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Unfinished business at Sembakkam park

Annai Anjugam Ammaiyyar Park at Maruthi Nagar needs to be thoroughly spruced up, say residents



▼ The stormwater drain network running through the premises of the park. PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



T.S. ATUL SWAMINATHAN

Some months ago, the Tambaram City Municipal Corporation initiated the construction of a stormwater drain network connecting Sembakkam Lake and Vallal Yusuf Nagar in Selayur. The network had to pass through Annai Anjugam Ammaiyyar Park at Maruthi Nagar and Church Street in Sembakkam.

Although the SWD work has drawn to a close, there is still some unfinished business to attend to. On account of the work, poles and lights were damaged and yet to be replaced. Mounds of mud are

found along the drain network.

“Though the work has been completed, the park has not been swept. It is overrun with vegetation and construction debris,” says V. Seetharaman, a social activist and resident of Rajakilpakkam.

The yoga hall and the wash-rooms have not been maintained well. The fountain has stagnant water and has become a breeding ground for mosquitoes.

The area where the play equipment are located is dumped with soil, making it unfit for children to play.

V. Thirunavukarasu, president of Sembakkam Park Friends’ Welfare Association, says: “Children cannot access the play equipment area, and the swings and see-saw are damaged.”

There is no caretaker or security guard to maintain the park. The three gates providing entry to the park – on Church Street, Maruthi Nagar and Vallal Yusuf Nagar – are kept open throughout the day. The park has become a thoroughfare for pedestrians, adds Seetharaman.

The Association’s office-bearers have taken up the issue with the Tambaram City Municipal Corporation Commissioner and Tambaram MLA.

Tirusulam subway needs more maintenance work

On January 23, the State Highways Department repaired the non-functional lights at Tirusulam pedestrian subway, which came as a big relief to pedestrians. They are now requesting the Department to fix the underpass ceilings, non-functional lift, and CCTV cameras.

The underpass connects GST Road, Tirusulam suburban railway station, Chennai Metro rail

station and Chennai International Airport premises and is used by hundreds of pedestrians.

The ceilings are damaged in more than five areas. Through the damaged ceilings, water leaks and inconveniences the pedestrians.

During Cyclone Michaung, the subway was flooded and out of bounds for pedestrians. *Text & photo: T.S. Atul Swaminathan*



▼ The damaged roof

On the wrong side of road safety



▼ Driving on the wrong direction is common on a section of GST Road and Thiruneermalai Road in Pallavaram. Ever since the traffic police implemented a traffic diversion at this junction, motorists from Thiruneermalai Road take a U-turn and disrupt the traffic flow on GST Road. Motorists drive on the wrong side of Thiruneermalai Road to enter the Ponds flyover service lane towards Chromepet and Pallavaram. “Motorists from Chromepet take a U-turn and drive dangerously close to pedestrians on GST Road. A pedestrian signal should be installed,” says S. Gayathri, a resident of Thiruneermalai. *TEXT AND PHOTO: T.S. ATUL SWAMINATHAN*

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INKING IN A CAMPAIGN ON THE CAMPUS

Through dedicated clubs, colleges in Chennai make sure students eligible for voting get their Voter ID and that they do vote when the time arrives. **P5**

A trash 'expo'

T.S. ATUL SWAMINATHAN

During your next visit to the Chitlapakkam lake, do not be surprised if you are greeted by an "exhibition" featuring various pieces of trash.

Tired of seeing along the walkways at the Chitlapakkam Lake as well as the retentment walls there marred by trash, the citizen group Chitlapakkam Rising has begun to showcase these pieces of trash to drive visitors to be more responsible while disposing of discards.

Volunteers of Chitlapakkam Rising clean the lake and its premises every weekend.

Despite garbage bins being placed along the walkways, plastic bottles and other trash miss them and are strewn around them.

Recently, during a cleaning activity, volunteers picked up oil cans, PET cans, empty chips packets and a



variety of other things, says Sunil Jayaram, a core volunteer of Chitlapakkam Rising. "To sensitise people on how they are contributing to the problem through irresponsible behaviour we placed the

trash at the corners of walkways," says Jayaram.

Members of the public are welcome to join the lake clean-ups held at 7 a.m. every weekend for an hour. Call Sunil Jayaram at 95001 22151.

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WORLD WETLANDS DAY: FEBRUARY 2**Is there a change in the water dynamics at Perumbakkam wetland?**

PRINCE FREDERICK

The flow dynamics at the Perumbakkam wetland seem to have changed. And this situation has impacted where birds pitch tent.

This change should not raise eyebrows: it was on the cards.

The Perumbakkam wetland is a major component in a combination of natural and man-made system that carries rainwater through a series of “conveyor belts” (which includes Okkiyam Maduvu and the Buckingham Canal), ultimately draining the excess water into the sea.

In the past few years, Perumbakkam wetland has come under greater focus as a conveyor of rainwater. To facilitate the movement of rainwater, Water Resources Department ensured a deep and wide earthen channel cuts through the western section of the wetland.

That could partly be contributing to a situation where water does

not accumulate in the southern and south-western sections of the wetland at levels they used to.

This might not have hindered the birds’ connection with the wetland, only altered the details of that connection, as the accumulation of water has increased in another side of the wetland as a naturally-occurring compensatory mechanism.

It is however necessary to keep an eye on how anthropogenic activities, even the essential and positive ones, impact habitats of this kind.

Ornithologist V. Shantaram notes that through citizen science, there has to be continual documentation of how anthropogenic activities impact a habitat so that when the balance begins to tip unfavourably towards environment, it does not go unnoticed.

The southern side of Perumbakkam wetland, off Classic Farms Main Road on January 18, 2024.

PHOTO: PRINCE FREDERICK

**Get those stones out of this patch**

BY
A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

By virtue of its location, a patch at a neighbourhood in Karapakkam has been serving as a sit-out for birds.

Located in River View Residency (a seven-street neighbourhood), this short patch runs adjacent to a bund of the Pallikaranai Marsh.

In what was designed as a crude form of a stormwater-carrying network, grey water would be carried from the households in the neigh-

bourhood – largely apartments – and drained into this patch. This route included open drains and huge concrete pipes. Waste water

can be rich in nutrients and a variety of bird species were making the most of the situation.

Over the years, documentation

of avian species from this patch was coming in thick and with impressive frequency during the winter migratory season.

But this was destined to be a temporary patch from the word go as sooner or later it would be recast in a different mould to fit the civic body’s template for development.

What was expected came to pass. Greater Chennai Corporation constructed stormwater drains in the neighbourhood and the network culminated at the edge of the Marsh, draining into it.

The old massive concrete pipes were discontinued.

While the construction of the stormwater drain can be considered salutary, the dishevelment of the patch that followed it cannot be. Huge stones lie in exactly the space that used to attract many avian species.

Reportedly, GCC will soon work on this patch as part of its plans to benefit residents of the neighbourhood. Until that happens, this patch should be kept spic and span for the avian guests.



This patch near River View Residency needs to be cleaned. The images were taken on January 8, 2024. PHOTOS: PRINCE FREDERICK



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'Wall painting' by Nature



▼ Give it an inch and it would take over the wall. A customised version of an old thought that fits the peepal tree. A peepal tree growing on a wall is not uncommon. Only that this peepal tree has found a grandstand to flaunt that ability running in the family. It has latched on to a wall at Poonamallee High Road in Kilpauk. Everything that is known about the peepal tree — the tenacity particularly — is in splendid display as the peepal's roots spread across the wall and claw into it for support. Having clamped itself into the wall, the tree is flattened against the wall, and still growing.

Photos: Prince Frederick



A tree vies with a monument for attention



▼ In Mandavelipakkam, at the Pillar junction — the nomenclature derived from a pillar installed by City Improvement Trust — a peepal tree vies with the civic monument for attention. It might not wrest first-time visitors' attention from the pillar entirely, but does manage to divide it. That division of focus veers in the tree's favour, thanks to its remarkable roots. Twisted and coiled and lying above the earth, the roots of the Peepal tree reach up to the height of the compound wall of the nearby GCC park. Given that GCC ran a campaign sometime ago against the practice of driving nails into trees, it is disappointing the civic body has driven one into this tree to display a board indicating a toilet is located close by on Lazarus Church Road. Photos: Prince Frederick



Breaking the mould



▼ On Arcot Road in Kodambakkam, the compound wall of a facility under Greater Chennai Corporation's Family Welfare Bureau has been replaced with CMRL's metal boards.

Before the "change of guard", a giant circular concrete container created for a peepal tree was pushing against the compound wall.

With Metro Rail work scudding through the road and changing some of its defining contours, the concrete container is all but gone. A rim with exposed steel bar is all that remains of it. However, just as a mould imparts a shape to anything placed within it, the bottom of the tree — roots interwoven with earth — wears a circular look.

However, having been circumscribed within a concrete container filled with earth, the coiled roots probably have not penetrated deep down into the earth. One cannot help wondering what should be (as much as what could be) done with this peepal tree. Photos: Prince Frederick

Inking in a campaign on the campus

Through dedicated clubs, colleges in Chennai make sure students eligible for voting get their Voter ID and that they do vote when the time arrives

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Numbers tell a story

At Stella Maris, the Electoral Literacy Club has been diligently engaging with students through activities highlighting the power of enfranchisement. Recently, it conducted a survey to find out the number of first-time voters among students and whether they had enrolled to get their voter's ID card. The survey has revealed that only 36.5% of the students who have completed 18 have voter IDs. Among the older students, more than 56% did not have a voter ID. This survey is part of an exercise planned by the Club in association with the District Election office to conduct drives to have more students enrolled.

"Based on the survey, we will be having a voters drive in the college in February," says Cinthia Jude, assistant professor of history, and nodal officer for elections. They plan to increase the frequency depending on the need and turnout.

"These camps will also be open to staff and families of support staff," says Cinthia. A student ambassador and a group of students make sure the club does its bit towards creating awareness about the issue. For instance, a reel-making competition on the importance of voting and inclusivity in voting was conducted.

Some online help

At Shri Shankarlal Sundarbhai Shasun Jain College for Women, five student ambassadors help

NOVEMBER 25: NATIONAL VOTERS' DAY



Students of CTTE College formed a human chain

the nodal officer run various campaigns among students.

First-year students are the main target of this initiative.

One of the campaigns was focussed on showing students how to apply for a voter's ID card online.

"We conducted a training session in the college as most youngsters are tech-savvy and we thought this was a faster way of inducting them into the process," says K. Jayachandrika, nodal officer.

Ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, the Electoral Literacy Club of the college has planned to conduct an awareness programme through street theatre on the campus as well as take some of

the activities to areas around the college.

"We plan to have a rally in T.Nagar," says Jayachandrika.

Regular drives

At Dwaraka Doss Goverdhan Doss Vaishnav College, the NSS wing has been initiating camps to enrol first-time voters.

These are conducted every quarter, a practice that is being followed for some years now.

Last year, more than 3000 students were enrolled through such drives, says a staff of the college. To make students attend these camps, students drum up support in various ways, which include putting up posters and going to every class and inviting

students.

Door-to-door drive

In the 2021 academic year, Chevalier T Thomas Elizabeth College for Women launched Indian Constitution and Ethics Committee to instil democratic values among students. An activity is conducted every month.

"Getting students to sign up for the activities in this club is not easy; we have been seeing a slow but steady growth of interest," says K. Preetha, head, department of languages, CTTE College. On Voter's Day, the Student Council conducted a door-to-door campaign driving home the importance of voting. Student leaders also got the pledge signed by the public.

DAV student wins medal at Archery Championship

M. Kaushik, a Class VIII student of DAV School, Adambakkam, bagged bronze medal in the under-14 Indoor Recurve Bow category at the 16th Tamil Nadu State Archery Championship. The event was held at Sairam Engineering College and organised by The Archery Association of Tamil Nadu (TAAT). Archers from 24



districts in Tamil Nadu participated in the championship.

The prizes and medals were distributed to the winning students by Shihan Hussaini, general secretary of the Association.

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