

TAMBARAM

Chromepet » Pallavaram » Tambaram West » Rajakilpakkam » Mannivakkam » Guindy » Keelkattalai » Nanganallur » Guduvanchery » Hasthinapuram » Pammal » Tambaram East
Medavakkam » Srinivasa Nagar » Kathipara Junction » Kovilambakkam » Sadasivam Nagar » Potheri » Selaiyur » Sembakkam » St.Thomas Mount » Madipakkam » Urappakkam » Paranur



A VOICE FOR DIFFERENTLY ABLED SINGERS

Musicians with disabilities do not find themselves on a level-playing field. Vinod Venugopal and Reshma have launched Samagratha, a platform that provides these musicians with opportunities **P5**



MAKING PROFESSIONAL COURSES MORE INCLUSIVE

Through a new initiative, Karna Vidya Foundation is adding to the already existing e-book content for the visually impaired **P6**

'Sewage treatment plants will be set up at Sembakkam Lake'

Mayor of Tambaram City Municipal Corporation has promised participants of a walkathon that the project would be commissioned at three locations soon



More than 500 people took part in the walkathon held to protect Sembakkam Lake.

PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

K. Vasanthakumari Kamalakan-nan, Mayor of Tambaram City Municipal Corporation, who took part in a walkathon organised by Sri Sarvamangala Nagar Residents Association in Chitlapakkam to create awareness about protecting the lake, said that was a need to facilitate sewage treatment plants at Sembakkam Lake targeting six areas.

These areas were identified based on field visits by experts. She said the STP plants will be constructed at three locations on war footing; for this, financial assistance has been granted.

With regard to lack of an underground drainage network, the civic body has submitted a proposal to the State government, and the appraisal has been cleared. Besides,

a project report and detailed work are being readied. Soon, financial assistance will be sanctioned, and the work will begin, she said.

More than 500 people participated in the walk, holding placards and shouting slogans to protect the waterbodies and stop dumping of trash. People requested the Water Resources Department to arrest sewage through stormwater drain networks.

Residents requested the State government to form a Commissionate for waterbodies and facilitate drainage networks to protect the waterbodies in the Chengalpattu district.

M. Ravi, the association secretary, said waterbody area should not be reduced, and used for entertainment purposes.

Text: T.S. Atul Swaminathan

'Unsafe drive on Medavakkam flyover'



Lights on both sides of Medavakkam flyover are not functional, making it difficult to drive even with the headlights on. Text and photo by R. V. Baskaran from Selaiyur

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Intense sunbath at these bus stops

Though the mercury is on the rise, commuters in many localities have to do without bus shelters. The absence is stark on a stretch of Medavakkam Main Road between Vanuvampet and Medavakkam; none of the stops there has a shelter. The State Highways Department is responsible for maintaining this stretch that covers Ullagaram, Puzhuthivakkam, Madipakkam, Keezhkattalai, Eechangadu, Kovilambakkam and Vellakal



Kovilambakkam Junction



Medavakkam Terminus



Madipakkam Koot Road

'Redevelopment work at Guindy railway station to be completed by May'



Guindy railway station on March 20.
PHOTO:
VELANKANNI RAJ B

Work under Amrit Bharat Station Scheme is progressing at a good pace at Guindy railway station. According to a press release from the Southern Railway dated March 19, 2025, the work that is being carried out at a cost of ₹13.50 crore will be completed by May.

Work at the parking facility (950 square metres), installation of three lifts, new roofs for shelters (2400 square metres) are completed. Booking counter at GST Road entrance, pedestrian path and toilet construction are nearing completion, adds the press release.

This station classified as Suburban Grade -

Two handles 68,000 passengers every day. Over 200 EMU/MEMU services stop at the station and 98 express trains pass through the station.

As part of the project, the aesthetics of the station's facade will be enhanced. The station's entrance will be redesigned with dedicated pathways for pedestrians and motorists. A pedestrian plaza, resurfacing the platform flooring, additional shelters and lights, installation of digital display boards, improved public announcement system, installation of high-resolution CCTV cameras are provided under the scheme, adds the press release.

This station classified as Suburban Grade -

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 Chittlapakkam



Deepesh Bhaskar and his team of volunteers at different events.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



cradled in Deepesh's arms. The experience left him shaken.

"I knew I had to do something," he recalls. The COVID-19 lockdown gave him the opportunity to turn reflection into action. As he continued working in marketing, he delved deep into plastic research and waste management. A course on Climate

Change and Sustainable Development from the Centre for Science and Environment opened his eyes to the direct link between soil health and climate change. He soon realised that true impact required systemic change, not just individual action. And so, he started Nilayaan – an environmental services startup dedicated to making sustainability a fundamental part of events and everyday living – in the middle of the pandemic.

Nilayaan's philosophy is anything but abstract: introduce Nature-based solutions in people's everyday living and they will carry that ingrained practice into their moments of celebrations. After it sows the seeds of awareness among individuals and communities, Nilayaan nurtures what grows out of the effort by lining up the right tools for segregation and composting. It offers choice in terms of home and community composting kits, and the buyer can match one with their composting situation at home or organisation.

As one can see from the testimonials on its Instagram page, many of those who have brought Nilayaan on board as their minimal waste celebration partner have been impacted by its work prior to it. Baby showers, birthdays and weddings form the chief part of the minimal-waste celebrations organised by Nilayaan.

Deepesh is embedded in the sustainability ecosystem, a situation that enables him to bring various entities – examples include Namma Ooru Foundation and Upcycle – on board to drive different aspects of what makes an event zero-waste.

The regular is interspersed with the out-of-the-way, now and then – such as the Harris Jayaraj's concert ('Rock On Harris') in October 2023 that Nilayaan associated with as a minimal-waste celebration partner.



Recalling the Harris Jayaraj concert, Deepesh says, "There was so much food waste. But with the right planning, we turned it into a resource instead of garbage." An Insta post provides specific details: "We converted 87 kilograms of food waste into nutrient-rich compost and recycled 250+ kilograms of plastic waste." Deepesh notes food that was left untouched reached needy palates as we had partnered with a food redistribution NGO.

In Nilayaan, volunteers form the flywheel that drives the engine. Volunteer management is therefore of critical importance to Deepesh.

Large-scale events require at least 18 volunteers to effectively manage waste, he begins and continues:

"Sourcing and training volunteers within a short time frame is difficult. Some attendees are resistant to sustainable practices and may discard waste irresponsibly. Events with over 1,000 attendees pose logistical challenges. Due to limited volunteers, only 60% of waste was managed at certain events, which was disheartening."

The work Deepesh and his associates (largely volunteers) undertake has to be underpinned by a deep personal commitment for it to be effective. That commitment is made and reinforced from time to time. Nilayaan conducts waste audits across industries and corporate spaces. One audit was carried out at an address extremely familiar to Deepesh.

"At my own home, we conducted a waste audit and found that we had diverted 200 kg of organic waste in just 7-8 months. That realisation encouraged me to scale up the initiative," says Deepesh.

And Deepesh made his niece's first birthday as minimal-waste as possible, enunciating the right script for all her subsequent birthdays.



From Deepesh's green notes
Replace plastic-based decor with flower-based arrangements that can be composted post-event

Use banana fibre strings instead of cotton or plastic strings for tying garlands, ensuring full compostability

Use paper lanterns instead of balloons for decorative purposes

Use cardboard instead of thermocol

Traditional paper cups often contain a thin plastic coating, making them non-biodegradable. Instead, use bagasse (sugarcane pulp) cups and plates, which are fully compostable

Hire steel plates and cups instead of purchasing them

Many apartments have RO filtration systems that waste 70% of water. Instead of letting this water go to waste, we collect and reuse it for event-related purposes

Party hard, but mindfully

Meet Deepesh Bhaskar, founder of Chennai-based startup Nilayaan, who is focussed on making celebratory events easy on the planet and our collective conscience

SHARON JESSICA MICHAEL

If you are a Jay Gatsby with a propensity for throwing extravagant parties (recall the central character in Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*), then you would not want to let Deepesh Bhaskar anywhere near your event planning team. Deepesh would gauge the success of any celebratory event by what it leaves behind or rather, what it does not. The *numero uno* at an environmental services startup named Nilayaan (@nilayaan.earth), Deepesh dons many sustainability hats, one of which is that of a minimal-



waste celebration consultant.

The path to Nilayaan was paved with a dramatic event (as distressing as it was transformative), days of brow-knitting reflection, course alteration, fresh learning and finally as with any entrepreneurial effort, a leap of faith.

Having pursued a bachelor's as well as a master's degree in social work, Deepesh initially transitioned into marketing for financial stability. But everything changed the day he encountered a cow choking on a plastic bag in the middle of a road. Along with his friends, he tried desperately to save the animal, but the effort proved futile. The cow died

This section spotlights initiatives undertaken by residents of Chennai to minimise the waste that reaches landfills

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A voice for differently abled singers

Musicians with disabilities do not find themselves on a level-playing field. Singers Vinod Venugopal and Reshma have launched Samagratha, a platform that provides these musicians with opportunities that might not otherwise come their way



LIFFY THOMAS

Over the last seven years, Sapna Soundarajan (now 25 years old) has shared the stage with acclaimed playback singers such as Late S.P. Balasubramanian, K.S. Chithra, S.P. B. Charan and Unni Menon. That would make any singer's portfolio look hugely impressive. It is even more admirable when one considers the fact that Sapna is on the spectrum.

Sapna is a multi-lingual singer and knows 3500 songs. However, she struggles to find opportunities that would fetch her monetary benefit. Samagratha offers a ray of hope to Sapna and others like her.

Chennai-based accomplished singers Vinod Venugopal and Reshma have been running Samagratha, an inclusive music platform, since 2023 to showcase the talent of differently abled singers along with the best of musicians from the industry.

The seeds of Samagratha were sown during the pandemic when the two "VIRES" (the name of their band) were involved in raising funds for light mus-



ic performers whose income was affected on account of the pandemic.

"We used to judge various events and one particular event had the differently-abled also participating in it. We saw amazing talent there and wondered what can be done to ensure these budding musicians have sustained income," says Vinod, who along with Reshma are jury members for Zee Tamil

Samagratha has been working to create livelihood opportunities for the differently-abled through music, give them a launch pad to sing along with playback and celebrity singers and also perform with top instrumentalists.

Under the Samagratha banner, Vinod and Reshma have organised three shows in Chennai, and identified 14 aspiring musicians which include those who are visually-challenged, autistic and with multiple disabilities.

Music came naturally to Ashwath R, a 27-year-old on the spectrum with a post-graduate degree in Visual Communication. Thanks to Samagratha, he received a launch pad. "Music brings a lot of happiness to special needs children and they are really fast and good at grasping the nuances in every song. All that we want from the society is that these musicians be given equal opportunities," says Sheeba Sojanar, Ashwath's mother.



Vinod Venugopal and Reshma and (above) two of the inclusive music programmes organised by Samagratha.
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

spotted aspiring musicians from Coimbatore, Calcutta and Pune.

Bringing aspiring musicians down to Chennai before a show poses logistic challenges and that includes cost management. "Parents have to invest in music training, upgrading their wardrobe and other tools each one requires depending on the type of disability. We insist that these singers be paid," says Vinod.

The two spend time in identifying, training the talent and offering them a level-playing field at musical shows.

"Rehearsals are a must before a show so that they are on par with any other stage singer. We decide the upon the song based on their strength, fix the pitch of the song then make them practise over a couple of sessions before the show. The rehearsals are done with karaoke track," says Vinod, a resident of Anna Nagar.

Besides ticketed shows, Samagratha has been trying to create awareness at local events such as weddings and private functions on why the differently-abled should be offered stage for performance.

Sapna's father V. Soundarajan says more corporates should come forward to give differently abled musicians a chance. That would be a big push for such talent.

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Making professional courses more inclusive

LIFFY THOMAS

Braille is among the most common knowledge accessing tools for the visually challenged. Increasingly, accessible EPub (short for electronic publication) has made learning easier and instant. A visually impaired person only needs to slide his fingers on the mobile device to read the content or listen to it.

In Chennai, Karna Vidya Foundation, a non-profit that has been empowering the visually-challenged through technology, launched into this space in 2017 by providing school textbooks in an accessible format. The pandemic slowed down the Foundation's work in this space, but since 2023 they have been focussing on making textbooks more accessible where professional courses such as law, commerce and computer science are concerned. This initiative is also aimed at encouraging the visually impaired to opt for courses beyond English, Tamil and history (which are usually taken by the visually impaired) for higher education.

"We would have converted provided nearly 300 books in the EPub format since we launched into this space," says K. Raghuraman, who is honorary advisor of Karna Vidya Foundation and assistant professor in English at Government Arts College in Nandanam.

Adaptability makes EPub user-friendly.

If a visually impaired person wants to switch from EPub to Braille it can be done easily. If they want to hear it as an audio that is also possible. Likewise, they can opt for a magnified version of the book.

The Foundation has been able to convert books with the help of a team of volunteers, who are mainly parents of children with different disabilities trained for this purpose.

Raghuraman, who is visually challenged, says EPub is yet to catch up in a big way, and conversion of books requires time and effort. There are multiple processes to go through.

"The images, tables and rows, font, elements of the text and other dimensions of the page have to be considered while undertaking conversion into book format. In vernacular languages, it becomes even more challenging as they come with stylised fonts," says the professor. He says digitally accessible information system (DAISY) has brought accessibility to EPub.

To take this effort by Karna Vidya Foundation to a larger audience, the books are taken to Bookshare, an international online library for print disabled including those with dyslexia and learning disability.

"There is a quality check before the uploading of any book on this platform to check if it meets all accessibility norms. Anyone can get themselves registered by showing a medical certificate to get access to the books, and this is free for people in Asian countries," says the professor, adding that the book remains a permanent treasure.

The Foundation has been reaching out to institutions to popularise such learning content. It also takes requests from students on certain books that they want to read in an accessible format.

"When you make learning resources public and accessible then the community will grow. This is a gradual process where we need to train people for conversion but we are sure to see results in the long run," he says.

The Foundation wants more volunteers to help with converting which can be done from the comfort of one's home. Visit them at karnavidyafoundation.org.

Through a new initiative, Karna Vidya Foundation is adding to the already existing e-book content for the visually impaired



BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

To make legal education accessible to all, a group of law school students have initiated a survey to identify gaps in the current system.

The Samavesh Project, as it is called, is an initiative under the Awaaz Leadership Labs, a non-profit based in New Delhi, with seven law school students representing different institutions collecting information from persons with disabilities (PWD) who have either appeared for the Common Law Admission Test (CLAT), All India Law Entrance Test (AILET) or aspire to appear for any of these examinations.

The exercise is aimed at collecting information, identifying gaps in the current system of law entrance examinations, make suggestions and propose model guidelines to relevant authorities, says a note.

"Those involved in making legislations that govern the nation must be representing diverse abilities. Once we are able to send stakeholders to the positions of law making, then the scenario will change," says Sushanth Gajula, a visually chal-

lenged law graduate who is part of the team.

The exercise is largely aimed at entry barriers for national level examinations. "CLAT, for instance, is not yet inclusive," says Sushanth. The team will be reaching out to various schools for sensitisation workshops.

They are also trying to build capacity among law schools. "Once we find some success in CLAT then we will push the agenda for other examinations," he says.

One challenge the project is faced with is getting across to students with disabilities.

Once they collect data, the team will be presenting it to the CLAT consortium.

"Many have special learning disabilities and are not comfortable in talking," says Sushanth. The team has also reached out to Lawctopus, a go-to platform for law students, to promote this initiative.

Awaaz Leadership Labs was founded by Rohit Sharma, a law graduate from National University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata.

AI GENERATED IMAGE:
M ARIVARASU

Indian jackal sighted at Perumbakkam wetland



On March 15, 2025, Sadasivam Shiva, a birder from Chromepet, headed to the Perumbakkam wetland looking for unusual feathers. As the migratory season is not over, only in its fag end, a surprise or two is par for the course. He was greeted with what was beyond doubt out of the ordinary, but the surprise did not arrive wrapped in feathers but a gleaming coat. He chanced upon an Indian jackal, which he photographed. The animal was in the far interior section of the wetland and he could manage only a distant snap with his telephoto zoom lens. The speculation is that the Indian jackal could have come from the forest area surrounding the Perumbakkam hill. This is the first ever sighting of an Indian jackal in these parts. These photos were taken by Sadasivam Shiva.

Online tuitions in Tambaram

SD Institute in Tambaram specialises in online tuition for CBSE students, especially for those preparing for class X and XII board examinations.

The institute offers personalised attention by maintaining around 25 students per class, said a release.

The teaching approach incorporates smart classrooms with projector-based sessions to make learning engaging, interactive and effective. The teaching staff are experienced and dedicated to providing knowledge-oriented coaching, added the release.

For details, call 99629 80770.

Women achievers honoured



The AVC Wonder Women Awards 2025 ceremony was recently held at Radisson Blu, Egmore, celebrating 22 women from diverse fields.

The ceremony was inaugurated by distinguished dignitaries, including Sowmiya Anbumani, Srinivasa Naik IRS, Principal Commissioner of Customs, Chandrasekaran, Assistant Director, Enforcement, and Dr. Josephine, a gynecologist.

The honorees were Sapna Handa, an image and styling coach; veteran actress Sathy Priya, who was felicitated with the 'Lifetime Achievement Award'; and Parvathy Venkitaramanan, a small-screen actress.

A significant highlight of the ceremony was the fashion show titled "The Golden Rasa" by designer Uma Balachandran, choreographed by Karun Raman.

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Abdul Farok Sahib Street in Pallavaram, on March 11. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Road needs immediate repair

Dr. Ambedkar Road in Pallavaram is not far from Nalla Thambi Road, Anna Nagar in Pammal and Abdul Farok Sahib Street in Pallavaram.

But navigating a section of Nalla Thambi Road and Sahib Street till Xavier Street is a painful exercise.

The roads are battered and marked by potholes, giving vehicle users a back pain.

A. Saleem, an auto driver and a resident of Nalla Thambi Road, says, "This has been the condition of the roads for close to a year.

The stretch needs to be relaid and patch-work would not suffice."

Following the March 11-12 rains, the stretches were inundated with rainwater, and motorists feared if they would trip over the potholes.

N. Amanullah, a trader, says, "Before re-laying the road, encroachments have to be removed. The width of the road has reduced."

Text: T.S. Atul Swaminathan

Applications invited for ITI courses

Metropolitan Transport Corporation (MTC) has invited applications from Industrial Training Institute (ITI) students (Mechanic Motor Vehicle, Mechanic Diesel, Electrician, Auto Electrician, Fitter, Turner, Painter, and Welder) for a one-year professional acquaintance in ITI. They would be given a stipend of ₹ 14,000 per month, said a release.

On April 2, MTC will conduct a special camp from 10 a.m. at the Industrial Training Institute, Chromepet, where students can apply for the one-year training.

Metro services for IPL matches

Chennai Metro Rail Limited (CMRL) will be running additional services for cricket fans attending the IPL matches at M.A. Chidambaram Stadium in Chepauk. CMRL will extend metro train services on all Chennai Super Kings match days, ensuring safe and convenient transportation for fans, says a press release.

Additionally, valid IPL match ticket holders will be eligible for a sponsored round trip metro journey between any CMRL metro station and Government Estate Metro Station, the metro station closest to the stadium. This initiative aims to reduce traffic congestion and promote the use of public transport. On match days, metro operations will be extended by up to 90 minutes post the match or until 1 a.m., whichever is earlier, based on commuters' demand. CMRL will announce the last train times before each match day, added the release issued by CMRL.

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Water supply to be disrupted in three zones from March 23

The Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (CMWSSB) has announced that localities in regions coming under its Zones 13 (Adyar), 14 (Perungudi) and 15 (Sholinganallur) would face disruption in water supply on March 23, 24, 25 and 26th.

The disruption is attributed to maintenance work in the 110 MLD seawater desalination plant at Nemmeli.

Areas in Thiruvanmiyur, Kottivakkam, Injambakkam, Neelankarai, Vettuvan-

ni, and Uthandi regions will face disruption on March 23 and 25.

Perungudi, Palavakkam, Karapakkam, Sholinganallur, and Okkiam-Thoraipakkam would have disruption on March 24 and 26.

As a precaution, the residents must store enough water to meet their needs. In case of scarcity, people can opt for 'Dial For Water' (water tankers) on the CMWSSB website, <https://cmwssb.tn.gov.in/>

EAPA makes a representation about Madambakkam lake to Chief Secretary

Members of Environmental Awareness and Protection Association recently met N. Muruganandham, Chief Secretary, Government of Tamil Nadu, and submitted a petition regarding the Madambakkam Lake.

S. Mohan, president; M. Thangaraj, secretary; and P. Viswanathan, member, presented the representation.

They wanted the lake's water holding area to be surveyed and protected, and the outlet channels be freed from encroachments to store water. S. Mohan said that though there were announcements regarding allocating funds to restore the lake; it was only on paper.

P. Viswanathan said the Water Resources Department has neglected the lake, resulting in the formation of dwelling lands on the mainland along the lake.

"On the lake's northern and southern sides, a wall has been constructed at buffer zone without gaps, which can lead to flooding during heavy rains in Radha Nagar, Parvathi Nagar, Gandhi Nagar, Yashwanth Nagar, and Jal Vayu Vihar."

M. Thangaraj said sewage treatment plants should be installed to prevent sewage from entering the lake, and dumping of trash should be stopped.

Text: T.S. Atul Swaminathan



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