

TAMBARAM

Chromepet » Pallavaram » Tambaram West » Rajakilpakkam » Mannivakkam » Guindy » Keelkattalai » Nanganallur » Guduvanchery » Hasthinapuram » Pammal » Tambaram East

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DOVETON'S UNIQUE CHRISTMAS TREE

It is Yuletide and as artificial trees are being brought to life through decorations, take a look at a real tree on this school campus that was given a fresh start through an artificial support system. **P5**



WASTE MANAGEMENT DURING MONSOON

It is that time of year when Greater Chennai Corporation has to cope with an increased load of garbage, largely on account of organic waste coming in from fallen trees. **P6**



Brave a slushy path to reach this station

T.S. ATUL SWAMINATHAN

These are images of the approach road to Singaperumal Kovil railway station near GST Road.

With no proper road, the walk to the station is slippery after the rains. The walkway is overgrown with bushes and littered with trash and construction debris.



S. Kamali, a commuter, says: "There are no lights, and residents of Bharathiyar Street have to use torches on their cell phones to navigate the pathway. The other option is to take a detour through Gandhi Street and GST Road. We have complained to the station authorities about the approach pathway but no action has been taken."

Even the pathway along VIP Nagar Main Road and Railway Gate Road is slushy and uneven. Besides, the steps to platform one (along Bharathiyar Street) are broken.



'Discuss lake restoration projects in the Assembly'

The Tamil Nadu State Legislative Assembly session will begin on December 9 and we want the elected representatives of the Pallavaram and Tambaram assembly constituencies to discuss Thiruneermalai lake restoration.

It has been over two years since the Water Resources Department (WRD) submitted the project estimates to the State Government for approval and fund sanctioning.

This also includes freeing the 'Nattu Kalvai' channel from encroachments and constructing retaining walls to prevent regional flooding. The channel drains the lake's excess water to the Adyar River, but no progress has been made.

WRD has written many letters to the Tambaram City Municipal Corporation to stop dumping and discharging trash and sewage into the lake and the channel.

B. Saravanan
Thiruneermalai



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'Accessible buses give me greater independence'

Four months since low floor buses were introduced in the city, Gowrivakkam resident *Sathish Kumar* explores the experience as a wheelchair user who frequently travels across the city

SATHISH KUMAR

On November 25, I completed four months of travel, hopping on 55 low floor buses of MTC that make trips to various destinations. These travels were part of my work and social activities, and above all to show the joy and freedom of an accessible travel for a wheelchair user.

It is a different form of happiness when you don't have to be lifted into an auto or cab with your wheelchair also stuffed into it. I do need some support to hold my motorised wheelchair while entering and exiting the ramp of the bus but this is far better than someone lifting me without proper training.

These accessible low floor buses hit the roads in Chennai after almost 20 years of struggle by many disability rights activists including Rajiv Rajan, Vaishnavi Jayakumar, and advocates Poongkhulali and Yogesh. This would not have been a reality without the understanding of the

State Government. These accessible buses not only give power to persons with disabilities but also to senior citizens.

My first travel was from Koyambedu to Rohini Theatre stop on August 7, which was comparatively hassle-free.

On another occasion I had to travel from Indira Nagar MRTS to Saidapet metro station, so I waited for 19B for close to two hours. Those were early months when low floor buses were pressed into service and their fleet was also less in number. In the last four months MTC's fleet of low floor buses has increased.



As per a circular posted by MTC on social media, there are over 400 low floor buses, but information about them don't show up in the MTC app. We have represented this to the MTC managing director Dr. Alby John Varghese. We also wanted details of such buses to be colour coded blue and written "LF" as this will help us plan our travel better.

There were other hiccups that I faced in the early months. A few drivers skipped the bus stop. I guess some were reluctant about taking a wheelchair user or opening the ramp.

After complaining about such behaviour by the MTC crew, it has been better now. Many of the drivers operating low floor buses have also been trained.

Vertical handlebars

Some modifications to the existing low floor buses will benefit the differently abled even more.

Since these low floor buses are rear engine, there is high "braking capacity" on these buses. When driver slams on the brakes suddenly, there are chances that passengers standing are not able

to balance themselves. Currently, the rear side seats do not have enough vertical handle bars, making it difficult for those who are standing in the steps on the back side of the bus, whenever breaks are applied. I have seen people fall down.

PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Vertical handlebars could be fixed on every alternate seat on both sides.

We also need the government's support for implementing principles of accessible universal design in bus stops.

A level boarding at a bus stop will reduce the dependence on conductors whose support is currently needed to take the wheelchair. Unauthorised parking near bus stops also need to be removed.

Above all, the low floor buses have been a big saving on my pocket. I was able to save around ₹20,000 on travel alone in these four months.

(Sathish Kumar is a banking professional and a member of the Disability Rights Alliance)

Foodpreneur receives award from CM

R. Padma Kalyani is a recipient of a State award for initiatives taken by her enterprise to empower disabled individuals



VANAJAKKSHI N

Suchiram foods, a social enterprise run by a Sholinganallur resident, received the honorary Tamil Nadu state award for individuals and organisations that work for the empowerment of disabled individuals. The award was presented to R. Padma Kalyani, founder, Suchiram Foods on December 5 by Chief Minister M.K. Stalin.

Suchiram Foods aims to create sustainable revenue generation opportunities for neurodiverse individuals by leverag-

ing their abilities in a manner they can be engaged in profitable business. Established in 2021, Suchiram provides a sheltered environment and access to operational set-up that is familiar to neurodiverse individuals, within its premises at Kottivakkam.

"Through our 'disability first' approach, we take in individuals with neurodiverse challenges as training interns and provide opportunities for skill development along with *ex gratia* for the time they spend at Suchiram," says Padma Kalyani. The identified individuals are supported by care takers in the learning

process. The end products are marketed and monetised for sustainable operation.

Suchiram focusses on everyday product needs such as cooking spice powders and healthy millet powders and mixes. Special sweets and savories are made to order ahead of festivals and they take up corporate orders and supply to educational institutions. Pre-ordered products are freshly made, packaged and shipped by their in house interns.

(Vanajakshshi N is a resident of OMR and associated with Federation of OMR Residents Associations)

READERS WRITE

'Battered road needs to be mended soon'

Various stretches of Velachery Main Road from Medavakkam Koot Road to East Tambaram are battered following the recent rains. The road should be mended without much delay.

N.K. Raja, president,
Nesamani Nagar
Residents' Welfare
Association,
Perumbakkam



'This pathway is earthen'

The path to an educational institution at Okkiyampet is earthen. It is quite difficult to use this path during rains. A proper road is required here.

S Phoenix, Perumbakkam

'Increase Veerangal Odai canal's capacity'



The stretch of Veerangal Odai canal opposite Velachery MRTS railway station needs to be deepened. This canal is an important flood water carrier. If its capacity is increased it will help in the mitigation of flooding at Ram Nagar, Kalki Nagar, Murugu Nagar, Srinivasa Nagar, and a few more colonies.

S. Kumararaja, Velachery

Three distinguished personalities receive honorary doctorates from Vels University

Vels University celebrated its 15th convocation ceremony recently, marking a significant milestone in the institution's journey. Speaker of the Lok Sabha Om Birla, who was the chief guest, commended the university's remarkable journey. "As I look at the graduates before me today, I see not just students, but future leaders, dreamers and doers. You are the pillars of a 'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India), and the responsibility now lies with you to lead our nation through this century," said Birla.

He also paid tributes to late A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. Honorary doctorates were conferred upon three distinguished individuals, recognising their exceptional contribution to their respective field. S.J. Surya, acclaimed director, actor, producer, lyricist, and singer; badminton coach Pullela Gopichand; and C.K. Kumaravel, founder of Naturals Group of Beauty Salons.

The ceremony was also attended by other esteemed leaders of the university.



(From left) Pro Chancellor (administration) Arthi Ganesh; Vice President of Vels Groups Preethaa Ganesh; Founder Chancellor Ishari K. Ganesh; Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, badminton coach Pullela Gopichand; entrepreneur CK Kumaravel and actor S. J. Surya

Lasya and FOMRRA to host OhMaRgazhi festival at OMR

HARSHA KODA

The OhMaRgazhi festival, celebrating the Margazhi season, will kick off at Lasya, South Chennai's cultural hub, located at Janaki Ammal Auditorium in APL Global School in Thoraipakkam, starting December 16, 2024. This exciting event will run every day from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m., featuring an array of performances that blend music, dance, and more.

The festival will showcase an impressive lineup of artists. Kicking off on December 16, the festival features Sivasri Skandaprasad with soulful bhajans and renowned vocalist Neyveli Santhanagopalan. On December 17, audiences can delight in performances by Super Singer Vikram Sai Prasad (Vocal) and V.V. Prasanna (Vocal). Dance enthusiasts will be treated to captivating acts



Vocalist Neyveli Santhanagopalan and Sivasri Skandaprasad.
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

by Ramya Venkatraman and Krupa Nityaesh. The festival continues with performances by O.S. Arun (Vocal), S. Sowmya (Vocal), and Smitha Madhav (Dance).

The lineup also features the acclaimed Komal Theatre's Drau-



A special lifetime achievement award will be presented to Bombay Jayashri Ramnath

pathi (Drama), along with Abhilash (Vocal), accompanied by Akshanan (Mridangam), and Rajhesh Vaidhya (Veena). Music lovers will appreciate S. Mahathi (Vocal) and Mumbai Meera (Vocal), accompanied by Chandra-mouli (Violin). The festival will culminate with a spiritually uplifting performance by Udayalur K. Kalyanaraman (Namasankertan). Full event schedule can be found on the www.OhMaRgazhi.com website and on all major social media platforms under the handle @OhMaRgazhi.

"OhMaRgazhi is more than just an event; it is a tribute to our community's rich arts and culture. Lasya, our non-profit project, has attempted to bring the

Mylapore experience to OMR." – Jagganathan, founder of Ramaniyam Builders, the festival's key patron, echoed this sentiment, emphasising the importance of nurturing local artistic talent.

A special lifetime achievement award – "Lasya Choodamani" – will be presented to noted vocalist Bombay Jayashri Ramnath at a ceremony that will take place on December 16.

Attendees can also look forward to the festival's beloved canteen, offering a variety of delectable food options. OhMaRgazhi is another attempt by the Federation of OMR Resident Associations (FOMRRA), to bring culture and social activities that enrich life on OMR. Entry to the OhMaRgazhi festival is free, but registration is mandatory. One can register on <https://register.OhMaRgazhi.com> (Harsha Koda is co-founder, FOMRRA)

Fourth edition by FORRRA on December 22

Winner of the music and dance festival to be crowned 'Margazhi Queen'

This is the fourth edition of the annual Margazhi Music and Dance Festival organised by the Federation of Radial Road Residents Associations (FORRRA) which includes 12 gated communities on the Pallavaram-Thoraipakkam Radial Road. To be held on December 22 at Aarna Mahal on Pallavaram-Thoraipakkam Radial Road, this year the organisers have lined up interesting performances by budding local and NRI artistes.

Carnatic music, bhajans, classical dance performances are open to participants from six years and above. The



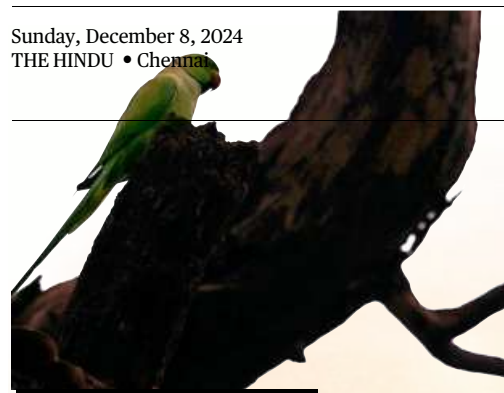
S. Karthick will inaugurate the festival; and (above) snapshot of a previous edition

ramp walk is open for women above 18 years. These contestants will have to participate in kolam, Thiruppaavai or Thiruvempaavai recitation and then go for ramp walk in ethnic wear, said a release. The final winner will bag the "Margazhi Queen" title.

S. Ghatam Karthick, an eminent Carnatic musician and composer will inaugurate the festival, which will have a day-long performance involving various artistes.

"Ever since we started it in 2021 our music and dance festival has witnessed more than 100 budding artistes perform and gain invaluable experience. First timers particularly continue to receive great exposure and learning experience in front of a large and diverse audience. This year again we are looking forward to having a good number of participants, with additional events such as Ramp Walk being choreographed by a professional from the industry; and 'Margazhi Queen' title contest, complete with mementos as a mark of appreciation for all our participants," says B. Vijayalakshmi, founder-president of the Federation

For registrations and further information, contact: 9840482337 / 8248791953



It is Yuletide and as artificial trees are being brought to life through decorations, take a look at a real tree on this school campus that was given a fresh start through an artificial support system

Doveton's unique Christmas tree

SHARON JESSICA MICHAEL

The once-majestic rain tree at Doveton Girls Higher Secondary School in Vepery began to be unsteady on its feet, a weakness that went unnoticed until the day it slumped. The school helped it back on its ageing feet, providing it with "crutches" to enable it to complete the rest of its life journey. Eight years later, it stands steady on its assisted feet, the props – a combination of metal and concrete – firmly in place.

Reflecting on the effort to save the tree, H.E. Wilkins, chairman, Doveton Group of Schools, remarks, "If someone is 80 years old and unwell, you do not just let them go – you provide care and support. This tree deserved the same."

When the tree slumped, they could have sent it packing without a twinge of guilt, their act justified by a factor other than age. Rain trees (*Albizia saman*) are "alien" in this land, their roots made for elsewhere, specifically central and southern America. Though introduced, they have blended into the landscape.

Traipse down TTK Road, and you would run into humongous rain trees from one end to the other. This rain tree at Doveton has blended into its specific environment, proudly brandishing a character of its own.

It is a magnet for rose-ringed parakeets, and so the tree, lovingly christened The Parrotage by Wilkins, became the focus of a collective effort to restore its vitality, when it slumped that fateful day, eight years ago. Pooling together five lakh rupees, the school devised an innovative plan to rejuvenate the ageing tree. Iron girders were installed to cradle its weakened frame, anchored securely by a sturdy concrete base. With this care and determination, the school ensured that the tree would continue to stand on the campus, offering a home for its feathered friends, particularly the rose-



ringed parakeets.

This rain tree now may be a shadow of its original glory, some of its branches resembling a statement abandoned mid-sentence; and some others, gnarled in a manner that reminds one of a tedious, circular argument that implodes on itself. Amputated and wrinkled and shorn of thick foliage, certainly, but what matters is this tree still hums with life, hosting scores of vibrant parakeets that chatter, whistle and nurture their young within the hollows at the ends of "amputated" branches. To ensure their comfort, the school placed a water pot and food tray near the tree, welcoming these winged visitors and reinforcing the bond between nature and the campus community. A pictorial

nameboard proudly crowns the tree, announcing its identity as The Parrotage to all who pass by.

Though these birds are parakeets, Wilkins decided to give this tree this nomenclature – The Parrotage – because it evokes the idea of a parsonage, symbolising care.

The children at the school have formed a deep connection with the tree, often spending time observing the behaviour of its avian residents. One memorable incident, told and retold by Wilkins a zillion times, involved a cat attempting to climb the tree in pursuit of an egg nestled in a hollow. Alerted by the parakeet's frantic squawks,

the flock quickly rallied, pecking at the intruder till it retreated.

This remarkable display of unity and instinct left a lasting impression on everyone who witnessed it, of-

fering a brief but significant lesson in the wonders of nature.

As one leaves the campus, the lingering thought one has of this rain tree is that of a grandparent, clearly past their prime, enervated by age-related ailments, but still making a handsome emotional contribution to the household. At the crepuscular hour, a procession of noisy parakeets fly into the wrinkled branches of this tree much like schoolchildren flying into the arms of their grandparent on returning home.

Its restoration was certainly not in vain.



When the tree slumped, they could have sent it packing without a twinge of guilt, their act justified by a factor other than age



The old rain tree that has been shored up with iron girders secured by a concrete base; parakeets are drawn to this tree. PHOTOS: SHARON JESSICA MICHAEL AND PRINCE FREDERICK

Waste management during monsoon

It is that time of year when Greater Chennai Corporation has to cope with an increased load of garbage, largely on account of organic waste coming in from fallen trees

LIFFY THOMAS

Greater Chennai Corporation recently deployed an army of workers to clear more than 7,000 metric tonnes of garbage after Cyclone Fengal made landfall on December 1. Some volunteer groups are still combing the sands of the beaches for plastic waste.

Not a surprise as heavy rains and strong winds always pose an additional challenge to the city administration as the percentage of garbage generated increases, largely due to organic waste from fallen trees.

As close to 60 percent of waste generated in Chennai is biodegradable, much of the city's solid waste problems can be solved if this segment is managed effectively. But that is easier said than done.

Composting units have their job cut out as high humidity level and other environmental factors delay organic matter from decomposing leading to a foul smell. There is also the concern of rain-water seeping into the composting units that hinders the process further.

Certain zonal officers *The Hindu Downtown* spoke to say the composting

units witness minimal activity as segregation and drying are difficult during rainy season.

Focus on bio CNG

The superintending engineer, Solid Waste Management, GCC, says since bio CNG (compressed natural gas) plants started functioning in the city from this year dependence on micro composting centres (MCC) has reduced. Currently, there are two bio

For any waste management system to function effectively, garbage workers from the informal sector must be recognised

CNG systems functioning in Madhavaram and Chetpet, and plans are on to open five more at other localities in the city.

"The civic body has closed the MCC attached to burial grounds, so the bio CNG systems are taking up much of the load of the organic waste generated in the city," says the superintending engineer.

The bio-CNG system in Chetpet, for

instance, has a capacity to take 100-120 tonnes of organic waste generated from the city households, markets and bulk waste generators. But these units also have a difficult time during monsoon.

Priorities change during heavy rains and cyclone for GCC partners handling the city's waste. "We do not get waste on time," says Manikandan M., plant manager, Srinivas Waste Management Services Private Limited, an empanelled vendor of GCC handling the bio CNG plant in Chetpet.

Citing the example of Cyclone Fengal, he says focus was on clearing tree debris from the road so waste gets accumulated at source and starts decaying. "First in, first out is the model that needs to be followed when handling organic waste," he says.

Besides the waste management company directly collecting waste from source, the plant on an average receives 40-50 tonnes of waste from certain zones of GCC.

"But more than 30% of waste that we get is mixed, so we run it through a 'depacker machine' to separate organic waste from the rest that is sent to the landfills," says the plant manager adding that presence of foreign bodies such as spoons affects production and

damages the machine.

Managing waste locally

Solid waste processing by decentralised methods is cost-effective and more sustainable as well.

Geo Damin, a solid waste management researcher with Poovulagin Nambargal, says currently most of the projects being discussed or undertaken in Chennai are centralised projects, whether it is incinerator or bio CNG, where logistic and emission-related issues need to be factored in.

"We need better infrastructure to make solid waste management work effectively. The existing infrastructure in the city also needs to be utilised well," says the researcher.

Emphasising segregation of waste at source, Geo says, the civic body must set new targets to achieve 100 percent of this from households and commercial establishments. "To discourage use of single use plastics, which end up in our seas, we should focus on enforcement of the ban on single-use plastic through hefty fines," he adds.

"For any waste management system to function effectively, garbage workers from the informal sector must be recognised," says the researcher.



Garbage washed ashore at the Marina Beach. Image taken on December 1.
PHOTO. RAGU R



Social activist Gilbert Rodrigo passes away

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

He was their panacea for all that needed to be changed. From getting tough paper work like reports done, working to secure the future of the marginalised, fighting for local access to natural resources to training staff to creating smart community leaders in villages, Gilbert Rodrigo, co-founder, GUIDE, could do anything.

“Even a few days ago a group of people came asking for his help to get a scholarship for an artisan. They didn’t know that Gilbert had passed away,” said Vasantha Raghavachari, his wife and co-founder, GUIDE, the NGO based in Chengalpattu district that has been working since 1985.

Gilbert Rodrigo, whose laughter was hearty and warm, was born on June 23, 1954. After completing his graduation in philosophy, he did his PG in sociology. In his long career in human rights and social work, he worked in several projects including the Bay of Bengal

programme of Food and Agricultural Organisation, Legal Resources for Social Action, Tamil Nadu Pondy Fisher People Federation, and Gandhian Unit for Integrated Development Education (GUIDE).

“In the 1980s when GUIDE was started, not a single Dalit child in

▼
Gilbert Rodrigo,
co-founder, GUIDE

Magaral village had gone to school. All that changed with our intervention. We enrolled the children of farm labourers into school and also conducted tuitions in the evenings. We got arrested after some local politicians, who were against our work, complained. Then after two days the local people told the police that we were only offering education to their children. Similarly, in 1992 when we were working for women’s rights and gave shelter to sexually assaulted women, we were once again hounded,” she said.

Vasantha said that Gilbert, whose organs were donated after he passed on, always looked for a long-term solution and one that was wholesome. “He preferred to lobby with the government and get things done for more people. Rather than get one patta, he would campaign for housing rights and get group houses,” she said. His death was sudden and came as a shocker for those in his vast network. Hundreds of local residents and those who benefited from his work paid homage to Gilbert.

Medical camp for special children



DSW Trust, in collaboration with the District Differently Abled Office, has launched a 31-day medical camp for special children in Chengalpattu district. The initiative aims to provide comprehensive health services and basic life support (BLS) training to over 1,000 special chil-

dren, said a release.

The medical camp, which commenced on December 1, will cover all special schools and homes in Chengalpattu district. A team of experienced medical professionals will provide general health check-up, paediatric

consultations, eye care services, dental care services, and BLS training for staff and parents.

Rotary Club of Centennial Madras, Parvathy Hospital and Dr. Agarwal’s Eye Hospital has partnered with DSW Trust for this initiative, added the release.

HGI opens alumni chapter in Australia

The Hindustan Group of Institutions (HGI) launched its Australia-New Zealand chapter in Melbourne recently. Ashok Verghese, vice president of HGI, inaugurated the chapter in Melbourne. He said the chapters will facilitate cross-border career opportunities, create mentorship pathways, and enable knowledge sharing across industries and geographical regions. The event was attended by distinguished alumni.

“We will strengthen the institution’s industry connections in the Asia-Pacific region, creating new opportunities for academic partnerships, joint research, and student placements.” Hindustan Institute of Technology and Science Alumni Association has also announced plans to extend its global presence further with chapter launches in Canada and Africa, added the release.



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Post-Fengal effect: no hiding place for this skulker



▼ The yellow bittern is a skulker, preferring to pass its days on earth unseen, using bulrushes and related vegetation as a veil. It is particularly smart at staying out of the focal length of telephoto lenses and that is quite a skill. This skill however deserted this yellow bittern, on December 1, 2024, a day after Cyclone Fengal "calmed down". With the cyclone "smothering" much of the vegetation with water, this yellow bittern had no choice but to be gawked at and photographed. PHOTO: PRINCE FREDERICK

Additional entry points opened at metro stations

Chennai Metro Rail Limited has opened additional commuter entries at three stations. To accommodate the increasing commuter traffic, the entries have been facilitated at Egmore, Guindy and Washermanpet metro stations. The entries have been equipped with lifts and escalators for commuters' convenience. Rajesh Chaturvedi, director of systems and Operations, and Gopinath Mallya, chief advisor, operation and maintenance, at CMRL, inaugurated the additional entries at Guindy, Egmore and Washermanpet stations, in the presence of senior officials and CMRL staff.

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The Hindu Colony Welfare Association gets a new committee



At the recently held general meeting of The Hindu Colony Welfare Association in Nanganallur, the following committee members were unanimously elected as the association's office bearers. They will hold their posts for one year.

G. Arun, president; Sundarraman and Narayanan, vice presidents, D. Velavan, secretary, Shobana, joint secretary, and R. Ramesh, treasurer,

For details, call R. Ramesh at 99410 69558.

Blood donation drive at two government hospitals

The Aalam Blood Donation camp will be held on December 8 from 9 a.m. onwards at two venues in the city - Institute of Child Health and Hospital in Egmore and Government Hospital in Chromepet.

This social wing is an initiative of We Are Chennai Cycling Group's (WCCG) and to donate blood, register at <https://forms.gle/4Gjtp2in8bxfFK2L8>

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- NEET and JEE Program

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