashtra. "It has a very different habitat, different topography, and completely different flora," says Jai who plans on growing *Lagerstroemia microcarpa* (nana), *Catunaregum spinosa* (gela) and *Ziziphus xylocarpa* (torna) among other species.

THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13588



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Across

- 1 Loathsome (10)
 - 7 Afterwards (5,2)
 - 8 Ape (5)
 - 10 Headquarters (4)
 - 11 Affecting the first month after birth (8)
 - 13 According to Sinatra in 1946, they've got an awful lot of this in Brazil (6)
 - 15 Artist's workroom (6)
 - 17 Many riot (anag) — threatening (8)
 - 18 Cheese-like food made with soya milk (4)
 - 21 A levels, for example (5)
 - 22 Patron saint of musicians (7)
 - 23 Caught unawares (10)
- Down
- 1 Piece of information (5)
 - 2 Rent — unable to decide (4)
 - 3 Vocalist (6)
 - 4 Coiled fossil shell (8)
 - 5 Restricted (7)
 - 6 North Devon seaside resort (10)

To play The Guardian Quick Crossword, The Hindu Cryptic crossword, Sudoku & other puzzles online, scan the QR code.



- 9 Vernacular (10)
- 12 Get rid of (8)
- 14 Kind of pigeon (7)
- 16 Synopsis (6)
- 19 Stared at inappropriately (5)
- 20 What turns blue litmus paper red (4)

Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated June 13, 2024.

Solution No. 13587



When, where, how?

Storyteller and trainer Renu Narayan is offering a one-day workshop on storytelling. Participants can understand the basics of creating a story structure and the art of telling a tale. She will also educate them on how to communicate clearly through effective use of language. @ IIT Research Park Taramani, June 9, 9.30am to 4.30pm. Eligibility: 16 years. Fee is ₹3,000. For details, call: 9841013108 .

Kick-starting pride

Poetry, panels and panache. This is how Prakriti Foundation plans on celebrating Pride Month

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The month of June is closely tied to a history of dissent and identity. Members of the LGBTQIA+ community have subverted the narrative of traumatic events in the history of queer marginalisation, to establish a month where the community speaks loudly and celebrates its identity with panache.

Prakriti Foundation shares this sense of building a community. The organisation kicks off Pride Month this year with a poetry reading session, panel discussion and a transgender fashion show at Alliance Francaise of Madras on June 9.

"Identity is at the core of arts, literature and performance," says Ranvir Shah, founder-trustee of Prakriti Foundation. "It is hence natural that we are allies."

The evening will begin with a poetry reading session in English by Bengaluru-based poet and independent writer Joshua Muiyia, who works on stories around art, culture, race and sexuality. Alongside him, model, teacher and writer of *Virkaadha Vaanam*, Agni Pradeep, will be speaking about her life and work in understanding gender-fluidity through verse in Tamil.

A panel discussion by Jaydeep Sarkar, the director of the series *Rainbow Rishta*, actor Negha, and L Ramakrishnan of queer collectives like Orinam and SAATHI, will discuss the portrayal of queer people in mainstream media.

While Negha, the first trans woman to win the debut actor award at the 52nd Kerala State Film Awards, will speak about the opportunities available to trans actors, Ramakrishnan will talk about the role of non-government organisations (NGOs) in the assistance of creating



Queer deliberations (Above) Actor Negha (right) in a scene with Trisha (left); (Inset) Director Jaydeep Sarkar. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

policy and providing aid during crisis intervention. Director Jaydeep will speak about the story behind the making of *Rainbow Rishta*, a series widely regarded for its accurate portrayal of queer relationships.

This will be followed by a queer fashion show by members from Sahodaran, one of the oldest community-based collectives for the LGBTQIA+ community in the city.

Although this is Prakriti Foundation's first such pride event, Shah says that they have spotlighted several queer authors before through their events on resistance poetry, dance and art. He adds that they are hoping for several other conversations on inclusivity in the future.

Harish Subramanian, programme coordinator, Prakriti, says that a conscious decision was made to ensure that local talent which speaks in the mother tongue, Tamil, is present at this queer festival. He adds, "We are also hoping to end the night with a celebratory dance through a DJ session."

Pride with Prakriti is on June 9 from 6pm at Alliance Francaise of Madras, 24, College Road, Nungambakkam. Entry is free.



A place called home

Sri Lankan writer Appadurai Muttulingam's latest English translation *Where God Began*, tells stories of love, loss, and the hope of refugees



would be a historical record," he says. But this, he found out, was a monumental task.

This work eventually took on the form of fiction, which Muttulingam says "is 90% real". It took him two years to put it together. "The stories have elements of love, marriage, death, murder... all of which the protagonist encounters during his journey," he points out. But what makes the novel throb with life are the many people in its pages, each with their own little stories.

Ahalya, who had been selected for a medical course in

Sri Lanka, but had to give it up to go to Germany; Chandra Mami, a keen observer of Nature, on her way to France to be with her daughter; the 'refugee magistrate' from Colombo who had to flee after the war broke out... Muttulingam writes about these people with sensitivity and attention to detail. The little things add warmth: one encounters a group of refugees in Germany which saves money with their refugee allowance, buys a video deck and watches the popular Pandiyarajan Tamil film *Aan Paavam*.

Muttulingam started writing extensively after his retirement. "I was in a very serious job, and was responsible for countries such as Somalia and Afghanistan," he remembers, adding that he did maintain notes of things that caught his attention. He now has 20 books to his credit, including three novels set in

A new beginning Tamil refugees arriving at Rameswaram; (below) Appadurai Muttulingam and his book. AP AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

places such as Canada and Afghanistan, short stories, interviews, and essays. Muttulingam says he has now stopped creative writing, and is working on taking the works of Tamil writers to international publications, as well as translating articles from such publications for the benefit of Tamil readers.

Muttulingam says he was fortunate to leave Sri Lanka before the Civil War broke out. He was married and had two children, when he received a telegram one morning in 1972 with a job offer in Sierra Leone. "I hadn't even applied for it," he chuckles, adding that a friend who worked in the company had recommended his name. Till then, Muttulingam, who was working as a general manager in an automobile company, had not planned on relocating to a different country. "There were several restrictions by the Government then; it was difficult to even buy milk for my children," he recalls. He thus left his home country, eventually living in different parts of the world. "I have been very lucky in a lot of ways," he says.

It has been 20 years since Muttulingam visited Sri Lanka. His ancestral home, that has now been refurbished and sold, was damaged during the war. "I

don't want to see my home after what it went through," he says. "I want to remember only the good parts."





Tempt

Launched by friends, B Akshay Sunil and K Nikhil Shivanand, who share a passion for sweets, Tempt offers a range of chocolates. Their latest additions to the menu are cookies and cream, and crunchy brocolate topped with choco chips, then drizzled in rich chocolate sauce. Try their signature triple layer cake, a blend of chocolate, white chocolate, and red velvet cake, all smothered in a chocolate sauce. Their upcoming outlet promises an extended menu which includes tiramisu. Open from 7pm to 10.30pm, high demand has spurred the duo to expand. *New 74, 5th Avenue, V block, Anna Nagar, with prices ranging from ₹150 to ₹200.*



Traffic Jam

Offering decadent desserts and refreshing drinks, sales at Traffic Jam begin at 7pm. They serve a variety of kulfis, waffles, mojitos and boba tea. Run by civil engineer Vignesh Karthik, Traffic Jam's bestsellers are hot chocolate brownie, lime soda and peach mojito. "The malai kulfi and the hot chocolate double-layered brownies are homemade," he says. The malai kulfi is creamy and drizzled with chocolate sauce, while the gooey hot chocolate brownie sells up to 100 pieces a day. *Traffic Jam is at New 5th Ave, Anna Nagar. Prices range from ₹35 to ₹100.*



Try an Alphonso popsicle, sip on a rasamalai latte, and dig into a chocopot. We explore this locality, which comes alive at dusk

The dessert carts of Anna Nagar

Maithreyi Venkatesan, Jeromi Claudine and Srreya Sridhar

Ikigai

Ikigai Food Cart, known for its inventive popsicles, has established itself as a neighbourhood favourite. "We specialise in popsicles and have distinguished it based on chocolate and fruits. Our signature offerings in chocolate are choco brownie and lotus biscoff. We also have fruit popsicles, and are known for blissful blueberry and Alphonso mango, along with the recently-added tender coconut pudding," says SR Rajkumar, one of the four partners behind the cart. Ikigai opened its doors six months ago and serves customers from 6.30pm till late. Rajkumar devotes his evenings to the cart, even though he juggles a day job as an automotive designer. The busiest hours are from 10pm to 1am on weekends, and from 10pm to midnight on weekdays. *Located at 5th Avenue, Z block, Anna Nagar, with prices ranging from ₹69 to ₹149.*



PHOTOS: B JOTHI RAMALINGAM



Kofuku Corner

Kofuku Corner, an anime-themed food cart opens at 5pm on weekdays, 4pm on weekends, and closes at 10pm. Friends Harineth and Meganathan, own this cart that sells popping boba shakes, fruity iced teas and flavoured cafe lattes. Their signature iced lattes are the gaelic paradise and mango magic. While the gaelic paradise is a cold, chocolatey brew, the mango magic has mango bits and frothy cream on top. Another bestseller is the American ice cream boba, rasmalai velvet and cranberry elixir tea frosts. The cart also sells anime-based stickers and posters for anime fans. *Kofuku corner is at 6th Main Road, in front of Anna Nagar Tower. They are priced between ₹69 and ₹109.*



Go, wildcats

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For everyone who grew up watching the Disney Channel in the Noughties, the *High School Musical* movies were a rite of passage. "We are bringing everything that people have loved about the *High School Musical* series to the stage," says Deandra Clementine Nicholas. The 23-year-old director is helming a stage adaptation of the first *High School Musical* film through *Wildcats: The Musical* with a young cast and crew bringing alive oodles of teen spirit on stage this weekend in Chennai. "We just have one new character and a new song added. I have made a few changes to tailor it for our stage," she says. Much like the first film, *Wildcats: The Musical* follows Gabriella, a new student at East High as she strikes up an unlikely friendship over music with the school's star basketball player, Troy. There is a ton of drama, sport, and of course, music and dance along the way, courtesy

East High's many colourful cliques and characters. While they expected a handful to show up for the initial audition call, nearly 80 people registered to try their luck at being cast. With Deandra being the oldest member of this production, youngsters fresh out of school and in college comprise a majority of the cast. Over the last three months, Deandra says the cast has been trained in singing by their vocal conductor Antara Sarah Chacko, and in dance by their choreographer Vishnulakshmi. "Along with Uthara Menon who is our executive producer, we have been working together as a core team on this big production. This is my first time working on a production of this magnitude, and it has been a learning experience, especially in patience," says the young director. *On June 8 at The Music Academy, TTK Road. Tickets are available on allevents.in and are priced from ₹250 onwards.*

Breaking free The cast of *Wildcats: The Musical*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT
Led by a young cast and crew, Poochu's Productions' *Wildcats: The Musical* will celebrate teen spirit through song, dance, and drama on stage at The Music Academy

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HOUSE OF DIAMONDS



Veteran actor Sathyaraj is gung-ho about his upcoming Tamil film which, he feels, has enough material to have its own cinematic universe

My secret weapon

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Very few actors’ on-screen persona feel like an extension of their real-life selves and Sathyaraj is a textbook example of that. The jokes and banter his films are famous for also seep into interviews with him. When quipped about giving back-to-back interviews, a laughing Sathyaraj goes, “I was answering the same questions and after a while, I began looking at our production manager and started singing ‘Innum Ennai Enna Seiya Pogirai’.” But the veteran actor loves talking about films; he is currently excited about upcoming release, *Weapon*. Excerpts from a chat:

Question: Your favourite actor MGR did Kalai Arasi (1963), regarded as

Tamil cinema’s first space film, but there has been a dearth of experimental films from the fantasy genre. Why do you think so?
Answer: Fantasy films are comparatively more expensive to make and many more aspects come into play. Nowadays, it also involves a lot of CG work and only after receiving the output do we

know what the final product looks like. It needs a certain sense of confidence to pull off a fantasy film and probably that’s the reason we have had far and few in between. I feel *Weapon* will start a trend.

Q: How different are films like *Weapon* compared to the regular ones you have done all these years?

Connecting the dots

After playing a cop in Rajinikanth’s *Jailer* last year, Vasanth Ravi is on a different mission this time around, in *Weapon*, directed by Guhan Senniappan. “The idea is not to repeat the genres, and the shift is based on the scripts I receive. I also look out for strong points in my character that would generate interest and curiosity for the audience,” says Vasanth. Vasanth adds that he likes the vision of the directors he has worked with, and *Weapon* is no different. “Director Guhan has been consuming a lot of DC and Marvel comics and anime since childhood. For me, listening to the script itself was like a fantasy. He explained the different worlds, and how he wants to connect them and do the equivalent of Hollywood’s cinematic universes.”

▶ **Taking a new shot**
Sathyaraj in a still from *Weapon*; (below) Vasanth Ravi. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

A: In *Weapon*, I have done what was expected from me but I am waiting to see the final version to see how it has panned out. *Weapon* has enough material to have its own cinematic universe, concepts we have only seen in Hollywood. This genre of films also caters to children and they obviously have to be accompanied by parents (laughs). If this turns out to be a franchise, it will become a comfortable space for senior actors like me, akin to Harrison Ford in the *Indiana Jones* film series. I was pleasantly taken aback by the producer’s conviction with this project. To be honest, I know I’m not a saleable actor to centre a film around me; I’m just a busy character actor.

Q: Is it easy to pre-visualise such a film during the narration stage?
A: On the very first day of the shoot, I was told to prepare for an action sequence and I thought it would be another run-of-the-mill one. But they impressively shot it for a week and that gave me confidence with this film. The usual family dramas that I used to do



with Goundamani *anna* and Manivannan were so discernible that even during the narration stage we knew the segments that would make people laugh, cry or clap. In films like *Weapon*, we know about it only after seeing the final product and credit has to go to the director’s creativity and producer’s intrepidity. Back then, someone like P Vasu sir narrating an emotional sequence would get me and actors like Prabhu in tears. Filmmakers like Manivannan would have clear-cut ideas or someone like R Sundararajan would sing while narrating the script and we know Ilaiyaraaja would deliver some nice tracks. I had pillars like them to bank on but films like *Weapon* that are mounted around my character make for a new experience.

Q: Where does this understanding and self-awareness of your market stem from?
A: 47 years ago, before I left for Chennai, my friends would pull my legs asking if I would become like MGR and Sivaji. I just wanted to give it a shot and even if acting did not work out, I knew I could become something along the lines of a production manager. A successful venture is good but I always prepare for the worst-case scenarios.

Q: Villadhi Villain, your only directorial venture, was a huge hit. Why didn’t you return to the director’s chair again?
A: I have made a lot of mistakes in my career and one of them was not continuing to direct. *Villadhi Villain* was a hit and if director Sathyaraj had stayed active, he would have retained the saleability of hero Sathyaraj. I don’t know if I can return to direction now. As an actor, I have about eight films and a few web series in different stages. It’s already been announced that I’m a part of some of them like *Mazhai Pidikatha Manithan* and *Valli Mayil*, as well as web series like *Gangs*. Apart from three Telugu films and a Hindi one that I’m going to start soon, I have also signed up for three Tamil series.



▶ **A new lesson**
Tamil film *Anjaamai*, releasing this week, revolves around the complexities and challenges posed by the NEET exam on Tamil Nadu’s education system. The film has been directed by debutant director Subburaman, who previously worked as an assistant director under directors Mohan Raja and Lingusamy. Featuring Vidaarth, Vani Bhojan, Rahman and Krithik Mohan in pivotal roles, *Anjaamai* explores the sweeping changes in education and their impact on students. Produced by M Thirunavukarasu, a psychiatrist and professor, the film will be presented by Dream Warrior Pictures.



▶ **The hunt begins**
Streaming platform ZEE5’s upcoming Telugu crime thriller series, *Paruvu*, stars Nivetha Pethuraj, Naresh Agastya, Naga Babu and Pranita Patnaik. The series is said to narrate a forbidden tale of love that spirals into a deadly conspiracy and battle for survival. With Pavan Sadineni as the showrunner, it is written by Siddharth Naidu, who also directs with Vadlapati Rajashekhar. In a press release, Nivetha Pethuraj said, “I portray a woman caught between love and a society that criminalises her choices. What drew me to *Paruvu* was its raw, unflinching look at caste politics and honour killings.” *Paruvu* premieres on ZEE5 on June 14.

The troublemaker

What influencer Uorfi Javed plans to do on the sets of MTV Splitsvilla

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Uorfi Javed is a mischief maker. And she is not apologetic about it. This is her new role in the current edition of *MTV Splitsvilla X5: ExSqueeze Me Please*, a dating reality show. Unlike last season, she is not pretending to be a contestant this time. “I just create mischief in the life of contestants,” she says. “Other than the addition of a mischief maker, this time we also have the exes making appearances. There are so many twists and turns. The love triangles are my favourite. And the contestants are very vocal and I’m loving that,” she says, over a video call from Mumbai. The 26-year-old made her television debut in 2015 with *Tedhi Medhi Family* on Big Magic. “That channel is now defunct, so not too many people knew about my debut. I then did a lot of other serials like *Bepannaah*, *Kasautii Zindagii Kay 2*, *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai*...,” she says. While she worked in soap operas, she was also creating her own outfits side by side. “I was always into fashion and sewing outfits for Instagram. It was all D-I-Y. Then, around two and a half years back, I started going viral.” That is when she decided to take fashion seriously. “So I thought, let’s create outfits that will go viral,” she says. For a person who comes up with such outrageous, bold, and interesting designs, Uorfi says that she does not really know where her ideas come from or what inspires her. She says she take her ideas to her “master ji” (tailor) who gives her directives a physical form. It is her unique clothes that have given her this kind of visibility. When she got on Instagram and was only doing serials, she had around one million followers. But it spiked in the last two years and now stands



▶ **Viral appeal** Uorfi Javed. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

at 4.8 million. “I just wanted to go viral,” she admits. From compliments from Kareena Kapoor Khan and Karan Johar to critics booing her sartorial innovations, Uorfi has seen it all. “They won’t understand, you have to prove it to them. I have been consistent with my journey, my growth. My agenda is to become something and be the best version of me.” Her own favourites include her butterfly outfit (a black gown with green leaf motifs that also flutter like butterflies), the one with birds (a short black dress with two mechanical birds hovering over her shoulders) and an upcoming one with a print of the Taj Mahal.

Uorfi Javed made her television debut in 2015 with Tedhi Medhi Family on Big Magic

Has she ever considered starting her own label? “That’s a lot of hard work and I can’t do it,” she says, adding, “Business wise I don’t know if it is profitable. I don’t know if my 4.8 million followers will buy them or not.” Anyway, most of her followers are men, she says. “Men follow me, women stalk me,” she grins. The Mumbai paparazzi’s favourite, they always shoot her whether at the gym or airport. And how they do know where she goes? Is that a PR stunt or do they keep a tab? “You’ll find out about that and a lot more on my new reality show. It’s called *Follow Kar Lo Yaar*.” And that, ladies and gentlemen, is how you market yourself.

MTV Splitsvilla X5: ExSqueeze Me Please airs every Saturday and Sunday at 7 pm on MTV and in Tamil simultaneously on Jio Cinema.



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