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A HOT BLAST FROM THE PAST

Following the death of a 25-year-old construction worker due to a heat stroke, last week in Chennai, a run-through of heat wave reports from Madras lodged in *The Hindu Archives*

P6



THE PALETTE AS AN INSTRUMENT OF CHANGE

Sivaranjani V, whose artworks figured in Vaanam 2024, believes the soft tip of the paintbrush should assume the sharp edge of the sword. P4

A house certified green by bees

PRINCE FREDERICK

One does not have to tell others what they are doing if the spirit of that activity permeates their entire being, surrounds them on all sides and hovers over them. M. Sreedhar does not have to tell the world he is invested in trees. It is out there to be seen.

His house at Nallappa Street in Chromepet is besieged by trees – trees grown over a period of 35 years.

Not just the 28 trees within his compound wall, he can call ever tree on Nallappa Street by their vernacular and botanical names – a natural outcome of being in the forefront of neighbourhood greening efforts, along with similarly green-thinking residents. The reward for this commitment is displayed right in his den.

On May 5, 2024, when *The Hindu Downtown* visited Nallappa Street for a ringside view of the a survey by tree conservation NGO Nizhal of the greenery there, bees had adorned a neem tree at M. Sreedhar's house with a humongous hive.



A massive beehive on a neem tree at M. Sreedhar's house in Chromepet; and (right) Sreedhar.
PHOTOS: PRINCE FREDERICK

This neem tree knows a thing or two about beehives, as it keeps hosting bees continuously. The tree always gets to sport a new beehive. Bees work overtime around his house, going tree-hopping and creating giant-sized beehives on this

tall neem tree.

He remarks the current beehive came up at an incredibly nifty pace – in around half-a-month's time. An old beehive, shrunk and on the verge of falling, sits next to this giant beehive. Sreedhar observes the bee-

hives are left to the bees and not a human finger has come anywhere near a beehive.

A growing passion

By profession, Sreedhar could call himself a mechanical and software



engineer – hats he does not wear anymore. He points out he had had a long stint in the software industry. By passion, he calls himself a “green engineer”. “My father was a hugely committed agriculturist in Tiruchirappalli,” he shares,

He reveals he is part of an informal group of green-thinking individuals who organise tree-planting exercises in neighbourhoods and educational institutions.

And his current work profile is not distant from his passion – he functions as an alternative energy with focus on solar and thermal energy.

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Nizhal's tree survey at Nallappa Street punctuated with inspiring pauses



During the survey. PHOTOS: PRINCE FREDERICK



Around the vesper hour on May 5, a knot of Nizhal volunteers and tree enthusiasts had gathered at Nallappa Street in

Chromepet to survey the trees there. Mid-way into the tree survey, the Nizhal volunteers stumbled onto the architects of Nallappa Street's greenery: residents

invested in the greening efforts since 2001

From there on, the tree survey at Nallappa Street in Chromepet was punctuated with pauses that celebrated

efforts by local residents to introduce fascinating native species and also to protect the greenery that have "moved into" their neighbourhood. The moment

frozen in the picture, one that has both Nizhal volunteers and residents within the frame, is about basking in an exercise undertaken by the residents to resusci-

tate an Indian laburnum uprooted by Michaung.

At Nallappa Street, mahilam trees make up a massive majority, around 70 p.c.

READERS WRITE

Senior activists on the warpath



Chromepet MIT bridge service road is already narrow due to several encroachments. In this condition both EB and highways are digging the road: EB for cable laying and highways for rain-harvest pits, simultaneously. This is causing great inconvenience to residents of New Colony from 11th cross street to 17th cross street. Open pits and rubble are creating an environment for accidents. After completion of one work, another department takes up their work.

Therefore, social activists of People's Awareness Association protested against the lack of coordination along departments by sitting over a mound of mud and rubble and holding placards.

EB should stop their work putting it on hold till the highways completes their work.

V. Santhanam, social activist, Chromepet

MTC releases list of buses heading to Vandalur zoo

Metropolitan Corporation has prepared a list of route numbers that go to the

Arignar Anna Zoological Park (also known as the Vandalur Zoo). The list will come in handy for people and their families

planning a trip to the zoological garden and other tourist and religious places across Chennai, said a release.

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A novel waiting area for commuters at Tambaram West bus stop

T.S. ATUL SWAMINATHAN

Finally, there is some respite from the heat for those waiting at Tambaram West bus stop on GST Road (towards Irumbuliyur).

Tambaram Police Commissionerate has set up a thaneer pandal adjacent to the air-conditioned bus shelter, which is of immense help to commuters.

The Hindu Downtown had recently reported that the air conditioners do not function optimally, so commuters stand and sit in the open.

Though the shelter is wide with a few water cans in place, the waiting area could have been spruced up.

V. Kavitha Vijayasarathy says, "The area along the pandhal could have been cleaned and benches facilitated."

The move will prevent the public from misusing the place and defacing the walls that painted with images of wildlife.

Bus commuters taking shelter under the Thaneer Pandal.
PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



RWA honours toppers with cash prize

People's Awareness Association members of Chromepet honoured three girl students from Sir Aiyaswami Aiyar Higher Secondary School, Chromepet, who scored good marks in the State Board Plus Two Board Examinations.

The students are Malini, Lakshita and Malarkodi. Malini scored 562 out of 600, Lakshita secured 525 out of 600, and Malarkodi scored 489 out of 600. They were honoured with cash prizes and their mothers with saris.

The girls through their determination and hard work have scored excellent marks, said V. Santhanam, the association founder. The members hosted a dinner for the students and their families.

The palette as an instrument of change

Sivaranjani V, whose artworks figured in Vaanam 2024, believes the soft tip of the paintbrush should assume the sharp edge of the sword

SHARON JESSICA MICHAEL

Sivaranjani V's journey from a curious child with itchy crayons to a perceptive artist with a prodigious palette is nothing short of inspiring. Art begins as a self-indulgent pursuit. Even great, meaningful art begins exactly that way, but moves out of that space, proceeding into the marketplace of ideas. It engages with ideas and the zeitgeist of the times. Just out of her teens, Sivaranjani has already discovered this truth. She knows the soft tip of her paintbrush can assume the sharp edge of a sword. And she makes sure it does.

Sivaranjani's artworks displayed at Vaanam Art Festival 2024 (held around a fortnight ago) engaged with the themes of our times. They resonated with the voice of the art festival, organised by director Pa. Ranjith's Neelam Cultural Centre at Lalit Kala Akademi as part of Dalit History Month Celebrations. The artists featured at the festival had painted vivid images of suffering encountered by various groups of people.

Sivaranjani's surrealist art was shot through with social commentary - visitors to the exhibition expressed this thought in different



Sivaranjani and (right) one of her artworks. Photos: Special arrangement

words. Her use of mixed media, including newspaper clippings and textured materials, added layers of depth and meaning to her artwork.

Sample this: an artwork in mixed media on canvas titled "Fish and Fishlore" depicts the resilience and struggles of the fisherfolk, particularly those from Tamil Nadu.

The artwork presents a collage of clippings of articles highlighting the challenges faced by these communities, the daily hardships as well as the shattering incarceration in a foreign prison. Unfazed by these obstacles, the fisherfolk continue with the life and work. Sivaranjani presented this idea through a surreal landscape where freshly caught fish is juxtaposed with a coastal backdrop. Materials like gauze went into evoking the imagery of fishing nets and crashing waves, presenting the struggle and the resilience.

Reflecting on the journey from the crayon books to Vaanam 2024, Sivaranjani says: "I started painting just to keep myself busy. When I was young, I used to take any scrap of paper and any crayon that I could find and simply let my imagination run wild."

Growing up in Bombay, art had been a solitary pursuit for Sivaranjani, now a resident of R.A. Puram who recently graduated from Women's Christian College with an undergraduate degree in English. "Art was something I did by myself, without anyone having to ask me," she reflects. But over time, she realised she wanted her art to be understood and appreciated by others.

"I saw others drawing in ways that people understood, and I wanted to do the same," she recalls. "I wanted to draw in a way that spoke to people, that sparked conversations."

These aspirations were realised



in the unlikelyst of times. Sivaranjani's creativity had a free run, ironically when she herself was cooped up within four walls. The pandemic lockdowns was a time of experimentation, of pushing boundaries. She switched from crayons to acrylic paints and started painting like there was no tomorrow.

During the lockdowns, movies became her source of inspiration, especially those that made her think deeply.

"Films by directors such as Vetri Maran and Pa. Ranjith opened my eyes to a whole new world of art," she reflects.

"They made me realise that art can be more than just a visual spectacle - it can be a powerful tool for storytelling and social change."

Sivaranjani feels she has moved from art that is a solitary pursuit to art that is a participatory phenomenon. Between every brush-

strokes, she wants to slip in a message for consumers of her art. "I want my paintings to reach people from all walks of life, sparking conversations and maybe even changing minds."

Vaanam 2024 not only helped Sivaranjani cross a personal milestone, but also brought the hazy contours of other milestones into view.

Sivaranjani feels enriched by the conversations she had with art enthusiasts at the event.

Thanks to the feedback, she feels she is on the way to increasing her visual vocabulary. Sivaranjani wears another creative hat - as a Bharatanatyam dancer. "Both art and dance are fundamental to me being me," she explains. "They enrich my understanding of the world and my place within it."

Clearly, this youngster understands that what you create ends up creating you.

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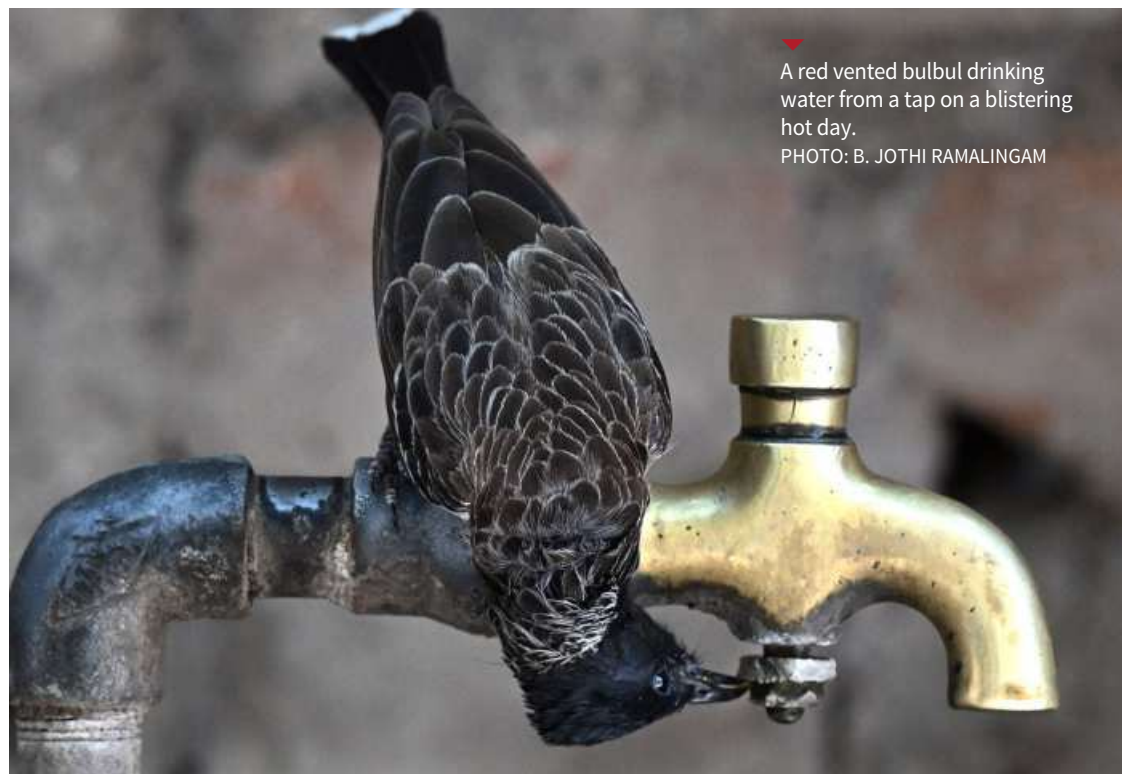
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A red vented bulbul drinking water from a tap on a blistering hot day.
PHOTO: B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

Heat Wave Shows No Sign of Abatement

NEW DELHI, May 21. The heat wave, which has taken a toll of over 300 lives till today, continued to sweep across India and the country's heat from Tamil Nadu to West Bengal without any sign of abatement.

Though temperatures in Pune and Lucknow dropped appreciably from 45°C and 52°C to 37°C and 34°C respectively, Chandigarh had the sunnier hottest day with 48.3°C, 2.7° above normal. Delhi had a high reading of 42°C. In the south, Madras had the hottest day with a reading of 41.1°C.

Severe and moderate heat wave conditions is forecast for Bihar, Orissa and several Andhra Pradesh cities, says a report from the India Meteorological Department.

There is hardly a more popular topic of conversation anywhere than the weather and its varying moods. There is always

discussed part to wild life and bird life. A Lucknow report said the temperature was 40°C during the last 24 hours. Reports from various centres indicated the temperature ranging from 38° to 41°C the highest being in Shikhar.

Hyderabad recorded a temperature of 40.7°C during the last 24 hours. Reports from various centres indicated the temperature ranging from 38° to 41°C the highest being in Shikhar.

The Heat Wave of 1972

The following are extracts from a book given by Dr. A. S. Ramesh, Director, Regional Meteorological Centre, Chennai, of the Rotary Club, Madras West, in the centre of which, he outlined the phenomenon of the heat wave, its nature and origin, with particular reference to the one that swept the country this summer taking a toll of more than 300 lives.

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A hot blast from the past

Following the death of a 25-year-old construction worker due to a heat stroke, last week in Chennai, a run-through of heat wave reports from Madras lodged in *The Hindu Archives*

LIFFY THOMAS

Among the earliest documented heatstroke-related deaths in Madras is the one that was reported by *The Hindu* on May 31, 1926.

According to the report now lodged in *The Hindu Archives*, a 22-year-old British soldier Fusilier Bradshaw was playing hockey at St. Thomas Mount when he retired from the game finding “the sun too hot”.

He was first taken to the Military Hospital and then to the General Hospital where he died.

A report titled “The heatwave of 1972” (based on excerpts from a talk given by Dr. A.A. Rama Sastri, Director, Regional Meteorological

Centre at the Rotary Club, Madras West) provides an insight into what constitutes a heat wave.

The report explains a heat wave condition is said to be present in a place when the maximum temperature recorded there is 6 to 7 degree Celsius above the usual recording at that time of year. When it the increase is 8 degree Celsius or more above normal it is categorised as “severe heat wave”. According to the report, June is known to record heat waves and severe heat waves consistently.

There have also been reports of animal death due to heat wave. A 1976 report has it that Madras Snake Park witnessed the death of many snakes, including a rare white cobra, due to a heat wave.

A. Ramachandran, who has

brought out a research paper on “Temperature trends in Chennai” says that up to 1965, the behaviour of our atmosphere, terrestrial ecosystem and rainfall was all normal.

“It is only after 1965 that we started seeing an increase in temperature and rainfall. What is worrisome is climatic extremities have become ruthless, we are seeing prolonged periods of heatwave which was not the case in the distant past. Temperature would increase for a day or two,” says Ramachandran, emeritus professor, Centre for Climate Change and Disaster Management, Anna University.

He says in earlier times natural causes were behind a heat wave.

“Now, it is anthropogenic,” says the professor.

Once upon a summer

In the mid-70s, when I was pursuing my undergraduate studies at Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda College, I remember the institution closing early whenever the temperature shot up. Back then, weather-related coverage in newspapers was limited. Many houses including ours used to keep a pot of water or buttermilk for the benefit of people on the move. Umbrellas were not a common sight and a towel dipped in water was tied to the head as a preventive measure. In the 80s, we adapted an exhaust to suck hot air from the room and it worked.

T.S. Raghavan, 68-years-old, SRP Colony, Perambur

Air coolers were a luxury then, and so we used *vetiver* as curtains to keep the room cool. Beaches used to be crowded during summer. While

the youth flocked to Marina Beach, Santhome beach was noticeably patronised by senior citizens. Nageshwara Rao Park in Mylapore and Panagal Park in T. Nagar were among popular parks that people used to visit for its green cover. Goli soda, paneer soda were popular beverages. During summer, Kalathi Rose Milk Shop's stock would go up.

K.R. Jambunathan, 72-years-old, Mylapore

Back then, Rasana was popular, and its demand would shoot up during summer. Buttermilk and fermented rice water would suddenly take on a new flavour and popularity.

I remember men placing a handkerchief under the shirt collar at the back of the neck as it was believed to be the striking point of a sun stroke.

S.P. Ramachandran, 89-years-old



A shelter for the waiting motorist

▼
A shade pavilion at Spencers traffic signal. It is one of ten traffic signals across the city to sport a shade pavilion now. Greater Chennai Corporation is behind this initiative. The image was taken on May 10, 2024.

PHOTO: PRINCE FREDERICK

Project Safety: spot the 'trap'

Landmines are at their deadly best on terrain they are least expected. Pavements are a greater threat to an intact limb when it sports that odd manhole cover with a crevice and that odd silt catch pit with an imploded lid. The list goes on.

Project Safety seeks that readers write in to downtownfeedback@thehindu.co.in about these chinks in the civic infrastructure, seemingly minor but capable of much harm.

The write-up should be accompanied by a photo of the safety hazard the reader seeks to highlight through this section

Watch your steps on Perumbakkam Main Road



On Perumbakkam Main Road, not too far from the Sholinganallur junction, the pavement has a "trap" laid for pedestrians. A stormwater drain manhole cover has a neatly-cut tear, one that seems engineered for a pedestrian to slip a foot comfortably into it and injure themselves. This pavement is well-scuffed as it is part of the route taken by students of a college and also employees at offices in an IT special economic zone. The broken manhole offers a ripe opportunity for sustaining a sprained ankle, even a fracture, at any hour, more so after evenfall as this section is poorly-lit. The images were taken on May 9, 2024. PHOTOS: PRINCE FREDERICK

Integral to a neighbourhood

Residents of Ranga Reddy Garden in Neelankarai have a feeling of satisfaction about the police booth in their locality, one used by law and order police personnel of the J8 Neelankarai police station.

U. Karunanidhi, president of the residents welfare association in RR Garden remarks that the police personnel have their presence felt at the booth a good number of hours in a day. "In the morning, they would be present two to three hours; and in the evening, three-to-four hours."

The booth displays a mobile number for residents to call on.

Fear of trouble can sometimes be more nerve-racking than real trouble itself. Access to police personnel right at one's doorstep helps deal with trouble, imagined as well as real.

"When we see hangers-on who raise our suspicion or when we see tipplers drinking in the open, we make a call to the police booth," says Karunanidhi.

Even if it turns out that these hangers-on are harmless and no trouble-makers, the fact that those in khaki are keeping an eye on strangers would be a deterrent to real trouble-makers who might be lurking around the scene. "The

movement of police personnel in our neighbourhood, thanks to the police booth, boosts our morale. It is a confidence builder," says the RWA president, adding that the Association had assisted the J8 police in setting up this booth.

Karunanidhi reveals the Association is in the process of firming up plans to bring the area under greater CCTV surveillance; and towards this end, they are having conversations with the J8 Neelankarai police.

Karunanidhi adds: "Currently, we have a degree of CCTV surveillance through requests made to residents in the neighbourhood that



they also install cameras focussed on the streets."

Unblinking eyes and a police booth provide reassurance to Kalakshetra Colony residents



The police booth at Beach Road Junction in Kalakshetra Colony.
PHOTO: PRINCE FREDERICK

mesh Sundararajan, an executive committee member of KCWA. "The J6 police pitched in with a cache of cameras that were with them, and KCWA added a chunk of new cameras to the initiative."

Ramesh observes the CCTV cameras also feed the images to a monitoring screen at the J6 police station.

The police booth on the afore-described Beach Road has a dedi-

cated personnel who monitors the images streaming in from various parts of the neighbourhood. Ramesh notes these images would throw an additional searchlight on activities behind parked cars (cars not belonging to residents) on the streets. The patrol team also combs the streets for those using the parked vehicles as cover to open the bottle and slip away untraced, leaving behind empty liquor bottles.

Ramesh observes Kalakshetra Colony has a sizeable senior population and having unblinking eyes at night (by way of the surveillance cameras) is a reassurance. So are the glimpses of khaki at night by way of patrolling and the booth.

He points out that with the help of CCTV surveillance, a bike theft and lifting of a water-motor, in two separate incidents, were cracked.

When the police booth keeps a light on for you

Police booths are sometimes defined entirely by their physical reality. And not by their intended social purpose. They do not rise above being brick and mortar. Their locks rust from disuse.

Even police booths of this kind – where even the buzz of a fly is not heard – has its place in the safety ecosystem. Its presence is a natural deterrent to crime. A burglar who has not hunkered down to surveying the scene might be unaware the police booth is not in service, and therefore take his "nefarious trade" elsewhere. And a functional police booth with the personnel in khaki scuffing its doormat regularly is a bulwark for the neighbourhood. It is a continuing and powerful deterrent. And when trouble perchance strikes, one knows where to turn to immediately.

Under "Project Safety", readers can write in to downtownfeedback.thehindu.co.in about any functional police booth that has benefited their neighbourhood.

'Stormwater drain in Pallikaranai clogged with trash'

Greater Chennai Corporation's 15-foot-wide cut-and-cover stormwater drain in Pallikaranai which runs along the 200-foot Thoraipakkam-Pallavaram Radial Road is clogged with solid trash.

The flush of water during the floods in the first week of December last year brought this solid trash into the drain. It is five months since the last North East monsoon and the stormwater drain has not been cleaned to this day.

This drain carries surplus water from Keezhakattalai lake to Pallikaranai marshland. It receives the surplus water from an open canal which flows through Sunnambu Kulathur and at Pallikaranai it merges with GCC's cut-and cover drain.

J Sankar,
Sunnambu Kolathur



The drain in Pallikaranai along the 200-foot Thoraipakkam-Pallavaram Radial Road on May 10.
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



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You can be our volunteer-writer

Dear readers, you can be our volunteer-writer by writing to us about issues and events in your neighbourhood. You should send the write-ups to downtownfeedback@thehindu.co.in. Letters must carry the contact number

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