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Meet the Lama family from Chennai that keeps Chinese New Year traditions alive **P2**

THIS AMERICAN SPENT 20 YEARS LEARNING TAMIL **P4**

How director Magizh Thirumeni shaped the content of Ajith's upcoming *Vidaamuyarchi*

By time and toil

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Filmmaker Magizh Thirumeni seems to have had quite a time making his much-awaited film *Vidaamuyarchi*. It all began when the director, best known for making gritty action thrillers like *Thadam*, *Thadaiyara Thaakka*, *Meaghamann*, and *Kalaga Thalaivan*, got his long-dreamt call to direct Ajith Kumar. “When Suresh Chandra (Ajith’s manager) said I was directing sir’s next film, I was stunned for a few seconds. Then I got a call from Ajith sir who in his iconic baritone voice, said



▲ Race on Ajith in *Vidaamuyarchi*; (below) director Magizh Thirumeni. S SHIVA RAJ AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

something I will never forget: ‘Magizh, trust me blindly.’ To this moment, the trust has been intact.” Magizh’s eyes light up when he explains how in a surprising turn of events, the star wished for them to collaborate on a story idea he had. So, for the first time in his career, Magizh agreed to direct a film with the agreement that he would execute somebody else’s vision.

A realistic action film From all the speculations rife on the internet, you might suspect that the source material is the 1997 Kurt Russel-starrer *Breakdown*. While he cannot speak about the same yet, Magizh believes the two-and-a-half-hour runtime of *Vidaamuyarchi* should answer your doubts on whether they adapted the 93-minute *Breakdown*.

“There’s a lot of original material in this story,” he asserts. Of course, this means that the director had to have altered his ways for the film to suit Ajith Kumar’s stardom, right? Magizh indicates the opposite. “While this is not a 100% Magizh Thirumeni film, it wouldn’t be 100% the kind of films Ajith sir’s fans are eager to see,” he says.

In a move long due for Ajith, the superstar will be seen as a common man and “not a larger-than-life hero who can bash up 50 guys in an instant.”

Vidaamuyarchi, from how he puts it, seems far removed from the traditional commercial formula. “What amazes me is that this A-lister has the guts to choose a script in which he plays a common man, tackling huge issues with common man powers and not superhero powers.”

This, of course, does not mean that it is a 100% experimental film, he clarifies. “It’s just that it isn’t that typical mass masala film with

hero introduction shots and punch dialogues.”

Ajith, Magizh adds, was opposed to making the film in the conventional commercial cinema language. “He struck down anything ‘massy’ and said, ‘No, we are not doing that kind of a film. We are making a very sensible film.’ Wishing for the audiences to enter theatres without preconceived notions, the filmmaker is confident that this is the kind of film audiences will go home and ruminate about. Magizh even hints that *Vidaamuyarchi* has Ajith questioning his own stardom. “He has challenged his larger-than-life image at every given opportunity.”

But why is a superstar of his stature choosing to do this at the peak of his career? “I believe the answer lies in his respect for the audience. How long do we feed them films that are far removed

from reality? They expect good, sensible movies.”

The project is also Ajith’s response to all the misogyny women are subjected to in our society, adds Magizh. “He said, ‘All stories have been told from a masculine point of view; let’s shake it up and question it.’ He told all of us that this would be one of the most remarkable films in our careers.”

Coming up Having started his career with a romance film (2010’s *Mundhinam Paartheney*) and done only actioners or suspense thrillers since then, Magizh says he wishes to explore other genres. “I want to do films in all genres. Every script I write comes out with lots of humour; I then keep striking all that humour out. I also want to do a romance film. In fact, Trisha (the female lead of *Vidaamuyarchi*) was saying that I should do an out-and-out romance film,” he says. Magizh adds, “Only genres that redefine themselves after a point of time survive in the long run. Action as a genre has existed right from the silent film era. In every era, an action filmmaker would redefine the genre. When people are tired of watching the same star-driven extravaganzas, a filmmaker would arise to do something innovative within that format.” He hopes his next film – a commercial actioner – will show audiences that even larger-than-life extravaganzas can be realistic. “Those films are getting made in Europe and the US. Our audiences don’t want mindless rehashes of age-old cliches. The audiences have evolved. It is time the filmmakers evolve as well.”



When the film, originally slotted to release on Pongal, got pushed, Ajith told me: ‘Magizh, don’t feel bad. So what if our film doesn’t release on a festival day? The day of our film’s release will become a festive day.’

MAGIZH THIRUMENI

Vidaamuyarchi hits screens on February 6



To watch video interview, scan the QR code

Get, set, go!

A race in progress; flamingoes at the lagoon.

B JOTHI RAMALINGAM AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Call of the catamaran

The 14th Pulicat Day celebrations will focus on creating awareness on the lagoon

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The Pulicat *kattumaram* is unique to the region. Made by securing four logs of wood together, it is still being used to catch crabs by people from the Enadhi tribe. Wooden catamarans, however, have long been replaced by fibreboats across the coast of Chennai. Over 45 teams from five panchayats in Pulicat are set to race on their catamarans at

the 14th Pulicat Day celebrations in the historic port town, 50 kilometres from Chennai.

Organised by the Art & Architecture Research Development & Education [AARDE] Foundation, the event is being supported by the Tamil Nadu Government’s Tourism Department. “This year, the event is bigger,” says Xavier Benedict, founder-trustee of the NGO that is involved in the promotion and conservation of Pulicat lagoon. Among the chief attractions of the day-long



event is the catamaran race that is set to begin at 3.30pm. Xavier says that the idea behind the race, that is held every year as part of the celebrations, is to create awareness on the condition of the lagoon.

Call to action “*Kattumarams* tend to hit the bottom since the depth of the lagoon is reducing due to sedimentation,” says Xavier adding, “It will be nice to have some government action on this issue.” He points out that

sedimentation is caused by man-made and natural reasons. “Three rivers join the Pulicat lagoon,” he says: “Any river should meet the sea; but dams and culverts across these rivers have reduced their flow and the brackish nature of the water.” Sand accumulation from villages and pollution have added to the problem. “If rivers flow continuously, the lagoon is deepened. This action, however, is not taking place, especially over the last five to six years.”

Xavier says that the deeper the lagoon, the better the rains for the State from the Northeast monsoon. “Tamil Nadu depends on this monsoon,” he points out. Coastal lagoons play a crucial role in attracting moisture to aid in a good monsoon. If their depth is reduced, the entire ecosystem will suffer.

This is why NGOs such as the AARDE Foundation are creating awareness on the lagoon, the second largest brackish water body in India. Activities on Pulicat Day will focus on sensitising people, especially children in and around Pulicat. There will be an eco-quiz with questions themed on the lagoon, and a folk theatre performance in the evening based on Pulicat, by students from Loyola and Pachaiyappa’s colleges in Chennai.

Pulicat Day celebrations start from 11am on January 31 with a chess tournament. The catamaran race and street play are open to the public. For details, call 9003546872.

PHOTO: AKHILA EASWARAN



Connect the spokes

The Chennai Cycling Thiruvizha celebrates the city’s thriving cycling community

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The Chennai Cycling Thiruvizha is a carnival dedicated to all things cycling. This annual event brings together cyclists, the general public, and businesses, creating a space to engage and learn. Organised by Chennai Cyclists, one of the largest cycling clubs in the city, the event highlights the benefits of cycling for health, fitness, and sustainable urban living.

Chennai Cyclists was founded in 2012 by a small group of five to six enthusiasts. Today, the community has grown to over 21,000 members and 16 chapters across Chennai, with daily early morning rides for both fitness seekers and leisure cyclists.

The day-long carnival features a variety of engaging activities and workshops. There will be competitions for both children and

adults, and discussions on cycling, health, and fitness led by experts. A dedicated race for children aged eight to 12 will also introduce them to the thrill of competition.

A flea market at the venue will allow participants to buy and sell old or unused bicycles, equipment, and cycling gear. Throughout the day, attendees can enjoy performances by stand-up comedians and musicians from the city at the open mic stage. A showcase of cycle brands, accessories, and essentials will also be at the venue.

Additionally, presentations will be made to city planners and policymakers, addressing ways to make Chennai’s roads more cyclist-friendly.

The event is powered by *The Hindu* Made of Chennai.

@The MCC School, Chetpet, on February 2, 9am to 5pm. Entry is free, but registration is required. To participate, register at cct.chennaicyclists.com.

Nurturing roots Members of the Lama family celebrate Chinese New Year with several offerings at the altar including envelopes of cash. S SHIVA RAJ



Meet the owners of Kim Ling, a 28-year-old hidden gem in Anna Nagar, among the rare few in Chennai still celebrating Chinese New Year with ancient traditions, a game of cards and varieties of dumplings

Year of the snake

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It is the day before Chinese New Year and luck is in the air. Susan and Julie Lama are standing at the door behind which Kim Ling lies. At this 28-year-old restaurant on Anna Nagar's Second Avenue, they are scurrying to arrange flowers, light *agarbattis* and finish a small 'puja' before customers arrive. "It is the year of the snake," Julie remarks. This entrance is full of typical

Indo-Chinese restaurant paraphernalia. There is red plastered on the walls, a large laughing Buddha, Buddhist scrolls and paper lanterns. But at the makeshift altar, where good luck is up for grabs, the two 60-something sisters of Chinese-origin are negotiating for space.

The offerings to god, all plated on small red plastic dishes, include candles, port wine, green tea, dragon fruits, a roast chicken, fish, assorted meat dripping in their own fat and juices, some dry fruits and flowers.

On the left are the coveted red envelopes which will be filled with cash soon. "We call it *hóngbāo* (in Mandarin). The amount does not have to be large but the money is usually considered very lucky," says Susan, lighting the incense sticks. Her brother-in-law, Peter Lama, holds the candles in his hand, signalling the beginning of the ceremony. A wish is whispered as eyes are tightly shut. The rest of the family emulates the order, praying for an auspicious year.

The first red envelope that Susan remembers receiving is from her family in Calcutta's Chinatown. After her grandparents moved with her parents from China to India in the 1930s, trying to escape two major wars, the families attempted not just to survive but to build booming businesses. They ended up entering the beauty and the

hospitality space.

"My father died when I was eight so we had no choice but to begin working. We travelled all over the country — Delhi, Mumbai, Kochi — but we began building our businesses here.

After our parlours were a success, we [Susan, Julie and their respective husbands Nima Lama and Peter Lama who were chefs]

had saved up enough to begin a small fast food restaurant called Kim Ling in Chetpet. That was quite the hit," says Julie.

Susan adds that her husband wanted distinct names like 'Hong Kong Beauty Parlour' and 'Kim Lings' to ensure quick Chinese association. When the opportunity to expand presented itself, they moved to Anna Nagar, which was sparsely populated in 1997 and



Rolling through history

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The Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989, classify vehicles older than 50 years as vintage. There are many collectors in India who have, over the decades, honed their skills to maintain these cars and keep them in running condition even after manufacturers stopped producing and servicing them. There are also multiple clubs, associations and museums dedicated to the preservation of these iconic mechanical wonders.

The Historical Cars Association of India (HCAI), is one such organisation that aims to bring together vintage car owners, and build a community based on this common interest. Based in Chennai, they host car rallies and meet-ups on a regular basis. The next big vintage and classic car meetup, titled Heritage Rollers will be held at the Turyya Hotel, Perungudi, on February 2.

This is the second edition of the event with the first one held in 2023. "This time we have 70 to 80 vintage

Get ready to witness a stunning display of automotive history as Heritage Rollers brings together vintage and classic car enthusiasts

and classic cars on display including a handful of Edwardian class cars," says Ranjit Pratap, president, HCAI. An Edwardian class car is a vintage car that was manufactured between 1905 and 1915, while any car that was manufactured after 1950 is labelled a classic car.

Heritage Rollers will display cars of various makes including Mercedes, Cadillac, Lanica, MG, Ford, Buick, Chevrolet, Studebaker and more sourced from across the country.

Wheels of time A vintage and classic car show organised by the Historical Cars Association of India back in May 2024. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Some of these vehicles are owned by prominent royal families of India. Nitin Dossa, chairman of the Mumbai-based Vintage and Classic Car Club of India will also be present with the cars he owns. "We just wrapped up a vintage car show in Mumbai for Republic Day and are still in the process of deciding which cars we should bring to Chennai," he says, adding that transportation is a challenge but worth it because it helps youngsters learn about their legacy. "We do a special lashing for these cars to ensure they don't move while transporting and we have chaperones accompanying the truck drivers as well," states Ranjit.

The aim of the gathering is to help car enthusiasts of this generation to embrace the technology and craftsmanship of the yesteryears, says Ranjit. "I have my own garage and I'm here to teach them. There are older mechanics who are skilled and can help as well. They just need to come forward," he adds.

After the display on Sunday, a convoy of 25 to 30 cars will be flagged off in a rally from Chennai to Puducherry on Monday morning. These cars will then be on display at the promenade and open to the public for viewing.

"My intention is to propagate this heritage legacy, because these cars have a lot of character," says Ranjit, adding, "People built them with their hands. Cars today may have a lot of comfort, but they are highly replaceable."

Heritage Rollers will be held on February 2, from 9.30am to 1.30pm at Turyya Hotel, Perungudi. Entry is free.

The beat of rebellion

Parai pioneer Velu Aasan has taken the instrument across Tamil Nadu, helping traditional artistes earn respect and recognition that eluded them for generations

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Velmurugan was standing with onlookers at Alanganallur's yearly Muniyandi temple festival when his uncle Saevugan and troupe played the parai. Velmurugan, who is now known as Velu Aasan [aasan means teacher in Tamil], was 10 years old then. "I don't know what came over me," recalls the 55-year-old over phone from Mettamalai village near Sattur in Virudhunagar district. "My body started moving to the beats spontaneously." His uncle then offered the percussion instrument to him. "That was the first time I held the parai," remembers Velu, who has won the Padma Shri this year for his contribution to the Tamil folk art form.

Velu has taught hundreds of men and women to play the parai. His students, spread across Tamil Nadu, have turned trainers to start their own troupes. He launched his troupe Samar in 2010, and apart from India, has played in China, the US, Dubai, Sri Lanka, and Singapore. "Samar means war," says Velu. It is to signify the spirit of rebellion the instrument stands for.

For long, parai was looked upon with the same disdain reserved for people from oppressed communities who played it. These men, forced to perform for long hours for meagre salaries, were often not treated with the respect deserving of artistes. Artistes like Velu have changed the tide in Tamil Nadu. He took parai to the world stage and the film industry,

breathed new life into its beats and feet movements, attracting young men and women to the art form. Today, he teaches in schools and colleges across the State, apart from performing at events and crafting the instrument himself.

His journey was not easy. "My father and uncles played parai; but even then, many relatives, including my mother, did not like to see me play," says Velu. His relatives would ask him not to come anywhere near their homes after playing it since the instrument is associated with funerals, he says. But the parai and its rhythm were so ingrained in his psyche that nothing could shake his resolve.

"In my younger years, my hands would keep tapping every flat surface I came across," he says. Bamboo baskets, telephone posts, his head, his tummy, water tanks, hospital stretchers... "My father Ramayya would take me to the movies to teach me the beats from songs," he recalls. "He would tap his thighs following the beats from the screen, and I would repeat after him."

Velu picked up techniques from various *vaathiyaars* he came across. He learnt feet movements from the Kattapas in Natham, absorbed the skill of performing with a large troupe in a cramped space from Mariappan and Rasamani from Mattapparai. Despite his love for the art form, life forced him to remain out of touch with it for almost eight years.

During this time, Velu did several odd jobs: he was a load man, lift operator and hospital ward boy. "I finally decided to embrace parai: I realised I was doing nothing wrong," says Velu.

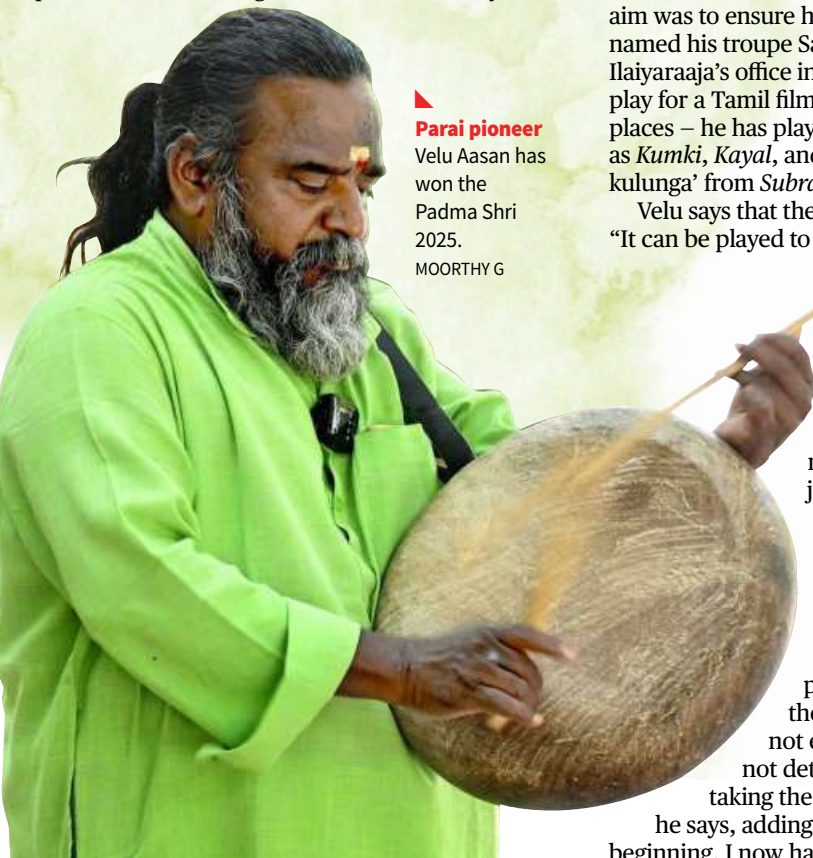
When Velu first started his own troupe, his chief aim was to ensure his men were paid well. He named his troupe Samar at music director Ilayaraja's office in Chennai when he was there to play for a Tamil film. The parai has taken Velu places — he has played for several Tamil films such as *Kumki*, *Kayal*, and the hugely popular 'Madura kulunga' from *Subramaniapuram*.

Velu says that the parai holds within it, life itself. "It can be played to celebrate every happy event in life, such as birth, a child's coming of age, weddings, and even at funerals," he says. The instrument conveys every possible emotion, and continues to fascinate him with its nuances. "It can resonate with joy one moment, and with the slight flick of the stick, can exude anger or even melancholy. "Parai is the air that I breathe, my life force," says Velu.

Despite all these years of performing and popularising the instrument, Velu still does not earn much. However, that does not deter him. "I want to continue taking the instrument to more people," he says, adding: "The recent award is just the beginning. I now have more work to do."

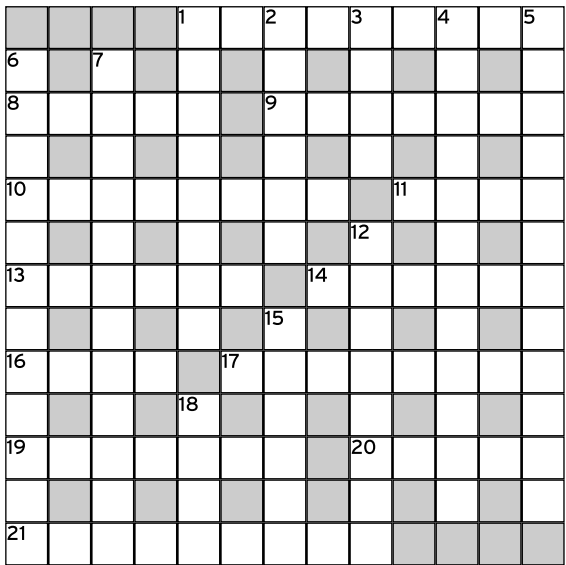
Parai can be played to celebrate every happy event in life, such as birth, a child's coming of age, weddings, and even at funerals

VELU AASAN



Parai pioneer Velu Aasan has won the Padma Shri 2025. MOORTHY G

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Across

- 1 Robert Louis Stevenson 1886 novel (9)
 - 8 Pallid (5)
 - 9 Cane made from a rattan palm (7)
 - 10 Soundly beaten (8)
 - 11 Attraction (4)
 - 13 Strident (6)
 - 14 Gratuitous (6)
 - 16 Nautical call (4)
 - 17 Glum (8)
 - 19 Compartment (7)
 - 20 School — entourage (5)
 - 21 History of a word (9)
- ### Down
- 1 Compassion (8)
 - 2 Accursed (6)
 - 3 Friend in need (4)
 - 4 Cover the cost (informal) (4,2,3,3)
 - 5 Sound of a working phone (8,4)
 - 6 Free rein (5,7)
 - 7 Have a tantrum (informal)

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



- (5,1,6)
- 12 Linchpin (8)
- 15 Do without (6)
- 18 Repeat (4)

Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated February 6, 2025.

Solution No. 13626

LOST ECLECTIC
I H C O L R A
SARCASM BLEAK
T U N P O A E
LOGIC UNWISE
E E T O P
SEVILLE ORANGE
S I R E E N
KARP OV CORGI
S D R I I O T
PLUTO RUPTURE
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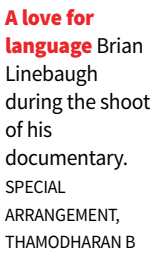
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Kriti Sanon has been roped in as the female lead in *Tere Ishk Mein*. Starring Dhanush, the movie is directed by Anand L Rai and has music by AR Rahman. The makers of *Tere Ishk Mein* (T-Series) announced the development by releasing the first look of Kriti from the movie. In the first glimpse video, Kriti is seen walking with a bottle of kerosene amid a riot. The actor delivers a fiery dialogue and then pours the kerosene on herself before deciding to light a cigarette. "Some souls are meant to collide. Some love stories are destined to burn brighter," reads the caption of the video. The romantic drama is set to release in theatres on November 28, 2025. Dhanush and Anand L Rai had previously worked in *Raanjhanaa* and *Atrangi Re*.



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Looks like *Pushpa 2: The Rule* is set to rule the smaller screens after a successful run in theatres. Netflix will be the streaming platform for the sequel, and the X profile of the streaming giant announced that the OTT version of the film will feature 23 minutes of extra footage, which was recently added to the theatre cut.

Pushpa 2: The Rule is said to have made ₹1000 crore at the global box office in just six days from its release, making it the fastest Indian film to reach this feat. The film is a sequel to the 2021 Telugu blockbuster *Pushpa: The Rise*. Released on December 5, 2024, it features dubbed versions in Hindi, Tamil, Kannada, Bengali, and Malayalam. The film sees Allu Arjun reprise his role as Pushpa Raj, alongside Rashmika Mandanna as Srivalli and Fahadh Faasil as SP Bhanwar Singh Shekhawat.



Get ready for some music....with a cause.

Following last year's concert, Rethinking Refugees and House of T is ready with the second edition of Gig for Gaza. This time, local talents like Blues Conscience, Crimson Sands, Layavart, Ann Shirley Natasha, Sublashini, and Tarita feature as part of the line-up. Proceeds from ticket sales will go to Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP), an organisation for families impacted by the ongoing crisis in Gaza.

@The Neighborhood Bar, January 31, 7.30pm.

Tickets are available on allevents.in and can also be purchased at the gate.



BRIAN LINEBAUGH

Though he speaks Tamil with flair, Brian is not yet confident about his conversational skills. "I've been at it for 20 years, but I still have difficulties," he says, before promising, "The next time we meet, I will speak to you entirely in Tamil." *Naanga kaathirukirom (We are waiting).*









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