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### A FARM FOR THE SCHOOL

Ahead of International Plant Health Day (May 12), a look at how an institution in Chennai has set a template for teaching regenerative farming practices to students **P4**



### A CITY WHERE AIR CONDITIONERS TAKE A BATTERING

Its coastal location makes Chennai attractive, but there is a flip side to it: salty air and high humidity, factors that are not friendly to air-conditioners. **P5**

## READERS WRITE

### *'Poor upkeep of road in front of our community in Thalambur'*

RENUKA MANI AND SHINOJ GK

**D**LF Gardencity in Semmancherry has more than thousand flats. There are three schools – PSBB, HLC and Athena – in the vicinity.

As you can see from the pictures, we are not being provided basic services by the Thalambur Panchayat such as the regular cleaning of the road in front of our community as well as regular garbage



bage pick-up.

Every year, the Panchayat organises a camp for collecting property tax which is being paid by a majority of the residents. Yet as the roads are rarely cleaned, we have unauthorised dumping of garbage on the roadside.

The construction that is going on in the region also adds to the waste being dumped on the roadside in the form of construction debris and also plastic waste.



We expect the local civic body to have a system of regular road cleaning. If not daily, at least a weekly cleaning of this road and

surrounding areas would be immensely helpful.

(Renuka Mani and Shinoj GK are residents of DLF Gardencity)

### A shower of gold on OMR



An Indian laburnum in full bloom at a house in Semmancherry overlooking Rajiv Gandhi Salai. As the month of May progresses, this tree's flowering ability will wane.

PHOTO: PRINCE FREDERICK



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**Ahead of International Plant Health Day (May 12), a look at how an institution in Chennai has set a template for teaching regenerative farming practices to students**

SHARON JESSICA MICHAEL

**A**t APL Global School in Thoraipakkam, the classroom "extends" into the garden with a gardening initiative having travelled swiftly from the periphery of learning to the centre stage.

In 2017, it sprouted as a club initiative by Maya Ganesh, a multi-hyphenate with regenerative farming as one of her specialisations, and soon put out promising shoots that developed into study branches. The initiative now stands robust as a full-fledged regenerative gardening curriculum that reaches students of every grade in tailored and measured forms.

"We do not have traditional landscaping here," says Shalini N, architect and garden coordinator at APL. "Instead, we have turned our open spaces into edible landscapes. Every plant is chosen not for beauty, but for its utility and ecological value."

Ahead of International Plant Health Day (May 12), this initiative can serve as a reminder that ensuring plant health is ensuring human health and planet health.

#### The genesis

"It began as a club," recalls founder Gita Jagannathan, "but with Maya's vision and dedication, it soon evolved into a structured part of our curriculum. Environmental education is central to our ethos. We see farming not as an extracurricular activity but as a means to understand the self, society and the environment."

The regenerative gardening curriculum is multi-tiered to suit different learning stages.

Kindergarteners take "Garden Walks," exploring biodiversity in age-appropriate language.

Primary students get five to six annual sessions in organic farming.

Middle and senior school students can opt for deeper regenerative agriculture modules through the unique subject "Expressions".

#### Seed by seed

A live seed bank is central to APL's



# A farm at the school



A tour of the farming activities at APL Global. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

regenerative agriculture initiative. Started after the pandemic, the bank preserves open-pollinated and heirloom seed varieties. "We never use hybrid seeds. Our seeds come from regenerative farmers across India – from Yarowayy

Farm, Hooga Seeds, and Sahaja Seeds," explains Shalini, who came on board in 2020 and now nurtures what was started and perfected by Maya ever since the latter moved out of Chennai.

Each seed undergoes a cycle of



seeds in our bank were saved by our special education students," says Shalini. The tactile and repetitive nature of seed sorting helps them build focus, motor skills, and a sense of accomplishment. Their labels – often handwritten – now mark jars filled with red pumpkin, beans, ridge gourd and more.

The garden also doubles as a living lab. Biology students observe plant anatomy first-hand. Photography Club captures dew-drenched greens. Global Perspectives classes use composting to teach sustainability. Pencil shavings, once discarded, now become compost experiments. The soil, like the curriculum, is always alive.

The seed bank is also inclusive in access, not just in participation. Any teacher, parent or student who wants to start a home garden can take seeds freely. "All we ask is that they send back a few seeds if their crop grows well," says Shalini. "That way the cycle continues."

#### Harvest days

The School Garden Produce Sale is a small yet vibrant initiative that functions much like a mini-marketplace, exclusively within the school campus. Held on alternate Fridays, this event is designed to share the seasonal bounty of the school's garden with the school community, while subtly promoting sustainability, healthy eating and awareness about farm-to-table concepts.

Each cycle begins with a harvest day, typically managed by the garden team. A list of fresh items – ranging from herbs, greens, and vegetables to the occasional processed product like turmeric powder – is compiled and circulated via email to the teachers. "The response is always overwhelming," says Shalini. "The produce sells out in ten minutes," says Shalini. "Prices are nominal – ₹10 to ₹45."

APL's commitment to regenerating farming practices is spilling over beyond its campus. "We have submitted a proposal to the Tamil Nadu education department," says Gita, "suggesting that every school in the state have a farming space – just like rainwater harvesting was once mandated."

The team is also ready to assist other institutions. "We offer support for design, seed sourcing, and setup," says Shalini. "We are open to workshops too, if there is interest."

# A city where air conditioners take a battering

Its coastal location makes Chennai attractive, but there is a flip side to it: salty air and high humidity, factors that are not friendly to air-conditioners

LIFFY THOMAS

**A** family living at an independent house in MRC Nagar is feeling the heat, ironically on account of an air-conditioner. Five years old, it has stopped working and is unserviceable. Buy a new one or replace the outdoor unit – the service company has told the family.

Not a peculiar case in Chennai: the city's high humidity and salty air from the long coastline take a toll on ACs faster. In localities close to sewage treatment plants and the Cooum, copper pipes in the indoor AC unit are hugely corrosion-prone. Weakened copper components lead to leakage of gas and reduced efficiency of the AC unit. Many residents have been told by service technicians that fumes coming from sewage released from pumping stations lead to wear and tear of components.

Last summer, D. Bhuvanesh from Telephone Nagar in Perungudi invested in an AC that came with a five-year warranty. "That was a calculated decision as we were spending a lot on repairing ACs as they are vulnerable to corrosion in our area. Sometimes each service would cost me ₹3,000 and once to change the coil we had to shell out ₹8,000," says Bhuvanesh.

An average split AC is built to last for 10 to 15 years but that is changing. The Central Government is also working on schemes to nudge consumers to replace old ACs with new five star models that are more energy-efficient.

Ashwin Kumar, director, Techno Air Conditioners, says five to seven years is a decent lifespan for a residential AC unit in

Chennai if it has functioned without much of a hiccup.

He says saltwater is one big enemy for copper coils that are a key component in the outdoor unit of AC, making them more susceptible to damage from corrosion.

"What the motherboard is to the computer, the compressor is to the AC. It plays a direct and indirect role on the unit's performance. The type of gas that we are feeding into the compressor also plays a role. So when the compressor is overloaded the cooling coil is also impacted," says Ashwin.

#### Energy efficiency

The Bureau of Energy Efficiency recommends that all air-conditioned brands set their default temperature at 24 degree Celsius to ensure saving on electricity and to reduce carbon footprint.

"For the last two years, most of the major AC brands come with an inbuilt sticker in the indoor unit that states that 24 degree Celsius is the ambient temperature to be maintained, but more awareness about this feature needs to be created both by retail outlets and technicians," says Ashwin.

He says technicians have tools to check whether the flow of gas is happening, if the pumping system is working and whether the required fan speed is maintained.

For offices and commercial establishments where the capacity is between 50 and 100 tonnes, it pays to have a dedicated technician to handle the remote control or the central AC switch as frequent temperature adjustments can affect its lifespan, says Ashwin.

## Can Chennai take lessons from this model?

BSES Yamuna Power Ltd. (BYPL), a joint venture between Reliance Infrastructure Limited and the Government of Delhi, runs an AC replacement scheme with leading air conditioner manufacturers such as Havells, Godrej, Blue Star, LG, Voltas and O'General on board.

Open for residents of East and Central Delhi, the scheme encourages consumers to exchange their old ACs for new energy-efficient 5-star rated ACs at a discount of 60%.

The objectives of the scheme include reduction in the summer peak load of BYPL, flattening of load curve and phasing out inefficient non-star rated ACs and increasing the adoption of BEE 5-star rated ACs, says a note on the website <https://www.bsesdelhi.com>.



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Bureau of Energy Efficiency partners with Tangedco to nudge consumers to set their default AC temperature at 24 degree Celsius

## The magic number

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

**T**he next time you are operating an air conditioner remote look for the magic number 24 and make sure to have it as default setting. To nudge households and businesses to reduce power consumption and carbon emission, the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), a statutory body under the Union Minister of Power, has launched a campaign to encourage people to use their ACs at a default setting of 24 degree Celsius.

In South India, Chennai is one of the key cities where this awareness drives will take off with the support of Tangedco as its nodal agency.

"We started the campaign through various methods and will soon extend it with the help of Tangedco, where they will hold meetings with various stakeholders including manufacturers and dealers involved in this segment to raise awareness," says Chandra Shekhar Reddy, media advisor southern states/UTs, BEE.

With 1.35 crore consumer base, Chennai is one of the largest in South India and therefore BEE is keen on having this drive in this city.

"With temperature increasing, demand for power is also rising and with Chennai's hot weather this drive is important to protect the environment as well," says Reddy.

According to BEE estimates, increasing the AC temperature by just 1°C can reduce electricity usage by up to 6%. If ACs are set at 24°C nationwide there would be up to 20 billion units of electricity that can be saved annually and carbon emissions could drop by 8.2 million tonnes per year.

The section of Great Salt Lake in Kalavakkam on OMR is relatively under-birded; here is fresh reason for birders to be regular in visiting this patch, particularly during the migratory season



## READERS WRITE

### 'Increase the display screen's font size'

At Chennai Metro Rail stations across the city, the font size of the display screen at the entry and exit gates is not friendly to senior citizens. I am referring to the screen that displays the remaining amount when entering the terminal and the balance after a journey. I am a senior citizen and have difficulty seeing the letters on the screen.

Commuters, especially senior citizens, have to ask the staff at the ticket counters for the remaining balance every time.

We have to wait in line at busy stations for a long time. If there is no sufficient balance, the wait is reasonable. We can either charge or top up the card.

I have made complaints in this regard to the CMRL staff, who said they would look into this issue and rectify it.

P. Sathyaranarayanan is a social activist, a resident of Guindy, and a member of the Senior Citizens' Forum in Chennai.

## WORLD MIGRATORY BIRD DAY (MAY 10)

# A hat trick

PRINCE FREDERICK

**S**ample these scenarios where the least expected – or the unthought – happens against a fast-ticking clock, ushering in fresh joy.

A result-altering three back-to-back goals in the additional moments of a football match. Three sixes in a row in the final over of a 20-20 tipping the scale. Or, three less-seen migratory birds sighted on the same day within inches of each other, at the tail-end of a wintering season.

Sathish Kumar, an IT professional during the week and a birder during the weekend, experienced the very last scenario.

His jaw dropped during a birding trip to Great Salt Lake (GSL) last weekend and it is yet to snap back to its normal position.

On May 3, 2025, at the salt pans in GSL opposite SSN College in Kalavakkam, Sathish saw a Gull-billed tern, a Slender-billed gull and a Spotted redshank.

He has photographed all three with the Slen-

der-billed gull and the Spotted redshank even filling one frame.

Sathish Kumar considers the sighting of the Spotted redshank extraordinary. It was a 'lifer' to him. In birding terms, a lifer marks the first time someone sees a particular bird species in the field.

The Spotted redshank and Common redshank have more similarities than dissimilarities, but the latter are sufficiently pronounced for a birder to not confuse one for the other.

When Sathish saw the lone Spotted redshank, there were a few Common redshanks in the waters too.

The Spotted redshank he spotted on May 3 had slipped into its breeding plumage.

In its breeding plumage, from crown to belly, including the nape and throat, the Spotted redshank develops a deep dark grey. Its legs also replace red with dark grey.

One of the diagnostic features distinguishing it from the Common redshank (also a winter visitor in these parts): the colour and the shape of the beak.



A Slender-billed gull; a Spotted redshank and a Gull-billed tern at Great Salt Lake opposite SSN College in Kalavakkam on Rajiv Gandhi Salai on May 3, 2025.

PHOTOS: SATHISH KUMAR

In the Common redshank, the beak is shorter, and the black and the red are distributed uniformly between the upper and lower mandibles. The base of the beak is red and the tip, black. In the Spotted redshank, the beak is longer, thinner and the tip sharper, and the lower mandible has a touch of red at the base. The rest of the lower mandible and the whole of the upper mandible are black.

Another feature of the Spotted redshank is the slight curve to the beak.

### 'Avoid using Medavakkam flyover as jogging track'

Medavakkam flyover has significantly eased traffic congestion at the junction for motorists proceeding towards Sholinganallur and Vengaivasal.

However, a number of people are using the flyover as a jogging track and for exercise during early morning hours. While the intention to stay fit is commendable, this practice poses serious safety risks for pedestrians and motorists who are forced to navigate around them. Using the high-traffic flyover for fitness is unsafe and should be discouraged.

I urge early morning walkers and joggers to avoid this overpass for public safety and traffic flow. Further, I request the traffic police to address this issue through increased patrolling, signage or community awareness campaigns.

The lack of open public spaces in Vijaynagar is a growing concern. A park where residents can walk, jog, and exercise is urgently needed. I urge the local administration to consider allocating space and resources for such a facility soon.

Pallav Kumar is a resident of Medavakkam

## CUMTA celebrates Tamil Week

As part of Tamil Week celebration, Chennai Unified Metropolitan Transport Authority (CUMTA) conducted various competitions for its staff last week. According to a press release, the event was held with the support of the Department of Tamil Development & Information. The competitions included essay writing, quiz, oratory, and storytelling. The Special Officer of CUMTA, I. Jayakumar, honoured the winners with prizes and certificates.

The press release notes the event was organised following the Chief Minister's announcement on April 22 at the Legislative Assembly that Tamil Week will be celebrated from April 29 to May 5 in honour of the Tamil poet and writer Pavendar Bharathidasan who was born on April 29.



# PANORAMA

## Zoo ambassador camp



At Arignar Anna Zoological Park on April 26. PHOTOS: VELANKANNI RAJ B

The Arignar Anna Zoological Park in Vandalur will conduct its yearly 'Zoo Ambassador Camp 2025' for students of Classes V and above in five batches in May and June.

The camp will be held on these days – May 14, 15, 21, 22, 28, 29, 30 and 31; and June 4 and 5. Online registration is mandatory.

Parents are requested to arrange transport for their children and provide them with water bottles, snacks and fresh-cut fruits. For more details, log on to <https://aazp.in/summcamp2025/>

## Special buses for Chithirai Pournami

In view of 'Chithirai Pournami', Tamil Nadu State Express Transport Corporation is operating special buses to the pilgrimage town of Tiruvannamalai on May 11 and 12.

The Corporation will operate around 1,156 buses on May 11 and 966 buses on May 12 from a bus terminus at Kilambakkam.



Close to 300 buses will operate from Madhavaram. Forty air-conditioned buses (with bed and seating facilities) will ply on these two days from Kilambakkam.

The passengers can book tickets through [www.tnstc.in](http://www.tnstc.in) and the mobile app.

## Inviting students to make a video of Chitlapakkam lake



Chitlapakkam Rising, a citizens guardians group, is inviting students to make a video to tell a story titled "Our Lake – Our Pride."

The video should capture the beauty of Chitlapakkam Lake in three to six minutes and it should be uploaded on social media with the tag #SavingChitlapakkamLake and #MakingChitlapakkamBetter

There will be prizes for both school and college students, said a release. The last date to submit entries is May 25.

Each contestant can submit multiple versions. For details, call Sunil Jayaram at 95001 22151.

## Two-day furniture expo

A home furniture expo is being held at Chennai Trade Centre in Nandambakkam on May 11 and 12, 10.30 a.m. to 8.30 p.m. One can exchange old furniture for new at the expo. Interested customers can take photos of their used furniture and show them to the organisers at the expo, said a press release. Latest trends in home décor, living room sets, bedroom furniture, wallpapers, fashion products, health and beauty products, cosmetics, kitchen accessories and consumer durables are on display. One can avail a discount of 50 percent on all furniture, added the release. For details, call 95661 87502, 93913 91162.

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## New schedule for AC trains

The Southern Railway, Chennai Division, has revised the air-conditioned electrical train services pattern and introduced additional services.

Train No: 49001, Tambaram to Chengalpattu, departs at 06.50 a.m. and arrives at 07.35 a.m. It runs on all days except Sundays and stops at Perungalathur, Guduvancherry, Potheri, Singaperumal Kovil and Paranur.

Train No: 49002, Chengalpattu to Chennai Beach departs at 07.50

a.m., and arrives at 09.25 a.m.. It runs on all days except Sundays and will halt at Paranur, Singaperumal Kovil, Potheri, Guduvancherry, Perungalathur, Tambaram, Chromepet, Tirusulam, Saint Thomas Mount, Guindy, Mambalam, Chennai Egmore, Chennai Park and Chennai Fort.

Train No: 49003 will depart Chennai Beach at 09.41 a.m. and reach Tambaram at 10.36 a.m. It runs on all days except Sundays and stops at all stations.

Train No: 49004 will depart from Tambaram at 1 p.m. and reach Chennai Beach at 1.55 p.m. It will run on all days except Saturdays and halt at all stations.

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# A green synergy

The latest batch of compost to emerge from the lane composters at Kasturba Nagar is growing the greens at a farm in Kottivakkam, East Coast Road. Wasted 360 Solutions made this possible

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

In a case of synergy, three entities representing three different constituencies of the green economy recently carried out a "transaction" defined by an abundance of goodwill.

It is a loose equivalent of what one would call "entente" in international politics — gestures marked by friendship and support. Here, there were what appeared to be business moves, but they were aimed at offering support to the one who needed it, and were free of any intentions of profit. Thanks to this, the latest compost to emerge from the lane composters at Kasturba Nagar is growing the greens at a farm in Kottivakkam.

When Residents of Kasturba Nagar Association (ROKA) harvested its fifth cycle of composting, the compost was going into packets for sale. Down the line, ROKA realised it has to sell its compost to cover a part of the costs of running the lane composters.

"From the third cycle onwards, we started selling the compost at ₹10 per kg, each pack holding 10 kg of compost," says Janani Venkitesh of ROKA.

ROKA has now harvested its fifth cycle of harvest. "Forty to fifty kg of compost was given to residents of Kasturba Nagar; they were on a priority list. And around 200 kg of compost went to Kazhani Native Farms in Kottivakkam on East Coast Road. Ann Anra of Wasted 360 Solutions bought the compost and donated it to Kazhani Farms. India Wasted has a dry waste drop off point at Kazhani Farms," says Janani.

Ann Anra of Wasted 360 Solutions weighs in:



"At Wasted 360 Solutions, we focus more on dry waste sorting and collection and aggregation, whereas organisations like Namma Ooru Foundation and communities like ROKA that do decentralised waste management for expertise in wet waste. We also work with SWMS to give waste to the CNG plant. But why I particularly have always been interested in compost is that it is the perfect solution and Indians are already good at making it. We had taken a training programme for about 250 beneficiaries (from an unskilled labour constituency) to get them to become experts in composting, making bio enzymes and essentially impart to them the ability to work with both wet and dry waste, gain sorting capacity. Getting them started on these processes (composting and bio-enzyme making, sorting waste and reclaiming recyclables), which obviously have a money component attached to them, we were thinking about connecting and buying back the material

(compost being one of them). While thinking in these terms, we heard about ROKA's harvest being really good and when I was speaking to Kazhani Farms, they said they needed two to three tonnes of compost a month. So, we footed the bill, buying the 195 kg of compost from ROKA which offered it to us at a discount, for Kazhani Farms. Because Kazhani Farms has been nice enough to offer us a free space in Kottivakkam for our dry waste drop-off."

On the lane-composting initiative in Kasturba Nagar, Janani says: "The lane composters are a part of the wider We Segregate waste management project in Kasturba Nagar, Adyar.

"The project is funded by the Urban Ocean program and nurtured by Okapi Research & Advisory, ROKA and Chennai Resilience Centre with the support of on ground partners - the Greater Chennai Corporation, Urbaser Sumeet, Spreco Recycling and the Bisleri's Bottles for Change initiative."

The lane composters at Kasturba Nagar and (below) Kazhani Farms at Kottivakkam.  
PHOTOS: PRINCE FREDERICK AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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## Music composer from Adyar receives Vocational Excellence award



The Rotary Club of Madras Mid-Town (Rotary International District 3233) conferred its Vocational Excellence Award for the year 2024-25 on Prashanth Srinivas. The acclaimed music composer, vocalist, and multi instrumentalist is a resident of Adyar and was honoured for his outstanding contributions to the world of music.

A student of Carnatic music under Veena Shastry, Prashanth Srinivas pursued advanced studies at KM Music Conservatory under A.R. Rahman and completed a master's in film music composition from the University of Southern California. Prashanth is founder of RagaHaus.

His impressive body of work spans over 30 international film scores include 'Ascharyachakit'

and '36 Gunn', said a release.

Past district governor Isak Nazer; chairman N.M. Ilangumaran; and president Rotary Club of Madras Mid-Town Kamal Narendra were among those present at the award function.

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