



metro PLUS

THE HINDU

Revel in Indo-Korean history through theatre and art at Chennai's Lalit Kala Akademi **P2**

ED SHEERAN'S DAY OUT IN CHENNAI P3



ARMAAN RAUT

Jinx

Ever since I started watching the first season of *Arcane*, I became a fan of Jinx, from the video game *League of Legends*. She is chaotic, badass, and fights for overcoming her tragedies. Putting together this costume took me more than a month. While I bought the blue wig, all the other aspects of the costume were made by me. My favourite part was building this gun — this was the most time consuming prop but it was worth it. Look at how it lights up.



B THAMODHARAN

ADITHYA ASHOK
Grey Knights Librarian

I have been cosplaying for the last four years, and over the last year, I have been trying my hand at making props. This cosplay might look challenging, but I picked this character on a whim.

While cosplayers normally print out templates, cut and put together their look, I decided to draw freehand on foam, take measurements and cut it out.

Today, a friend and the volunteers here have been helping me get in and out of my suit. It took me only three days to make this, an excessively fast pace of working just for Comic Con here.

Sanjana Ganesh
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Sandhya Ramachandran from San Francisco, who is back in Chennai for a break, watched an Instagram reel and decided to visit the Madras Literary Society (MLS) on February 10. She came for the high ceiling but stayed to peruse through glazed pottery work, sketches and murals done by the inmates of Puzhal Central Prison. "I did not know of this exhibit but the sketches, cyanotypes and murals seemed amazing. I want to know more about who created it and what the process was like," she said.

A quick left turn at the hallowed entrance of this 1814 library is enough to answer her questions. Through posters and standees, we learn of the journey of the inmates who took part in theatre performances, created stellar art, sang, danced and made pottery as part of The Art in Prison project. The initiative by Project 39A, National Law University, Delhi and Sumanasa Foundation, is one of the invited projects of the ongoing Chennai Photo Biennale.

The objective of the project, which will continue to display their work and showcase a documentary until March 15 at the MLS campus, is simple. Carnatic musician and head of

**JESSICA MARY LANNEY**
Erza Scarlet

The Heaven Wheels Armour that Erza Scarlet wears is my favourite armour of hers. For my second Comic Con, I decided to work on recreating this intricately designed silver metal armour that has feather-shaped plates. I created the entire outfit from EVA foam, and hand-painted it in silver to mirror the actual look. Erza has always been a favourite; she is just so strong and I love cosplaying as her.

VEENA DEVI
Moana

Moana is an inspiration. Even when she is in the middle of the ocean where there is no light or hope, she always finds a way. She has the capabilities of overcoming any barrier and I love this about her.

Despite me being a Design student, this was a challenging cosplay to put together. The dress material took time for me to procure, and I made the skirt with artificial hay. I stitched a bandeau top, and added in the wreath and oar to complete my look. I spent about 45 hours making this costume and I feel it truly is worth it since so many people are excited about Moana today!



Frames of access (Left) A view of the exhibit; (below) TM Krishna at the event. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



When art is solace

Art made by the inmates of Puzhal Central Prison are now at the Madras Literary Society

Sumanasa Foundation, TM Krishna, says, "Art needs to be for everybody and everybody must be able to create art."

"Project 39A and us have been in conversation regarding an initiative like this since before COVID. Back then, it was to be just for prisoners on death row. However, over time, it evolved and became a larger initiative. We conducted auditions and selected around 60 inmates who engaged with different art forms. All of us have no idea what goes on inside a prison. One cannot

go inside with a saviour syndrome. It is why 18 facilitators of the project took part in a workshop before we began the initiative to educate ourselves," he says.

Rahimunisa Begam, project coordinator, who has been visiting the prison since the inception of the project says that the best part of this initiative has been inmates forging vulnerable friendships. "Some of the exercises in theatre demand letting one's guard down. The fact that they felt safe enough to

do so and experience heightened emotions including crying was great to see. This is especially because it is often taboo for grown men to shed tears," she says.

Both TM Krishna and she add that the only repeat request they received from the inmates was to extend practice hours.

Visitors who have seen this short display at the MLS have been left wanting more but this is a start. "People are now interested to know how things function inside the prison," Rahimunissa says.

On display until March 16 at the Madras Literary Society, Directorate of Public Instruction Campus, Nungambakkam. From 10am to 5pm. Entry is free.

Who would you choose if you could be your favourite pop culture character? We spill the tea on who wore what at Chennai Comic Con

Can you cosplay?

S Poorvaja

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Can I get a 'chi hoooo?,' asks little Dheva Mayuran who is cosplaying as Maui from the film *Moana*, holding up a painted fish hook. Not too far away, he spots Moana, a cosplayer who looks mind-bogglingly similar to the curly-haired star of the much-loved Disney movie. In the vicinity, at Chennai Trade Centre in Nandambakkam, there is also the Front Man and Young-Hee, the red-light green-light doll from the *Squid Game* series, people's superhero Spiderman, and Bumblebee from *Transformers*.

In its second edition at Chennai, Comic Con saw nearly 4,500 cosplay registrations. Whipping out cameras, and asking to pose with their props and swords, the cosplayers were the central attraction.

Several cosplayers from Bengaluru and Puducherry joined the enthusiastic cosplay community from Chennai, bringing alive a bevy of characters from their favourite comics, anime, manga, movies and video games.

"There has been at least a 300% jump in the number of people who cosplay in Chennai. I remember there being hardly a handful who were interested, say about seven years ago," says Aravind Menon, a cosplayer from Chennai. Aravind has a simple reason for why people choose to cosplay. "Being your favourite character is an out of the world experience," he says.

At this year's Comic Con, we caught up with some cosplayers who told us about their love for the characters they picked, and how they put together their impressive looks.

**YUVAGANESH S**
Kokushibu

Kokushibu from *Demon Slayer* is one of the strongest characters I know. He can fight anyone and win. I got some help with my make up and intricate face painting from a friend. The costume though, was fully made by me. I sourced this purple cloth that looks like his costume, and stitched it. Making the sword was the most important part to tie this cosplay together. I used EVA foam, and a stem of wood for the inner layer. The details were achieved by marbles and tissue. So many fans have asked to pose with the sword, and taken pictures with me as well.

**ARINDAM PAUL**
Kakashi Overdrive

While I was inspired by Kakashi from *Naruto* for my base design, I put together this outfit drawing from a host of anime, manga and cyberpunk influences, and the aesthetics of a samurai.

This cosplay is full of details. The back of my armour for instance has references to the manga *Akame ga Kill!*, the

weapons I am carrying are from two different games, *Ghostrunner* and *Zenless Zone Zero*, and in an ode to the relaunch of the game *Onimusha*, I have a design on my armour.

I named this character Kakashi Overdrive, and it took me six to eight months to put together.

It should not take so much time, but I work in the corporate sector through the week. I have dedicated my weekends to preparing my cosplay for Comic Con!

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The great racquet swap

Reji Varghese

When four of Chennai's leading club tennis players Vikram Seshasayee, Sooraj Viswanathan, G Rajesh and B Venkteshwar met up in November 2024, it was not to discuss tennis. The four of them were in final discussions about putting up Chennai Picklerss by Sports Den, a state-of-the-art indoor pickleball facility at Porur that would be open to the public round-the-clock.

Tennis players, from professionals to recreational enthusiasts, are increasingly trading in their tennis rackets for pickleball paddles. One revealing statistic is that out of 144 players currently listed on the Professional Pickleball Association Tour, 130 of them have some level of tennis background.

Indian tennis legend Ramesh Krishnan says, "There is plenty of excitement around pickleball and it is certainly on its way up." Ram Sukumar, CEO, Indium and veteran tennis player in the Chennai club circuit states that having played tennis for 37 years, he was initially sceptical about pickleball.

"When discussions started 18 months ago to add pickleball

The launch of Chennai Picklerss by Sports Den demonstrates a growing trend in the world of racquet sports

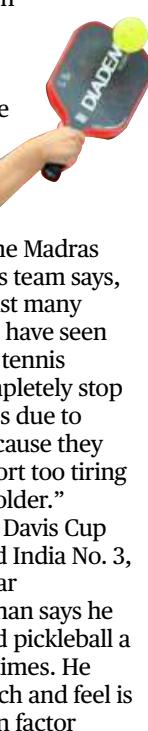
courts at our club, I found the sport intriguing but a little odd – a mix of tennis and table tennis that I thought was mostly for older players."

However, after playing it regularly for the past six months, Ram says, "While I will always remain a tennis purist at heart, I've come to appreciate pickleball for what it is: a sport with low entry barriers, fun to play, and accessible to people

without formal training. Hand-eye coordination sports like pickleball are fantastic for exercise."

Less physical impact
Tennis is a high-intensity sport that requires quick movements, rapid changes of direction, and explosive power. Pickleball, on the other hand, is generally less physically demanding, making it an attractive option for tennis players who may be looking to reduce the impact on their bodies.

Vikram Seshasayee, captain of the Madras Club tennis team says, "Over the last many decades, we have seen many of our tennis buddies completely stop playing tennis due to injuries or because they found the sport too tiring as they got older." Current Davis Cup Player and India No. 3, Ramkumar Ramanathan says he has played pickleball a couple of times. He adds, "Touch and feel is the common factor



between the sports and I see many tennis players getting involved in Pickleball as it's a fun sport."

Making the switch
Several professional tennis players have already made the switch to pickleball. Andre Agassi, the former world No. 1 has become a global ambassador for pickleball, which is starting to take off in a big way in India, China and the rest of Asia.

Tennis legends John McEnroe, Steffi Graf, Andy Roddick, Michael Chang and Maria Sharapova among others have also been known to play the game.

Mukund Sasikumar, current Indian Davis Cup Player and India No. 2 says, "Retired tennis legends have a lot of time and definitely want to stay active with something less physical than tennis. The features of both tennis and pickleball are quite similar because the body motion is mostly from down to up, both games are feel-based and both require hand eye coordination."

The future of pickleball
"I hope pickleball and tennis can compliment each other," Ramesh Krishnan says, adding that pickleball can be an ideal starting point for youngsters who will then "hopefully graduate to tennis".

Chennai Picklerss by Sports Den, at Kimberly Garden, Pallavaram Road, Kolapakkam, will be open through the day with three indoor pickleball courts and a store for equipment and accessories. Call 9840294518.

Tamil pride

A discussion on Tamil identity was the crux of the conversation between author Nirmala Lakshman and former Union Minister Jayanthi Natarajan



Beyond language Author Nirmala Lakshman and former Union Minister Jayanthi Natarajan at Amethyst. R RAVINDRAN

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but also in its erudite leaders who reached across bipartisan lines to strive for better lives for the Tamil people, said Lakshman.

A conversation about this and several other layers of the Tamil identity including its secular nature, alluring poetry and advanced civilisation, took place on Tuesday between the politician and the author at Amethyst's Purple Turtles.

Centred around Lakshman's latest book *Tamils – A Portrait of a Community*, part of a series brought out by the Aleph Book Company, the discussion went over passionate women of Tamil's glorious Sangam age, Jain and Buddhist influences before an established and unified Hindu identity, as well as early nationalists. The author read out Sangam poetry translated by poet AK Ramanujan that captured the essence of women who yearned for their lovers, often in battle and, hero worship.

Lakshman said that there is a need to amplify the South Indian contribution towards the Indian freedom struggle. She recounted the story of Sivaganga queen Velu Nachiyar, the Marudu brothers, who were early freedom fighters, and the sepoy mutiny at Vellore in 1806, that predated the Meerut mutiny in 1857.

Strumming on heart strings

Bluebirds keeps classic rock alive with a tribute to Billy Joel and Eric Clapton at Bay 146 this Valentine's Day



Retro notes
Bluebirds band. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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When the Bluebirds take the stage for 'The Piano Man' and 'The Guitar Man' at Bay 146 on Valentine's Day, they will do more than play music. They will revive an era when love ballads and rock anthems shaped romance and relationships. The Chennai-based band, with roots stretching back to 1969, is set to perform a tribute to Billy Joel and Eric Clapton – two musical giants who defined what it meant to love, lose, and live.

"We grew up listening to Billy Joel and Eric Clapton," says Rajan Muthukrishnan, the band's bassist. "Their music is absolutely mesmerising. A piano man and a guitar man – it's a rare combination, but a beautiful one."

Jesudasan Rajasekaran, the band's lead vocalist says, "I discovered Billy Joel in 1978 when my American girlfriend gave me two of his songbooks. That was my introduction to Valentine's Day. Since then, his music has been a part of my life."

For drummer Shyam Rao, the tribute is also about legacy.

"Music evolves, but the roots matter. As an older band, it's our job to keep that fire alive," he says.

Through the ages
Originally founded in Madurai in 1969 by an Anglo-Indian family, the band is now a mix of old and new members.

The Valentine's Day setlist is deeply personal. Each song is tied to a memory.

At Bay 146, an intimate venue with a devoted music-loving crowd, Bluebirds expect an audience that spans generations.

Rajan is in his 60s, Rajasekaran in his 70s, and Shyam in his 50s. But as they talk about music, memories, and love, they seem ageless. Their laughter is easy, their enthusiasm infectious. T Rajasekaran says it best: "The day I stop singing, that's the day I start ageing."

On February 14 at Bay 146, Royapettah. For tickets, call 9710976876 or visit district By Zomato or Insider.



Time will tell Snapshots from the performance and exhibit.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



trip to the DMZ, Limits of Change is Parvathi's personal quest to piece together her late father Major-General TNR Nayar's time and experiences at the CFI. His letters, diary entries, photographs and videos form the cornerstone of this experience.

Spread across Lalit Kala Akademi, in rooms titled the archive room, helicopter room, tattoo room and forgiveness room to name a few, different pieces of the puzzle come together in performance, lending a well-researched, text-heavy exhibit that exists on its own. Curator P and her assistant's narration is the cherry on the top.

"This is a work of storytelling. When Nayantara and I were researching, we realised that most people did not even know that there was this lovely piece of Indo-Korean history that started from Chennai and finished in Chennai," says Parvathi, adding, "They say that fiction tells our truest truths. So to create a work of fiction, we didn't invent history, but it's enmeshed in history. The emotional charge for it is my father's life. Who he was as a person influences and informs this piece."

The idealism of the newly independent India, and the self-proclaimed duty of care, all set context to the project rooted in autobiography. "We

Turtle walk across the 38th Parallel

In a laudable marriage of theatre, art and spoken word, *Limits of Change* by Parvathi Nayar and Nayantara Nayar, narrates a lesser-known chapter of Indo-Korean history

Gowris
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How often does an art gallery turn into a stage, blurring the lines between memory and myth, fact and fiction, personal and collective histories?

On a bright Tuesday morning, Curator P and her zealous assistant guide their guests through a narrative that sits at the sweet spot between fact and fiction, a mammoth physical maze that embodies an often overlooked chapter of Indo-Korean history. The story of the Custodian Force India (CFI), who were peacekeepers at the Korean Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) during 1953-54 following the signing of the Armistice of the Korean War, comes alive through the personal



anecdotes of a certain Captain N. It traces the first peacekeeping mission undertaken by independent India.

In a 70-minute interactive experience designed to challenge the audience, *Limits of Change*, part-art exhibit, part-performance and

part-history lesson, by Parvathi Nayar and Nayantara Nayar, is an ambitious project rooted in personal history. Here art installations, videos, spoken word and text merge seamlessly.

A six-year-long sojourn that involved years of meticulous research and a post-pandemic

book-end the piece with history and then let fiction take over. I think personally, I find these hybrid spaces very exciting," adds Parvathi.

Limits of Change is also a large collaborative exploration. Rathi Jafer, director, InKo Centre, who produced the show, says, "We are always looking for access points between the countries through the arts. The inter-cultural dialogue between India and Korea is emphasised by this project."

While Yog Japee helms the dramaturgy, the excellent stop-motion videos that narrate the fairytale of Miss P are conceptualised by CP Satyajit. The exhibition design is by Sindhu Vannamalai Sowmithri and the art installations are created by students from various educational institutions in the city.

In each room, there is a different emotion to tackle. Says Yog, "We wanted the audience to get as close to the human experience as possible. Ultimately, in such stories, it is the human experience that is paramount. That's what you take back."

Shows are on till February 20 at 11.30am, 3.30pm and 6.30pm. Registration is on a first-come, first-serve basis and can be done at inkocentre.org.





Quick cut (Left) A Sandeep who runs Kerala Hair Dressers; (below) Sandeep with Ed Sheeran. VELANKANNI RAJ AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Head Sheeran

Ed Sheeran who is in India, got a head massage from A Sandeep who runs Kerala Hair Dressers, a saloon started in 1939 in T Nagar

Asandeep encounters anywhere between 60 and 70 heads each day (except on Tuesdays) at the 85-year-old Kerala Hair Dressers in Pondy Bazar. But on February 4, he received a call requiring secrecy and an international popstar.

"I had no idea who Ed Sheeran was. We said 'hi' to each other and began the massage. I gave it to three others," he says.

In the video on Ed Sheeran HQ on Instagram, the artiste who is in India for his *+xx Tour* (pronounced The Mathematics Tour), can be seen jokingly saying, "This is abuse". "I usually do not use the kind of force seen in the video but foreigners tend to like the pressure. They asked for it, actually. My daughter has been reading out the comments and customers have been asking it as well. Who knew he was as popular," Sandeep says.

Sandeep however, is no stranger to celebrities. His oldest, most consistent customer is industrialist and famous T Nagar resident Nalli Kuppuswami Chetti. "Other famous personalities have visited over the years, including Rajini. He used to pick calls on this telephone," he recounts. On a regular day though, Sandeep can be seen saying a cheerful "Hello," leading customers to their ornate Burma teak chairs with old leather cushions. I suspect

that Sandeep has taken to understanding life through parables that he hears from these talking heads who dole out advice as they speak. It is in these stories that he finds confidence to run a saloon that continues to charge only ₹150 for a haircut.

When Sandeep's grandfather V Sankunni Nair arrived in Madras in 1929, he landed in Pondy Bazar because it was the location of the first planned commercial complex in the city. "Everyone who wanted to make money, obviously came here," he says. He broke away from the then famous Malabar Hair Dressers in 1939 to establish his own shop to send money home to Thrissur. "Back in Kerala too, the family did the same job. However, we only received payment in the form of barter – veshti, mundu and rice. He needed to move but also had plans to go back home. Chennai however, never let him go. *Paasa kaaranga*," he says.

Stepping into the saloon feels like a trip back to the halcyon days. Everything is the same except the colour of the customers' hair. Rosewood shelves line the walls and glass painting panels alternate with mirrors. Sandeep says that though he has considered alterations over time, long-time customers have opposed it vehemently.

G Sankaran, a 96-year-old resident of T Nagar says that the saloon was always neat and hygienic. "I remember getting a haircut for ₹2. The grandfather, father and son would always have a



Maintaining relationships is essential. It is why you will see me greeting passers-by at the door

A SANDEEP
Owner

pleasant word to say, and a smile," he says. Sandeep says that these are the only prerequisites essential to successfully run a business.

"Maintaining relationships is essential. It is why you will see me greeting passers-by at the door. At first, they might be startled.

The next time, it is likely that they might walk in for a cut. The second is to maintain cleanliness," he says.

Sandeep adds that although people have not always responded kindly to the 'vanakkam' at the gate, he hasn't stopped. "People wonder how I put myself out there so often. I tell them that I am nervous too," he says.

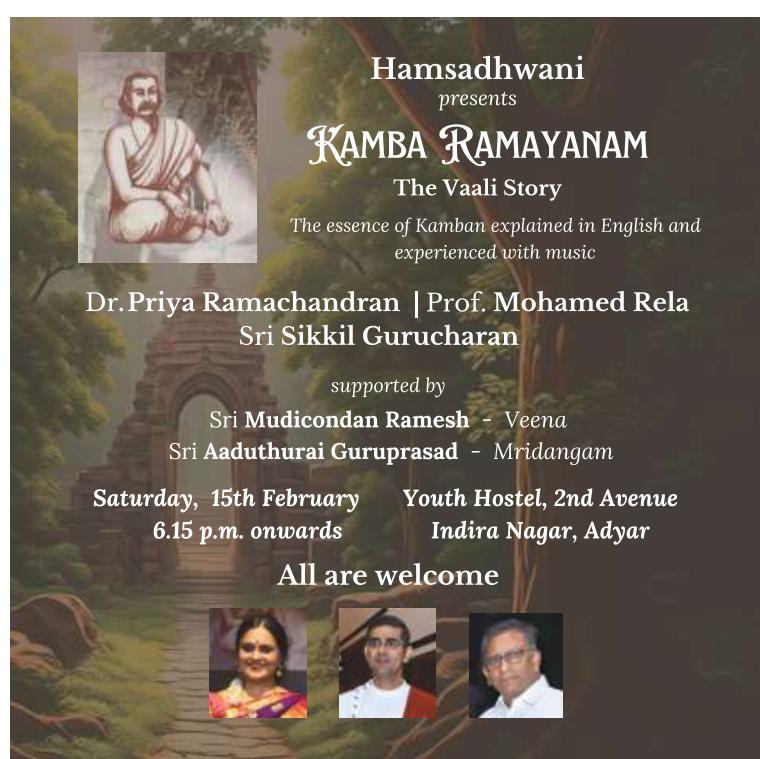
Inside the saloon though, he is far more conservative. He does not sit inside the shop, does not believe in fancy treatments or colouring and does not love lengthy, unruly hair. It is why he prefers providing simple and quick cuts, shaves and oil massages. "Instead of placing cucumber over the eyes, just eat it," he asks.

Times have changed now. The T Nagar map that he hand-drew then digitised and hung on his wall has changed due to metro rail work and subsequent redevelopment over the years. Celebrities too, have new stylists today and the cuts involve fades and mullets. Does he feel left out? "I ask my customers if they want a stylish cut or a beautiful cut. I can do the latter. They can do the former themselves. I want to be accessible to the common man," he says.



Visual journey

Kaana Katral – Learning to See, is the title of a visual storytelling exhibition presented by the Chennai Photo Biennale Foundation. Showcasing the creative works of graduate students from Dr MGR Janaki College of Arts and Science for Women and the Tamil Nadu Government MGR Film and Television Institute, the exhibition explores themes of identity, memory, and everyday life through compelling visual narratives. @VR Chennai, Anna Nagar, February 15 to March 16, 10.30am to 9pm. For details, call 9962249371.



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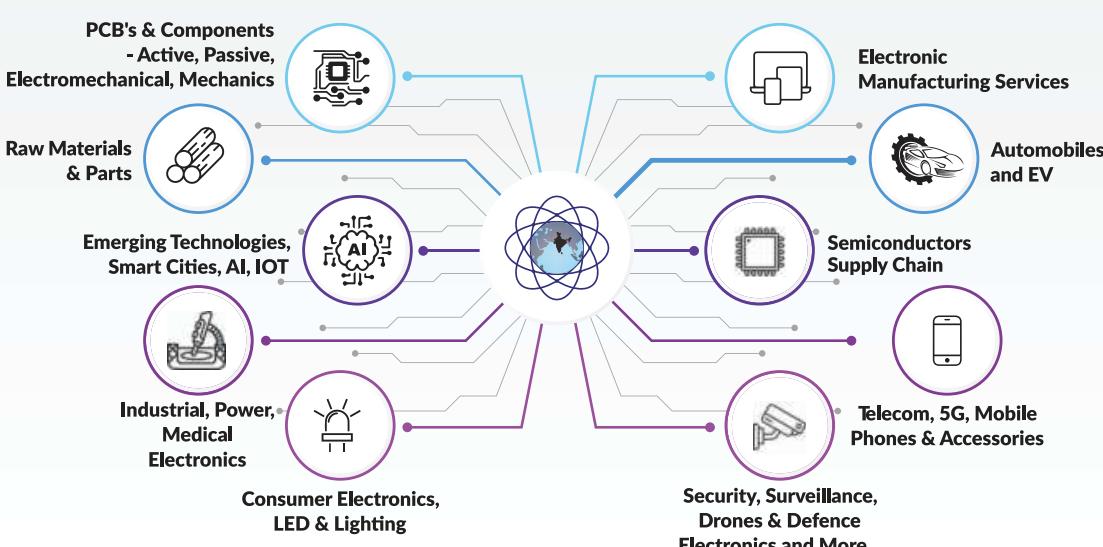
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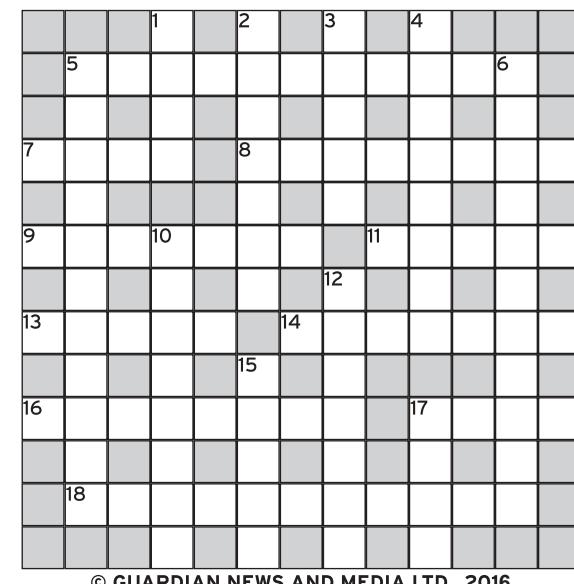
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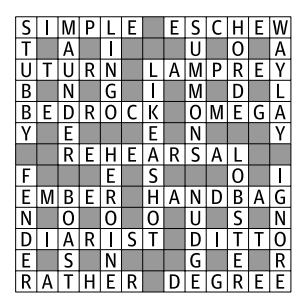
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Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated February 20, 2025.

Solution No. 13628



A thrilling mystery

The Stella Players are back with their annual play, and this year it is a stage production of Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap* presented by the students of Stella Maris College. The play has been adapted by Bhavya Balantrapu, @Stella Maris College Auditorium, February 15 (6pm) and 16 (3pm and 6pm). For tickets, priced at ₹250, ₹350 and ₹500, visit insta page @dramatics_sm.

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Celebrating Love

Valentine Day Special

Unforgettable Valentine's Day Gifts: Thoughtful and Meaningful Ideas

Haarshini Agarwal

Valentine's Day is all about expressing love and appreciation. While chocolates and flowers are classic, a meaningful gift makes the day truly special. Here are some thoughtful gifting ideas to make this Valentine's Day unforgettable.

1. Customised Gifts

A personalised gift shows thought and effort. Whether it's a scrapbook of shared memories, a custom fragrance, engraved jewellery, or a framed picture of a cherished moment, these gifts become keepsakes that last a lifetime. They reflect how well you know your partner and the special bond you share.

2. Gifting an Experience

Material gifts fade, but experiences create lasting memories. Instead of a bouquet, why not plan a weekend getaway, book a pottery class together, or try a couple's dance or Pilates session? Sharing experiences strengthens bonds and adds excitement to your relationship. Imagine celebrating love over fresh croissants in a Parisian-style café—it's all about making the day unforgettable.

3. Handmade Gifts

Nothing speaks love like something crafted by your own hands. Whether it's a heartfelt letter, a hand-painted artwork, a knitted scarf, or a song played on the guitar, a handmade gift carries emotional value. It's not about perfection but the time, love, and effort you put into making something unique for your partner.

Make It Special

Whatever you choose, the essence of Valentine's Day lies in making your partner feel loved and cherished. Whether it's a grand gesture or a simple token of love, what matters most is the thought behind it. This Valentine's Day, focus on creating moments that will be treasured forever.



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MD, Pothys Group. This exclusive Valentine's Day offer will be valid from Feb-

ruary 14 to February 16, 2025, across all Pothys Swarna Mahal outlets in Chennai, Nellai, Trichy, Thiruvananthapuram, and Coimbatore.

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