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ASKAR SESHADRI

With the re-routing of traffic in Mylapore on account of Metro Rail work, Luz area has lost its character, considerably.

And that includes hawkers' presence – rather, the lack of it.

Hawkers on Luz Church Road and Luz Junction were offered areas near South Canal Bank Road but they did not countenance the idea.

Now, after several rounds of discussion between CMRL and GCC, a new street has been cho-

sen for these vendors: Kalvi Vaaru Street. Many residents of Kalvi Vaaru Street cannot bring themselves to welcome this decision.

They think the street will get congested. The number of vendors might likely to be around 30. Residents point out that the decision was taken without consulting them.

It is believed all these vendors will be allotted spaces on the eastern side of the street. It is also believed that this arrangement is set in stone and the vendors will be relocated in a month.

This is the only available stretch to reach Royapettah High Road from eastern side.

CMRL and GCC should revisit, re-evaluate the decision and drop it, say residents of Kalvi Vaaru Street.

The image that goes with this report shows vendors' boxes, wrapped in a cover and placed at Kalvi Vaaru Street.

(Baskar Seshadri is a resident of Mandaveli)

Vending carts with different designs expected to *join the party*

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

On certain streets designated as vending zones, vending carts are parked. They look alike, lacking variation. These steel vending carts bear a streamlined body and seemed suited for food trade. These vending carts were directed at the Marina beach and now, they are being "recycled" to different addresses in Chennai across Greater Chennai Corporation's 15 zones.

There is indication that a plan to bring variety to the vending carts lining vending streets is gaining traction in Ripon Buildings.

Other vending carts markedly different from these are likely to join in.



The vending carts now parked in some of the vending zones in Chennai.

According to Greater Chennai Corporation's Revenue Department sources, a move to have made-to-measure vending carts that suit specific vending activity is on. The official notes that the top brass in Ripon Building is keen on having vending carts of different designs, each suited for a particular trade.

There would be vending carts specifically made for flower vendors; then those for petty shops; and so on.

The official notes that the thinking in Ripon Building is that besides enhancing functionality, such carts would add to the beauty of the landscape.

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Chennai Beach station needs better maintenance

Chennai Beach station can do with more periodic maintenance.

Dismantled roof sheets, mangled scaffolding bars, rubble on the platforms and unpaved station concourse stand mute testimony to the indifference of the MRTS management.

If it is a work in progress, civil works jobbed out to contractors need strict day-to-day supervision and time-bound completion.

Rods, pipes and cables are obstructing passengers' movement and can cause accidents.

Can't the public address system be handled more intelligently?

One recorded announcement being played in a loop for 20 times might not always be necessary. Announcements can be brief "train to- departure time-platform". The loud volume is most passenger-unfriendly. Display TVs on platforms would be welcome and announcements can be restricted to emergencies and unusual information.

I hope the MRTS senior management will take action.

K.R.Subramanian



'Remove that protruding metal piece on Royapettah High Road'

C.R. SAINATHAN

Recently, after finishing my work at the PF Office on Royapettah High Road and heading back home, I lost my footing having stripped over a protruding metal piece on the pavement. I landed on the pavement with a thud.

I am 76 years old, and at this age, a fall can put me in a debilitating situation.

Fortunately, I did not break a bone. Pedestrians came to my help, lifted me up. Engaging an autorickshaw, I returned home.

That protruding metal piece on Royapettah High Road (opposite Canara Bank) has to go before it trips another senior citizen, nay anybody. Is Greater Chennai Corporation listening?

(C. R. Sainathan is a resident of Tiruvallikeni)

Bhavan's Tamizh Isai Vizha from February 24

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan is conducting "Bhavan's Tamizh Isai Vizha" from February 24 to 28 at its main auditorium in Mylapore. The festive series begins on February 24 at 6.30 p.m. with a vocal concert by Vidya Kalyanaraman on "Sitham Yellam Sivamayam". On February 25; 6.30 p.m. Gayathri Girish will give a vocal concert on "Devi Darisanam".

The programmes are open to all.

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(Clockwise from top left) Then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran presents a Tanjavur plate to Mother Teresa on March 2, 1984; children parked on the elephant sculptures; a handicraft fair; and children participate in a drawing contest. PHOTOS: THE HINDU ARCHIVES



BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Of protests, picnics and fairs

With Valluvar Kottam undergoing renovation, *The Hindu Downtown* walks down memory lane to take in the monument's early years

Valluvar Kottam in Nungambakkam saw the light on April 15, 1976 as a grand memorial to the Tamil sage-poet Thiruvalluvar. It was aimed at promoting the poet's monumental work *Tirukkural*. According to *The Hindu Archives*, when the construction of the memorial was under way, the auditorium was billed as one of the Asia's biggest measuring 7.05 metres long and 30.50 metres broad.

Designed without any intermediate support (pillar), Valluvar Kottam was capable of accommodating 4,000 people and was designed with the best acoustics and modern lighting techniques. The granite stone chariot was another attraction.

The report also makes a mention of the challenge the city administration faced while working on this project as the Valluvar Kottam was being built on an area that was formerly a swamp and subsequently filled with garbage. "On account of the loose layer of the ground, piles, reaching to

depths of 15 metres, had been driven to take the load," reads the report.

The auditorium was to be utilised for educational and cultural functions

In May 1976, Valluvar Kottam was opened to the public on the entry fee of 25 paise was levied.

Many associate Valluvar Kottam with protest meetings, exhibitions and expos. But in the early years many VIP events including State Government-organised events were hosted here. One such event reported by *The Hindu* is that of Mother Teresa being honoured by then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran in 1984. A Tanjavur plate was presented to Mother Teresa during that event, which was attended by many school students.



VOICES

Whenever we plan an event with an attendance of 500-1000 people then the choice is always between Valluvar Kottam and Kamaraj Arangam in Teynampet. I was personally involved in organising some events where Valluvar Kottam was chosen as the halls were spacious and it was centrally located. The District Navarathri festival which features cultural programmes was one event for which the place served as venue.

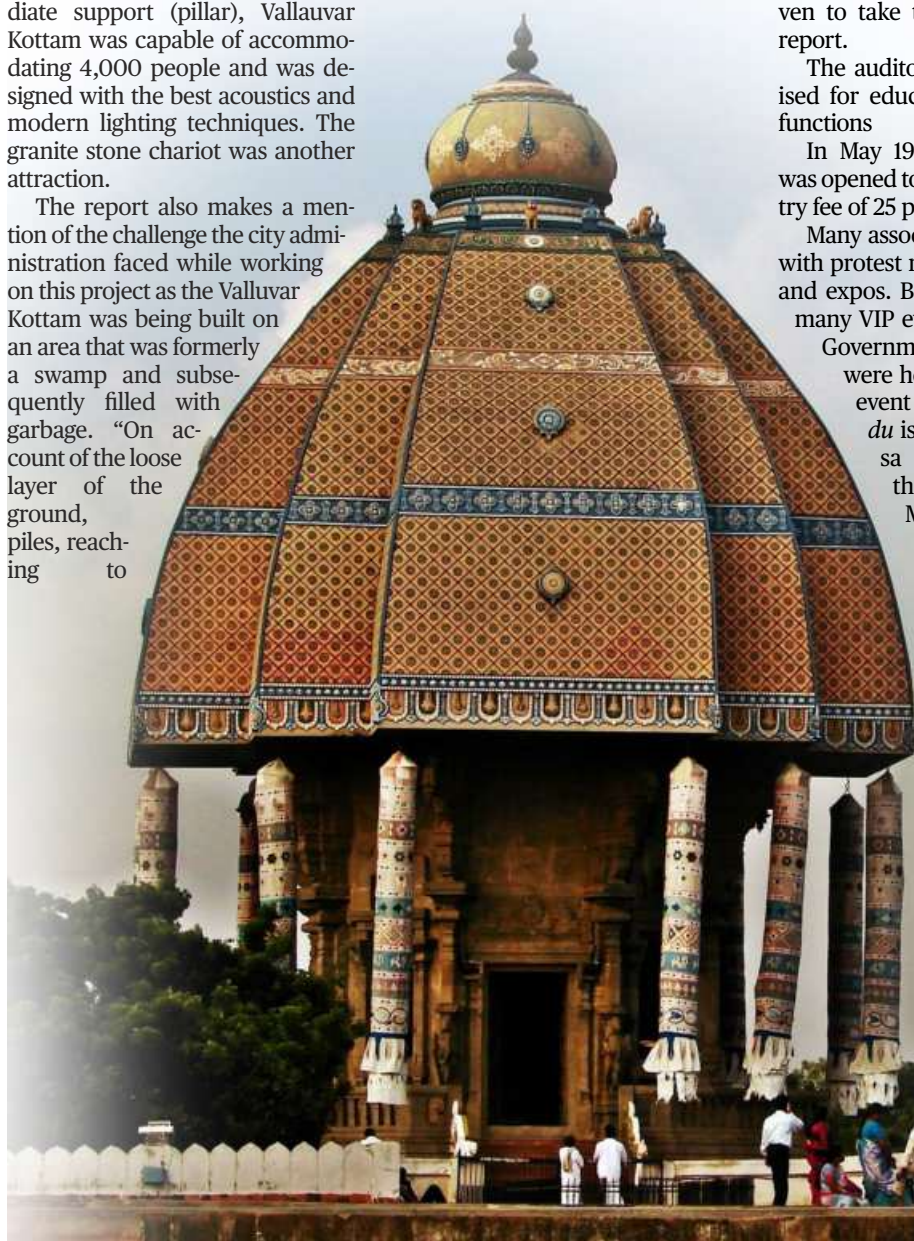
—Lion R. Murali
past president, Lions Club of Madras Fort St. George

Valluvar Kottam was our first choice when it comes to conducting exhibitions. Since 2006, we would have conducted at least eight editions of Silk Mark Expo at this venue as it always has a good recall value among shoppers and artisans thanks to its proximity to T. Nagar which is the main shopping hub during the festival season. Apart from it being centrally located, the length and breath of the halls inside was a big advantage for exhibition organisers to customise stalls as per their requirements. There were no pillars, and the verandah was so big that customers could wait there at ease. Parking was another attraction.

—Prabakara Rao,
deputy director, Silk Mark

In 1992, while studying at the Government College of Fine Arts, we chose Valluvar Kottam for our outdoor study where we spent the day sketching on the campus. The place was largely empty and peaceful. The structures of Valluvar Kottam packed a punch in terms of visual appeal, being easily seen from the road. Not so now, because the compound walls cover up the structures inside.

—Immanuel Jackson, art director



Student-volunteers in the *spotlight*

“Catalysts of Change” is an initiative by Chennai Volunteers to recognise and celebrate sterling efforts by college students and their institutions to make a difference through volunteering. The 2025 edition of this awards event is taking place on February 25 at Church Park on Anna Salai

“**C**atalysts of Change” is a platform that recognises college students who have volunteered with sincerity, compassion and commitment, impacting less privileged people, through Chennai Volunteers.

This event appreciates outstanding students and faculty from 13 colleges in Chennai, on February 24, 2025 (between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m.) at the Sacred Heart Tamil Medium Girls School auditorium, on Church Park campus.

This youth service award was instituted in 2023 as a platform to inspire young student volunteers to become a better version of themselves and motivate many more students to start volunteering for causes, according to a communication from Chennai Volunteers.

It is hosted closer to the end of their annual term in college and is based on consistent and committed outreach or volunteering through the year. This year marks the third edition of this event.

The power of college students as a massive volunteering force stood out in bold relief on account of the pandemic. When the pandemic retreated, the systems it had augured in did not, immediately. Work from home continued.

The need for volunteering had snapped back to pre-pandemic levels. The field had opened up, but the “labourers” were scarce.

Rinku Mecheri, founder of Chennai Volunteers, notes that corporate volunteers were not available in the same numbers as before as they had marched off to their native towns and were continue to work remotely. It was the college students who stepped in-



to the breach.

Rinku continues: volunteering meant a lot to these college students; they were looking forward to it. While helping people through volunteering, these students were being helped by volunteering. Though they were college students, they were essentially children just out of school, as they had missed two years of in-person college education and the regular interactions that shape personality.

These students continue to make an impact in a variety of initiatives, those pertaining to education, library setup, special needs people, environment, climate change, health, disability, child and development, women empowerment, school painting and more.

In recognition of this contribution, this award was instituted.



The chief guest of this year's awards function is Silai Zaki, Australia's Consul General based in Chennai.

N, Ravi, Director, The Hindu will be the guest of honour.

Both of them will address the audience; and they will of course, be handing over the awards as well, says the communication.

The award categories

Section 1: All the colleges that have partnered with Chennai Volunteers to volunteer through the year for various causes, will be recognised for this contribution.

The 13 colleges that have been selected for honour in the 2025 edition of “Catalysts of Change” are as follows: Loyola College; Justice Basheer Ahmed Sayeed College for Women; Stella Maris College; Shri Shankarlal Sundarbai Shasun Jain College for Women; Women's Christian College; Sathyabhama Institute of Science & technology; Madras School of Social Work; Anna Adarsh College for Women; Sri Krishnaswamy College for Women; MOP Vaishnav College; Madras Christian College; Shri Ramasaamy Memorial Institute of Science and Technology; SA College.

Section 2: This section has two sub-categories, the team awards and the individual student awards that have been thoughtfully created, based on the exemplary work demonstrated on-field. Students who have shown leadership and empathy while volunteering will be awarded.

The venue for the awards event is: Auditorium at Sacred Heart Tamil Medium School, #216, Church Park, Anna Salai, Gopalapuram, Chennai - 600086.

For more details, call Chennai Volunteers at 9840182299.

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Letters must carry the postal address and contact number.



A WhatsApp bot for first aid

ALERT, a voluntary organisation engaged in creating awareness about first-aid, has launched its WhatsApp bot for providing first-aid assistance. Called ALERTAiD, it can be contacted through WhatsApp at 9944036929.

According to a press release, ALERTAiD can be used

by anyone as a quick reckoner during real emergencies. It can also be used to learn about first aid. The organisation is also offering e-learning courses in first-aid in medical emergencies. To know more about the courses, visit www.academy.alert.ngo

Both these initiatives were

developed with support from Ford Motor Company, adds the press release.

Minister for Health & Family Welfare, Ma Subramanian, and Distinguished Scientist, ISRO and DRDO, A. Sivathanu Pillai, launched the WhatsApp bot at the eighth edition of Alert Being Award ceremony held recently in the city, says the press release.

Don Bosco alumni 'gift' a STEM lab to a government school

With Grundfos India's support, they establish the facility at a girls school in Choolaimedu



A view of the STEM lab; and snapshots of the inauguration.
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Learning at Jaigopal Garodia Government Girls' Higher Secondary School in Choolaimedu has been enhanced by a STEM lab that was unwrapped recently, a few days removed from International Day of Women and Girls in Science. The first classes pertaining to STEM lab teaching took place on February 21. Grundfos Pumps India Pvt Ltd., and Don Bosco Egmore 1997 batch alumni are the architects of this social initiative. Bringing LMES Foundation into the picture, they have designed a three-year hands-on programme for 50 students in Grades 6 and 7, focusing on basic to advanced STEM concepts including physics, electronics, robotics, AI and aerospace, says a communication from the DB 1997 alumni group. The communication further notes that the initiative was driven by Don Bosco 1997 batch alumnus and Thousand Lights MLA Dr. Ezhilan (who is also a member of the 1997 DB), as a step towards achieving the State Government's mission of bridging the gender ratio gap in the STEM workforce.

This intervention gives the DB 1997 batch a "fifer" – five social initiatives in as many years.

"In 2021, during the pandemic when education went online, the 1997 DB batch alumni mobilised 150 laptops for students of an Adi Dravidar school. When education returned to physical classrooms,



for three years on the trot, from 2022 to 2024, the batch came together to build classrooms in government schools. The batch aims at one social project every year. And every time, the batch has made a contribution, YRG Care would match that contribution. Dr. Sunil Suhas Solomon, chairman and managing trustee, YRG Care, is a member of the 1997 DB batch. Sunil is with John Hopkins University School of Medicine, USA but heads the YRG Care foundation," elaborates Deepu Anthony, a member of the batch.

On why the batch steered away from what seemed to be a pattern of social intervention – establishing classrooms at a government school – Deepu says: "Ezhilan

called me one day and apprised me about how the government is trying to bridge the gender gap in the STEM workforce. He sought to find out if the DB 1997 batch could do something that would contribute to efforts in this direction by the government. We took the idea to the batch and formed a core team for this initiative; and we decided that the gender gap in STEM workforce should be addressed at the school level, and that too in a government school. Generally, students in government schools are not aware of the application of the courses they can take up. We decided we should set up a STEM lab and design a programme that would allow for specialised teams to step in and explain the applications of various

STEM-related courses. It had to be a long-term investment in these students. When we told Ezhilan about our plan, his team evaluated a few schools in his constituency and chose Jaigopal Garodia Government Girls' Higher Secondary School because of the enthusiasm towards the idea evinced by the HM and science teachers in the school." At the heart of the three-year application-oriented programme is an effort to make students curious about STEM concepts and provide them with the resources to master them, says Deepu. "This programme is an experiment we are carrying out with Jaigopal Garodia Government Girls' Higher Secondary School. Analysing the measurable outcomes, we

will see how this programme can be taken to other state government schools," notes Deepu. "We decided to bring LMES Foundation on board as the implementation partner, as its parent company LMES Academy is engaged in the work of establishing STEM labs in private schools. The Foundation has been conducting a one-day STEM education orientation visiting government schools."

According to the communication the DB 1997 batch shared with *The Hindu Downtown*, as part of the three-year programme, the students would have sessions by industry experts, and participate in industry visits. They would also be given career guidance in the 10th and 12th grade and be eligible to apply to LMES Foundation's college education scholarship programme. The communication further adds that the project sponsors, Grundfos and the Don Bosco alumni and the implementation partner LMES Foundation, believe that this initiative would have measurable impact not just on the learning outcome dimension, but also on the number of girl students who enroll for the Science stream in the 11th grade, and thereafter when they need to choose a course in college.

Present at the inauguration of the STEM lab, Grundfos' Country President – India Usha Subramaniam and Manager – CSR Apoorva Manichandar remarked that this initiative is aligned with Grundfos' Social Impact mission, says the communication.

Listen to this: it is 'Truly Nazareth'

An initiative by the visual communication students of Nazareth College of Arts and Science in Avadi, this podcast has drawn avid listeners from various quarters

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The voice of podcast host Vinisha Suresh is booming as she explains the significance of World Soil Day observed on December 5 and how anyone can contribute to the cause it represents.

"A seed will not grow in every soil. We too as students bloom when we are planted in the right environment and we take advantage of the opportunities it offers. We need to make use of the opportunities provided by the institution and beneficial things around us," the host explains in a chatty tone. This one marks the 150th episode of the podcast.

For two years now, the Visual Communication students of Nazareth College of Arts and Science in Avadi have been running a podcast series titled "Truly Nazareth" sharing inspiring stories and starting

engaging conversations by bringing a variety of voices on board.

Predominantly in Tamil, the podcasts dwell on mindfulness, self-development and career advice. It also provides a peek into happenings in the neighbourhood.

The weekly podcast has so far not missed its deadline. Every Friday at 6 p.m., a new episode is released on www.trulynazareth.com and Spotify immediately after which the link to it is shared with heads of departments and promoted on the college's social media handles. This is in turn shared with other WhatsApp groups including the other institutions run by the Nazareth Group. The content creation, voiceover and editing of Truly Nazareth is led by eight students, five from Visual Communication department and the rest drawn from other departments.

Curating content

Running for a duration of three to four minutes, some of the episodes talk about various initiatives run by the students. For instance, one episode discussed "Feed the needy", an initiative started by the students during the pandemic where food is packed by students from their homes or prepared in the college canteen to feed the hungry and the homeless. The initiative is still going strong.

Another episode discussed "Reformation" introduced by the college management, where students involved in malpractices or in unethical behaviour are sent to an



The team.

NGO for rehabilitation.

How has Truly Nazareth evolved since it was launched on January 26, 2023?

Geetha Subbiah, head of digital media and communications, says when they started the series, the focus was on bringing out a new episode every Friday. They did not promote the content in a big way. "Based on feedback we started marketing Truly Nazareth at events where we put up a stand," says Geetha, who is mentoring the students.

As the college already has a

news channel, the mandate of this podcast series is to take things beyond the college campus.

Vinisha Suresh, one of the podcast hosts, says when they started the series they used to read from a script. "Now, we have learnt to speak based on our experiences, which is like talking to a friend," she says. The feedback to every episode is taken seriously.

"The initiative is student-driven, the language is colloquial and we are happy that the series has engaged with the community of school and college students," says

Geetha. The series has been drawing requests from the public that they be given a space in it.

"A woman entrepreneur from Avadi wanted to be part of the show, so we had a question and answer session with her in one episode. Likewise, another parent wanted to come and talk. We need content and we accommodate such requests as long as it meets the objectives of the show," she says, adding that the initiative has provided students hands-on training in content creation, audio production and digital storytelling.

Pakwan Chennai celebrates womanhood

Pakwan Chennai proudly commemorated womanhood with the eighth edition of The Realistic Awards 2025 - the brainchild of Sanjay Dangi, Anil Dangi, and Hitesh Kothari. Held at the Rajwada, The Grand Ballroom in T Nagar and the event witnessed a celebration of women achievers from various fields for the eighth consecutive year.

According to a press release, the evening was graced by prominent dignitaries, including the chief guest Nugroho Priyo Pratomo, Director of the Indonesian Trade Promotion Center (ITPC) Chennai; Trade Consul Wan Ahmad Tarmizi from the Consulate General of Ma-



laysia (Trade Section); Kamran Khan, Head of India Government of South Australia; Rajesh Fatteningh Dhabre, IRS, Commissioner of Customs, Chennai and Thiru Senthilvelavan B., I.R.S.

Renowned actress Latha was honored with

the Lifetime Achievement Award for her exceptional contributions to South Indian Cinema. The audience was further enraptured as playback singer Vandana Srinivasan received the Best Playback Singer Award, delivering captivating performances

of her popular tracks in Tamil and Hindi.

The Realistic Awards 2025 celebrated excellence across multiple fields, with winners including:

Television artist: Bavithra B, Model Tiwania Bello, Fresh Face of the Year Anukriti Saraswat, RJ Sivasankari, influencer Shifana Begam, voice artist Devaseena, classical dancer Kavitha Srinivasan, stylist Hannah, Ms. Universe Tamil Nadu 2024 Lakshitha, nutritionist Ambiga Sekar, doctor Dr. Banupriya, educationist Deepa Rajesh, makeup artist Olivia Anuguradha, Architect Sumithra Ravindranath, Entrepreneur Gomathi Periyathiruvadi, Costume Designer Bandana Narula, and sportsperson Aarthi S.

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A 'summer checklist' for Perumbakkam wetland

Two fires in recent memory

Parallels can be drawn between two fires at the Perumbakkam wetland, one in 2022 and the other in 2024

*Both fires originated from near the kuccha road on the western side.

*Both fires raged at a given time of year — in the late May-early June period, when the summer heat receives a spike.

*It took considerable effort on the part of fire & rescue services to bring both fires under control.

A section of Perumbakkam wetland with drying vegetation on February 21, 2025.

PRINCE FREDERICK

Perumbakkam wetland is beginning to develop a "tan". The bulrushes are beginning to shrink resembling ageing human skin drained of fat. These are nature's *aide-memoire* on what next to expect. It is a "gentle reminder" — using a phrase that makes nudges to action palatable in polite society — that the Perumbakkam wetland is an easy target for fires during summer. And it is time to start efforts to scuttle that possibility, checking factors that can be controlled. Summer heat can cause fires on dry vegetation, but there could be something else at work. Before proceeding further, here is what is at stake. At risk of repeating the evident, Perumbakkam wetland is not the sole preserve of waterbirds. Certain parts of it host ground-nesting birds, and these are the parts susceptible to fires, due to a cocktail of factors — brown vegetation during summer, the summer heat and burning cigarette stubs. These parts — particularly a kuccha road that marks the western border of the wetland — are hoofed by humans, and unknown to themselves, some of them carry in their hands an agency to start a fire.

The Perumbakkam wetland is swamped by intense developmental activity on three sides. On its northern side, lined by the Sholinganallur-to-Perumbakkam road, Metro Rail pillars are rearing up their head. In addition to Metro Rail work, there is activity pertaining to the Water Resources Department. On its southern side is a neighbourhood that is "mo-

bilising" residents at a rapid pace. Housing projects abound on this side and frequently, a project becomes a collection of homes. There is constant work and work presupposes the presence of workers. On both sides — the northern and the southern — there is a noticeable presence of workers. Some of them live in temporary shacks arranged for them next to their worksites. Perumbakkam wetland is known for movement of people down a kuccha road on its western side, a good number of them belong to this workforce. Besides, on the other side of the kuccha road that is housing construction activity, leading to movement on the road.

A careless cigarette butt thrown on the brown, dry vegetation before it has burnt out, can cause considerable mischief. From where the fire often started in recent years — particularly in the 2022 and 2024 fires — there is reason to believe it was the trigger and the intense summer heat did the rest. This spot needs to be seen for what it is: the wetland's Achilles tendon, and needs to receive a pre-emptive cast of protection.

On the southern side, a breach in the wall in a couple of places used to be entry point for humans. Stones have been massed up to plug one breach, and dead tree branches to plug the other, but climbing over the stones and branches and setting foot in the wetland still remains an easy option. In fact, it does not take the pole-vaulting prowess of a Sergei Bubka to scale the protective wall, even where it is fully intact. Continual monitoring holds the key to addressing the issue.

As water levels drop, bovines wade in

A section of Perumbakkam wetland with water having largely drained out, is marked by movement of pint-sized birds such as the little ringed plover, the little stint and Temminck's stint and also wagtails. They poke around for food in the semi-dry wetland soil. The two avian images show a little ringed plover and a citrine wagtail. On these semi-patches one would find hoof marks left behind by bovines. Bovines browse on grass and herbs on an elevated section of Perumbakkam wetland. They do not stay restricted to this patch but trudge through the boggy sections where waterbirds are stationed, wallow in the slush and disturb their peace. Stray cattle in Perumbakkam wetland is a recurrent issue that is stubbornly ignored. The images were taken on February 18 and 21, 2025. PHOTOS: PRINCE FREDERICK

