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THE HINDU



Chennai prepares to host its first official F4 night race. Catch all the cars in action **P2**

ALL ABOUT TOVINO'S ONAM RELEASE **P4**



Madras minutes

Amidst sonorous bells, ticks, tocks, chimes and strikes, we meet the only two technicians entrusted with the keys to the oldest clock towers in the city

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An advertisement by Cook's Travel Services from August 1940 in *Walkabout* (an erstwhile Australian illustrated magazine) summarises the Madras of yore through a simple black and white picture. It uses a picture of the Madras Central Railway Station as the gateway to a nation at the precipice of its minotinous, hard-fought freedom. Within the printed borders of the ad, one finds a tram in motion at the busy Park Town intersection. A horse-drawn carriage trudges past people. Most importantly though, the remarkable railway station with its defining white Travancore-cap clock tower, stands tall at 135 feet amidst a cotton-ball sky. For years now, this very image of the Central railway station has been used in Tamil cinema to depict the transition of a changing landscape. The Park Town intersection is far more chaotic today. The four platforms built in 1873 have now become 17. Buses, bikes and busy travellers occupy every inch of the road outside the station. And, the advent of time on watches and phones, has made clock towers entirely antiquated. However, up in the tallest tower of the building, the chaos of the outside world pauses. Technician Syed Nazir sets about winding a Gillett & Bland mechanical clock from the 1870s that still runs. "This is from London. The British brought it here. Do you know what a striking clock is? When it was first set up, it is said that one could hear the chime every hour all the way till Chintadripet but the sound has become defunct now. It is still a wonderful clock though, full of history. Just look at how she runs," Syed says over the rhythmic tick. There are only two people in Chennai – Syed Feroz and S Anthony – entrusted with the keys to the city's oldest, most prized clock towers of today. Fitted with mechanical clocks that are barely in production in India, a simple wrong twist of a screw or a missing cog, would mean that time would effectively stand still at these locations. These custodians, however, are vigilant about the clocks' every movement and their meticulous history. Meet the timekeepers of Chennai.

Atop the ivory tower
Fifty-one-year-old Syed's tryst with timepieces, began at home. "My

father helped fix the clocks in the Nawab of Arcot's house," he claims proudly. Syed says that he was never truly interested in academics and moved to taking care of the business by the time he was 15. "I worked as an apprentice with SA Rahim who was often contracted by the Greater Chennai Corporation to fix, wind and upkeep the clocks under the purview of the department. I assisted him for 10 years and eventually branched out on my own," he says, walking around broken bird eggs and rat tails, at the Chennai Central clock tower. Syed's mornings begin at 5am with phone calls from various officers of the Corporation and the Southern Railways as he is a contracted employee now. He maintains a roster to attend to the clocks at the Ripon Buildings, St Mary's Church at Fort St George, St George's Cathedral and a clock at the neighbouring US Consulate to climb, wind and maintain the mechanism.



Syed has mastered the weigh-drive mechanism that defines colonial clocks from the late 19th and early 20th Century. Here, six iron plates are tied to a metal rope and connected to a chain of wheels. They are suspended below the clock's main movement. As the wheels rotate every passing minute, the iron plates unwind, moving towards the floor. A brass pointer on the dial of the clock moves too. Usually, over a week's time, the suspended plates slowly descend as the wheels rotate. Once the plates hit the floor, the clock stops working. Technicians must wind this clock back at least once a week from the floor to ensure that the plates are suspended

People are sensitive about clocks running on time. Rain or shine, it must tick

SYED FEROZ
Clock technician

at the top once again so that the clock continues ticking. This means that Syed works through the week. "Over the last 40 years, I have repaired and wound clocks while wading through knee-deep water inside clock towers and also through the COVID years where nearly no vehicles plied. People are sensitive about clocks running on time. Rain or shine, it must tick," he says. A recent health setback has proven to Syed that he needs a protege to ensure that people can keep time whether or not he is around. It is why he is grooming S Imran Khan to take over. It is the only way to protect these markers of history. "Not many people are interested because it is a lot of hard work but somebody has got to do it," Syed says. S Anthony concurs with Syed. Speaking as he winds the Royapettah clock tower, in his blue shirt drenched in sweat, this technician from P Orr & Sons who has been involved in fixing clock towers for 10 years now, says that

A mile, a minute (Top) S Anthony at the Royapettah clock tower; (below) Syed Feroz. S SHIVA RAJ AND THAMODHARAN B



This clock existed before me. It must exist after me too. That is why I do this

S ANTHONY
Clock technician

few people are interested in the job as it could sometimes mean life or death. "The Fyson clock (unveiled in 1940) at Presidency College has a narrow entryway to the top. The first time we went, it was concerning to go all the way to the top because of the dust, the lack of light, the rickety ladder up and the placement of the mechanism itself. It was hard to breathe," he says. Although he has worked on clocks only for a decade, he has four decades of experience fixing watches. Antony says that his favourite part of the job is 'figuring it out'. He adds that he can find out what is wrong with a clock by merely hearing it tick. As he opens the gate and climbs up the Royapettah clock tower, a 1940s Art Deco marvel, contrasting the brash newness of the Express Avenue mall, a traffic constable who has been on duty in the area, says that he would like to join him. "I have been working in the area for decades but have never climbed the top," he says. In minutes, he slips out too. "I don't know how he stays here for hours," the police personnel says, fanning himself. "This clock existed before me. It must exist after me too. That is why I do this," Antony says. "That, and the view. Where else can you see Chennai like this?"

STEP OUT



A satire unfolds

Since 1917, Women's Christian College (WCC) has upheld an important tradition — the college play. The event this year brings together 120 students and faculty members to present Nikolai Gogol's satire *The Government Inspector*. The 90-minute play chronicles the panic and chaos that breaks out in a small Russian town once they hear of the arrival of a government inspector. Written in a light-hearted way while tackling issues related to power and corruption, Regin Rose, director of the play, and founder, Chennai Theatre Academy, says that the play written in 1836 remains relatable to this day. In this staging, expect intelligent humour with a side of introspection. The *Government Inspector* will be staged at Women's Christian College, College Road, Nungambakkam on September 5, 6, and 7 at 6.30pm. Tickets are priced ₹200 upwards, and will be available at the venue.

— S Poorva



Reimagining beauty

Feminism and futurism are the themes of CGI artist Samyukta Madhu's art show *Reincarnations — Ghosts of a South Asian Past*. The idea of traditional South Indian beauty through a contemporary lens with forms adorning kolam tattoos and futuristic jewellery, hopes to present the view of an uncolonised yet technologically advanced world. The art works will be displayed on LED screens at Collage on the first day of the show. The print versions of the artwork will be on display until September 9. The show will run from September 1 to 9 at Collage, 6, Rutland Gate, Thousand Lights

ADVAYA

From The House of Angadi

In Chennai

ADVAYA presents an experiential showcase featuring a convergence of 600 years of design legacy and innovation in sarees and menswear.

Date: 30th & 31st August

Venue: The Folly at Amethyst

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A musical brew

Recreating the romance of old school vinyls, Vinyl & Brew curates speciality beans from across India, with some papaya toast on the side

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Can you build a cafe on hopes, dreams and the sound of music? Ragu Muthiah day-dreamed about a community space filled with the sound of vinyl records and the scent of coffee for years.

Finally, he opened Vinyl & Brew.

Standing in his new cafe, which already buzzes with energy, thanks to Elton John playing in the background, the hum of quiet conversation and hiss of the espresso machine, Ragu beams. He suggests I pick a vinyl record to play. The soundtrack, shaped by the diners, shifts gently between jazz, pop and the blues.

"I have no background in coffee, or restaurants. I work in advertising and I run a



production house," Ragu confesses, then adds with a chuckle, "That's the fun part."

His interest in coffee, honed during the pandemic, led him to a variety of roasters and estates from across the country. "I got interested in Indian speciality coffee, and originally wanted to do a roastery and coffee shop. But during the pandemic, a lot of enthusiasts started roasting coffee, and there is great quality available across India now. So I

decided to start curating coffee instead," he says.

As we chat, his team – all restaurant industry freshers – are busy behind the counter, carefully making pourovers using the Chemex, Vario V60, Origami and Kalita brewers. While there will undoubtedly be a learning curve over the next few months, given that the team lacks experience, there is a distinct charm to Vinyl & Brew for the same reason: they are enthusiastic about experimenting with new flavours and equipment.

I try the fermented rose coffee, a light roast made on a Chemex and served black. It is remarkably fragrant conjuring up memories of a garden in bloom. Then I try a more conventional medium roast coffee from the Ananthagiri Hills, which is rich and almost viscous with flavour. Finally

Caffeinated notes Inside Vinyl & Brew. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

(and yes I'm rather over-caffeinated at this point), I sip on a silky cortado made with the house blend, a dark roast of Gudalur coffee beans from the Nilgiris.

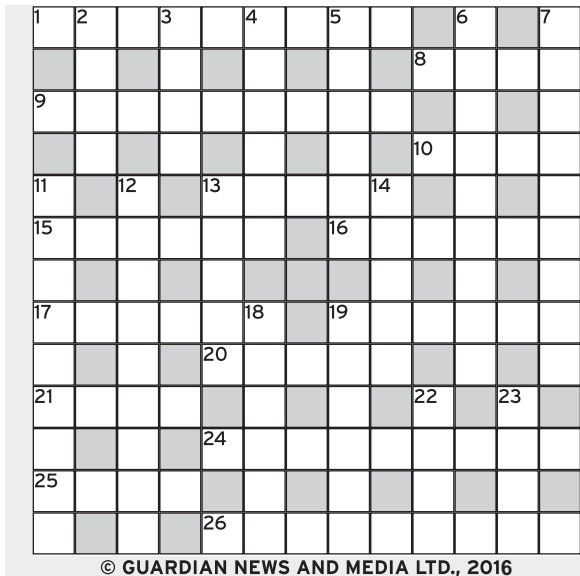
There is a short but thoughtful food menu as well. It includes toasties set on chewy, buttery sourdough: I try one with chunks of sauteed eggplant served with an Italian style tomato sauce. It is fresh with basil and topped with a generous pool of melty cheese. I also sample the unexpected papaya toast, which tastes better than it sounds, with slices of raw grilled papaya set on a bed of mixed greens, cream cheese and herbs.

After my deep dive into black coffee, I order a slice of their chocolate cake, which turns out to be dark and moist, a pleasing foil for the coffee.

As Ragu walks over to his collection and starts thumbing through the Def Leppard, Nirvana and Queen vinyls, Ragu says he envisions the cafe as a community space for music, with listening sessions and workshops.

Till then, you can drink coffee and eat cake as you let the romance of old school music wash over you. "Vinyls just sound so much better. You don't have listening fatigue..." says Ragu, adding, "The other day a customer was working on his laptop here, and he suddenly started singing along. He just became part of the music."

Vinyl & Brew is at TTK Road. A meal for two costs ₹1,000.



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THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13600

Across

- 1 Friction (9)
- 8 American wild cat (4)
- 9 Broken French (informal) (9)
- 10 Butter used in Indian cookery (4)
- 13 Invalidate (5)
- 15 Fruit — shade (6)
- 16 Skewer (6)
- 17 Manipulate balls (6)
- 19 Reconnoitre (6)
- 20 Run off to get married (5)
- 21 Sage (4)
- 24 Bowdlerise (9)
- 25 Branch part (4)
- 26 Preserve by lowering temperature (6-3)

Down

- 2 Dully studious type (4)
- 3 Coquette (4)
- 4 Type of hospital drip (6)
- 5 Cause to make a mistake (4,2)
- 6 Skill(s) attained while living in uncultivated country (9)
- 7 Audacious (9)
- 11 Name all forms of a verb (9)
- 12 Composure (9)
- 13 Supple (5)
- 14 Supple (5)
- 18 It could supposedly change base metals into gold (6)
- 19 Fir (6)
- 22 Nasty giant (4)
- 23 Asterisk (4)

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Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated September 5, 2024.

Solution No. 13599



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



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In 2018, when Deepika Padukone wore two saris from label Advaya for her wedding, it put the Bengaluru-based brand under the spotlight. But the brand's success story started way before that when it was launched in 2010. "Advaya means unique and we live up to that name as a brand," says KH Radharaman, founder of the label, who also started The House of Angadi in 2001.

Radharaman comes from a family that has been in the business of textiles for 600 years, with a background as master

weavers and court weavers. So, it comes as a surprise that he is not a trained designer but an engineer. However, when he speaks about textiles and innovation, one can sense the passion.

"My motivation to come back to textile was two-fold. I had a family history which made it easier to think about it as one of the options. Ultimately, the fact that I was an engineer and wanted to be an entrepreneur was another starting point."



How to engineer a sari

Bengaluru label Advaya brings its bandhgalas, trousers, and Kanjeevaram saris with innovative techniques to Chennai

By the end of 2009, Radharaman felt it was necessary to do design intervention and work on woven textiles for the Indian market. "I started doing things that were different. One of the first innovations was introducing linen blended in Kanjeevaram. Back then, linen in handwoven textile in India was not heard of," he says, adding, "There was a need for a different identity under which we could house these innovations. That's how Advaya was born."

The design studio is in Bengaluru, where they weave, embroider and print. But the label also works with clusters across the country. "We do a lot of work in Varanasi, Kancheevaram, Kota, kantha in West Bengal, chikankari in UP..."

Weave a tale Collections from Advaya. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

This weekend, Advaya will bring three series of its womenswear and menswear to Chennai. The Eternal Series has motifs like plumes of the peacock and mystical creepers in traditional reds, soft pinks, flame orange and bottle green. The Heritage Series revisits the family's 600-year-old design roots and revives traditional and archival designs and techniques that are not in circulation. The Contemporary Series is inspired by minimalist nuances in art and architecture, and includes handwoven ikat from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, tanchoi technique from Benaras, and kantha from Bengal. The menswear on display comprises shirts, kurtas, bundis, bandhgalas, trousers, and accessories like pocket squares in fabrics like tussar, silk, linen and linen blends.

"All my work under Advaya is compiled in the form of series. We don't design collections that are seasonal in nature, rather we build a series of design. Designs that are perpetually going to be relevant," he says.

Advaya will be on display at The Folly in Amethyst on August 30 and 31, 11am onwards.

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Who is the golden sparrow?
Nilavukku En Mel Ennadi Kobam, directed by Dhanush, will have a cameo appearance by Priyanka Mohan. This is Dhanush's third directorial venture after *Pa Paandi* and *Raayan*. The makers released the announcement poster of the film's first single, Golden Sparrow, featuring Priyanka and other actors in the movie.
Anikha Surendran, Priya Prakash Varrier, Matthew Thomas, Venkatesh Menon, Rabiya Khatoon, and Ramya Ranganathan play prominent roles in *Nilavukku En Mel Ennadi Kobam*. GV Prakash is set to compose music for the film.



The finish line
Interested in motorsports? Here's a documentary web series on Indian racers and how motorsports evolved in India. Titled *Breaking the Barriers*, it hopes to take viewers on a journey from an era gone by to the current times in chronological order and hopes to inspire the younger generation. The makers now intend to do limited theatrical releases, based on demand. The theatrical version, which will be of two-and-half hours duration, will have limited releases in Chennai, Bengaluru, Coimbatore, Hyderabad and New Delhi. "Today, when we talk to motorsports enthusiasts in India, they speak about Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen. Their awareness of Indian racers pales in comparison. This docu-series is an attempt to connect Indians to our unsung heroes and showcase them in a global arena," added Sujith, who is also the father of motor-racing champion Yash Aradhya.

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Being the jack of all trades - be it in any field - never comes easy. In the film industry, where a lead actor's career span mostly depends on their consistency in helming movies that rake in the moolah at the box office, it is rife with risks to continuously experiment with roles in a bid to prove your versatility.
For actor Tovino Thomas, who has carved a space of his own in Malayalam filmndom since making his debut 12 years ago without any godfathers in the industry, that seems to be not a deterrent. He has never limited himself to being a 'safe zone' actor, who sticks to only certain roles. From the unconditional lover Appu in *Ennu Ninte Moideen* to the macho villain Shaji in *Kala* to the flamboyant and effervescent Wazi in *Thallumaala*, Tovino has been able to pull off a range of characters in his 49-film-old career.
During a visit to *The Hindu* office ahead of the release of his 50th film titled *Ajayante Randal Moshanam* aka *ARM*, Tovino says that the diversity in his filmography has earned him the tag of an "unpredictable actor". "It is good for the audience if an actor is unpredictable. I don't want people to think that Tovino is always the hero. I don't want them to decide before they watch a movie," he says, about breaking the moviegoers' preconceived notions.
In *ARM*, which, according to him is a blend of several genres, he has tried to further push his limits and put his acting prowess to test as he plays three characters belonging to three different eras. He says he approached the characters like he would in three separate films because they are all so distinctive; and



The golden ARM

Tovino Thomas on his upcoming *Ajayante Randal Moshanam*, set in northern Kerala



he has gone the extra mile to nail them.
"We designed how these three characters walk, smile, talk, and even fight. I practised kalaripayattu for around six months for this movie," he

The adventure begins

The cast and crew of upcoming Malayalam film *Ajayante Randal Moshanam* (ARM) visited *The Hindu's* Chennai office on August 26 for an interaction. The 3D period adventure, set for an Onam release in September, stars Tovino Thomas and features Kriti Shetty, Aishwarya Rajesh, Surabhi Lakshmi, Basil Joseph, Rohini and Harish Uthaman, among others. Directed by debutant Jithin Laal, the film features three men from different generations, all played by Tovino, as legends who rose to the occasion when their land and its people needed them.

An unconventional approach Tovino Thomas in a still from *Ajayante Randal Moshanam*; (below) the cast and crew during their visit to *The Hindu* office in Chennai.

says, pointing out how important it is to explore the nuances of characters to make them look unique. Elaborating on his process of internalising the three characters, he says each character has a prominent basic emotion of their own. "For the first character, it is *veera* (courage), second it is *roudra* (anger), and third it is *karuna* (sorrow)."
Apart from going through such intense processes to perfect his performances, Tovino says he also doesn't mind learning a little "magic trick" or two that adds more layers to his characters. Whether it is the closing shot in the teaser of *ARM*, where he swallows a *beedi* and takes it out - all while it is still lit - or the 'ring toss game' scene he did in the 2021 superhero film *Minnal Murali*, he says he finds joy in mastering such practical effects that can elevate a scene.

The game-changer role
Talking about *Minnal Murali*, Tovino says that his career can be divided into "before and after" the film, thanks to its acceptance worldwide. "That film pushed the boundaries of my capabilities. After it, I felt more sense of responsibility because my movies were now being watched by more people than before," he notes about the film, which had entered Netflix's weekly Global Top 10 (Non-English) list, upon its release.
Asked the reason behind its success, Tovino says that it presented a superhero who is very grounded and rooted in the local culture. "Minnal Murali is a superhero who wears a dhoti. Though the superhero element is unrealistic, Basil [director Basil Joseph] had a realistic approach, which made the film believable," he says.

Slice of life

Mari Selvaraj on his recently-released *Vaazhai*, during which he faced the challenge of turning his life's darkest phase into a film

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The biggest artwork adorning Mari Selvaraj's office - there are a lot of them, all in monochrome - is the imagery of a young Mari sitting on a table with books penned by him, surrounded by visionaries BR Ambedkar, Periyar and Karl Marx. "It's a gift

that made me happy. The books written by me are based on the understanding I got from the works of these three icons. We have stories, but what's important is from whose perspective we are telling those stories," says Mari. Excerpts from a chat:

When life comes full circle
If a director really wants to test their acumen, they should do a

children's film because working within their pure world is a challenge. It'll also test whether we have enough innocence left to understand ourselves and teach someone. When describing a societal issue through children, we have to put in more thought and effort to make it easy to pass the idea through them. Despite doing three films, a film like *Vaazhai* makes me proud.
The children today are sharp and the inputs given to them are the same as what I usually do with other actors. But the words and attitude I use differ; even the storytelling differs. Seeing how they react makes me forget that I'm a director as it'll start making me feel like I'm an older family member

who is narrating a bedtime story!
Based on the films I've done, we could probably call them a series with *Vaazhai* being the first entry. Because they all are stories about the same land, a connection automatically comes up. If the child from *Vaazhai* fights for education, that's the story of *Karnan*. If he goes to a law college, that's *Pariyerum Perumal*. With that political knowledge, he turns into *Maamannan*. It's also interesting to see how a normal person faces different issues as he progresses in life.

Why we make films
While telling a story about everyday people, instead of showing them individually, showcasing their life and lifestyle matters. When we're



showing incidents from someone's life, it's important to show who they are, what they loved, what they longed for and how they led their life. *Ivalo piriyama irrukuravangaluku ivalo periya aneedhi yen nadakuthu?* (Why do such lovely people face such

injustice)? When we show them their livelihood, seeing them in trouble disturbs the audience. A general truth we often look past is how the biggest of wars were fought over the simplest of things.
Are we doing films only for those who are going to clap and whistle, or also make them get into a discussion with themselves after the applause? After watching a film in darkness, they are going to come out and see society; the film should at least make them connect the dots between the two worlds.

A new thought
My next film *Bison* asks a different question but to make it more ambitious, a sporting background comes in handy. I've done films on politics, the story of a village, a college where the next generation comes together... and now, a film about the lives of hardworking folks. Similarly, *Bison* will be set within the walls of a sports stadium. The idea is to mount them on a canvas that would make the story reach the maximum number of audiences. My stories are from my experiences that I can't get past; they pull me down at times, but they constantly keep me on my toes.



All the small things
A still from *Vaazhai*; (above) Mari Selvaraj.
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