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# STATUS REPORT

Portable stainless steel stools enter the picture



Flexibility in thinking opens the door to a fresh outlook and effective problem solving. This kind of thinking seems to have been at work at Kumaran Nagar bus stop on Nookampalayam Link Road off Rajiv Gandhi Salai (IT Corridor). Portable stainless steel chairs have been placed to make up for the lack of adequate seating.

Who said all seating at a bus stop has to be fixed? The images were taken on April 26, 2025.

PHOTOS: PRINCE FREDERICK

Palavakkam resident K. Sarath turned his back on a corporate career to take up silambam coaching; given the inclusion of silambam in the quota for employment in Tamil Nadu, he is keen on teaching underprivileged children for free

ARIVARASU M

When his friends wielded the cricket bat, K. Sarath was encouraged to brandish another piece of wood, thinner and longer. Though he had scampered down the 22 yards himself, Palavakkam resident Krishnamurthy wanted his son Sarath to choose silambam (stick fencing) over cricket for specialisation.

Sarath found generous encouragement as he took this path at age four: his grandfather and his uncle had mastered silambam. He began silambam classes under Balasekar's tutelage.

Sarath would go on to acquire a BBA and an MA (Journalism) de-



## The swish of a magic stick

An airborne K. Sarath; and training sessions on the beach. PHOTOS: ARIVARASU M AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



gree from Hindustan College, Padur, enter the corporate world, thrive as an executive in a multi-national company; but he could not stop his ears against the swish of the silambam stick. So, here he is: an instructor of silambam and boxing; and he sees the former as a tool of empowerment and conservation. Sarath believes that by practising and teaching silambam, he is not only protecting a sport, but a tradition, Tamil tradition. There are nuances to the art and he is enamoured of them.

"Silambam is not just playing with Bamboo staffs, or Kombu (horn). It has different styles such as *Kaippaadam* (hand silambam), double stick fencing, single or double curl sword, *alangara varusai* and more."

Sarath has won four gold medals in silambam at a national-level competition held in Chandigarh, bested the competition in the *Thodumurai* fighting style in Chromepet competitions; and twice claimed victory in the *Thanithiramai* category at Coimbatore's tournaments. His name

has a mention in the Asia Book of Records for a feat. Sarath was a state-level champion in boxing in 2013. Sarath has trained Shipping corporation of India Ltd (SCI) personnel in silambam-based self-defence; the sessions were based on hand silambam. Silambam techniques were meant to be an ally to these personnel when they return home from night duty – against chain and mobile snatchers, says Sarath.

Sarath has students from the IT sector, the IT corridor being a parallel road to East Coast Road. Naiveen, an MCA graduate and a software professional, says "silambam engages both body and mind in a way most other workouts do not."

Sarath sees the silambam stick as a tool of empowerment; the sport, a path to dignity. "I teach poor children for free, though some families still offer what they can, unsolicited. Tamil Nadu's government inclusion of Silambam in the 3% sports quota for government and government-owned undertakings jobs ties the sport to social and economic empowerment."

For details, call 9940316610.

One does not associate notebooks and textbooks with World Book Day, but there are students out there who cannot afford to buy them fresh off the shelves. A spotlight on Prakrith Arivagam, a library in New Perungalathur that is scripting a charity on the unused pages of used notebooks



# Take a page out of their book

SHARON JESSICA MICHAEL

**O**n World Book Day (April 23), Sriram Gopalan was desk-bound at his non-profit children's library and thumbing through pages – not pages that flaunted printed words, but empty pages that hoped to host words, handwritten words.

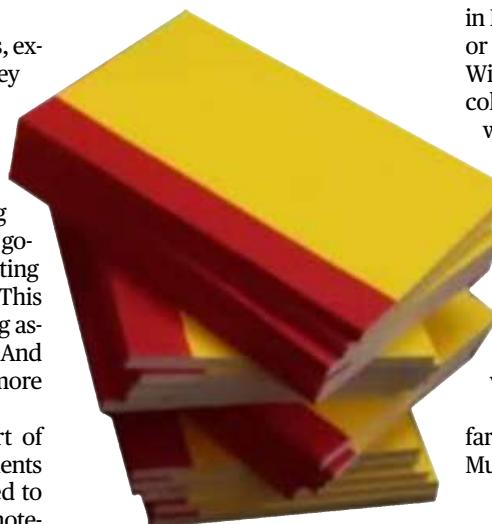
At Prakrith Arivagam, as this library at Alapakkam in New Perungalathur is called, Sriram was swamped by stacks of half-used notebooks. Ruled and unruled, long and short, white and yellowed, smudged and dog-eared notebooks. He was tearing out the untouched pages to settle them between new covers and find them a new pair of hands. Sriram was not labouring at this work alone. The sound of pages being ripped out intact filled the room: he was with people who are on the same page about how half-used notebooks ought to be treated.

They collect used notebooks, extract the blank pages which they would ultimately bind into fresh notebooks: on for weeks now, this activity would extend through May. The epilogue to the exercise: donating the notebooks thus made to government schools and benefitting underprivileged children. This "summer-vacation volunteering assignment" is in its second year. And by the look of it, it has added more pages and chapters.

Last year, with the support of volunteers from the local residents community, the team managed to repurpose and distribute 800 note-



An initiative by Prakrith Arivagam reaches notebooks to students of government schools.  
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



books to children at a Panchayat Union school at Alapakkam under Nergundram panchayat in Perungalathur. This year, the bar has been set decisively higher.

"This year, we started collecting in March itself, hoping to reach two or three schools," Sriram says. With over 1000 used notebooks collected already and volunteers working nearly every day, the distance between the effort and the goalpost is shrinking rapidly.

This annual exercise is promoted in WhatsApp apartment groups, library circles, and social media – to seek half-used notebooks and the volunteers to deal with them.

Responses came from near, far and wide, with Mumbai and My-

## A word of praise from the PM

Prakrith Arivagam, started on January 1, 2023 by techie Sriram Gopalan after his return from the United States to pitch permanent tent in Chennai, originally had the character of an exclusive children's library.

Its scope was subsequently expanded to include books for all age groups, says Sriram. He however adds that 90 per cent of the books still cater to children. Besides, it focusses on promoting activities that would contribute to the holistic development of children. It therefore essentially remains a children's library and resource centre.

In the 116th edition of Mann Ki Baat (dated November 24, 2024), Prime Minister Narendra Modi showered encomiums on Prakrith Arivagam how it promotes the reading habit and creativity – through memory-training classes and robotics among others – among children with the use of the latest technology.

He made this reference to Prakrith Arivagam while discussing the lofty goals of children's education and the role played by libraries in achieving them.

plaore among places where the initiative found resonance.

The project is being powered by more than 20 volunteers this time. "It is a rotational effort," says Sriram. "Even if someone cannot make it every day, a few hours here and there really adds up."

Up to this point, the helping hands belong largely to adults. With educational institutions now closing for summer, college and school students are expected to walk into the volunteering exercise.

Volunteers collect used notebooks, either through drop-offs or home pickups within nearby areas. Sorting the pages is the most labour-intensive: it is about removing used pages, then classifying the clean sheets. "We classify everything – long books, short ones, ruled, unruled. Then we send them to a local binder, who binds them at cost," he explains. "We do not earn from this. The binder we work with has agreed to do it at cost price. We cover the expenses through small fundraisers within our community."

Sriram sums up, defining why they do what they do.

"I think this generation does not realise how much they waste. Schools now provide new books with the fees. Most of them are not even fully used. But there are still thousands of children in government and rural schools who go without basic stationery. That gap is what we are trying to bridge."

To volunteer or to donate old textbooks, call 9445411121

# Out for a charge

Have you spotted the latest addition to the landscape: an EV station next to a supermarket or any other major congregating point? Private players and even Greater Chennai Corporation are seeking to establish charging points in locations that can be quickly and comfortably accessed

LIFFY THOMAS

**T**wo years ago when Kiruba Joy brought home a new electric car, he did not anticipate objection from the residents association to having the machine charged from his individual meter. The 300-unit apartment community in Porur had only two EV users then. The association would go on to invest in a common charging point, which did not impress Kiruba as he found the rates to be on the higher side.

"We shifted from our own flat to a rented accommodation in Kolathur to be able to have EV charging at home as well as to enrol my daughter in a nearby school," says Kiruba.

Kiruba would have loved to make use of a public charging station, but he found none within a five kilometre radius.

In the last six months, the EV landscape in Chennai has improved, EV charging infrastructure keeping pace with people's openness to travelling electric.

### A changing landscape

Greater Chennai Corporation has started work on identifying locations for public EV charging stations across its 15 zones. Private players are parking EV charging stations near crowd-pulling establishments like malls and cafes.

"Currently, our preference is in establishing two-and-three wheeler charging points as many electric vehicles in these categories have hit the roads in the recent months, and the charging point for such vehicles is not yet universal," says Sriram J, senior manager, charging infrastructure at Bolt.Earth.

The company has 97 public charging stations in Chennai and is in the process of establishing 10 more.

"The recent fleet of Pink Autos and load vehicles launched by the State Government are electric, so the charging infrastructure has to keep pace with the demand," says Sriram.

Plugzmart, a Chennai-based EV charger manufacturer for high-power charging, has 25 charging stations on the highways to help long-distance travellers.

The Union Government has also asked power distribution compa-

**We are seeing a lot of improvement on the ground. Now we have an EV cell where concerns raised by us are being looked into**



nies to set up common charging stations every 25 km along national highways.

According to Bureau of Energy Efficiency, as on April 12 2025, Tamil Nadu has 1,524 public charging stations installed over the last five years, with Chennai accounting for 218 (tier 2 cities have 459 and tier 3 has 847). Karnataka and Maharashtra are way ahead of Tamil Nadu.

EV users note that besides addressing charging infrastructure gaps in public places, signages have to be put up to improve the visibility of charging stations.

Vignesh N. works as a delivery partner and commutes more than 100 km on his e-bike from his home in Ambattur Industrial Estate to Parrys. He says the city needs not just more charging stations but the existing ones need to be better maintained and be made user-friendly. "You reach a charging point to realise it's not working or there are a queue of people waiting

for their turn or the filter option is the app is such that it directs you to a gated community where you are not allowed," says Vignesh.

Exclusive charging points for gated communities is also in the wish list.

Ragavendra Ravichandran, co-founder and COO, Plugzmart, says the focus is more on getting developers of new projects on board than persuading an existing apartment community to invest in an EV station. "Having an EV charging infrastructure is now an essential selling point for developers," he says.

Some real estate players have been opening up these unmanned charging stations for those beyond their community. Ragavendra cites the example of SKCL Prime in Guindy where

An EV charging station established next door to a supermarket on ECR Link Road in Sholinganallur; and (below) near Saidapet station.

PHOTOS: PRINCE FREDERICK AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

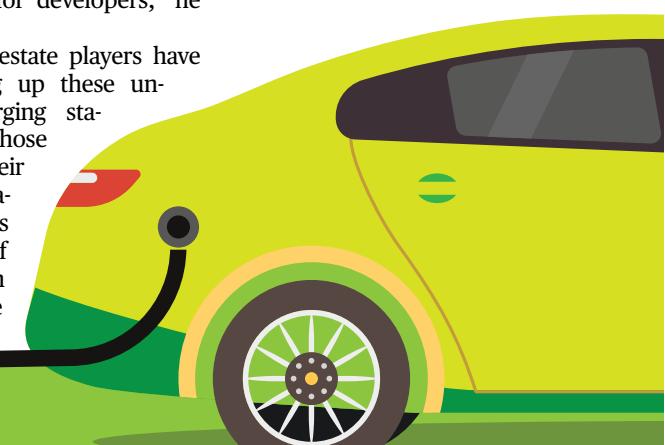
employees working in the IT park as well as those from the public can avail the charging facility inside the campus.

### Wiring in

Among the challenges faced by private EV players is finding a good location where electricity load is good.

"EV vehicles need good wiring. In many cases, the wiring component is not suitable and the cost of setting up the wiring runs into lakhs of rupees. The 'load fixed deposit' that has to be paid to the government is also high," says Sriram.

The process of engaging with the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board is also time-consuming. "We are seeing a lot of improvement on the ground. Now we have an EV cell where concerns raised by us are being looked into. TNEB has also asked its senior staff to give preference to EV users," says Sriram adding that a meeting of charge point operators was held on April 24.



At the end of every wintering season, one can have only a broad idea about where a migratory bird would breed, unless it is tagged. The latest illustration of how bird tagging helps conservation efforts comes from Kelambakkam backwaters on the southern rim of Chennai



## *On the tail of a tagged Curlew sandpiper*

PRINCE FREDERICK

**W**hen a wintering bird doubles back to its breeding grounds to attend to the visceral business of procreation, it becomes essentially "unreachable" for the human friends it has made in its wintering grounds. It is impossible to keep tabs on the bird. One only knows its vast breeding range, which could straddle countries. Trying to

trace this bird down to its "hearth" would amount to looking for a needle in a haystack.

Birder Jithesh Babu is rummaging through a haystack: he is trying to trace the soon-to-be address of a curlew sandpiper (he made friends with, on April 18, 2025 at Kelambakkam backwaters). Jithesh would likely succeed in this effort. The Curlew sandpiper (already wearing its breeding plumage and likely to be around in its wintering

grounds for some more time) is wearing a tag.

A bird with a tag usually has a recorded history to fall back on. It is a matter of time before Jithesh knows where exactly the Curlew sandpiper would go. The tagged Curlew sandpiper having crossed his 150-600 mm telephoto lens, he has a photo of the creature, which he has sent to Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) along with a request for information about it.



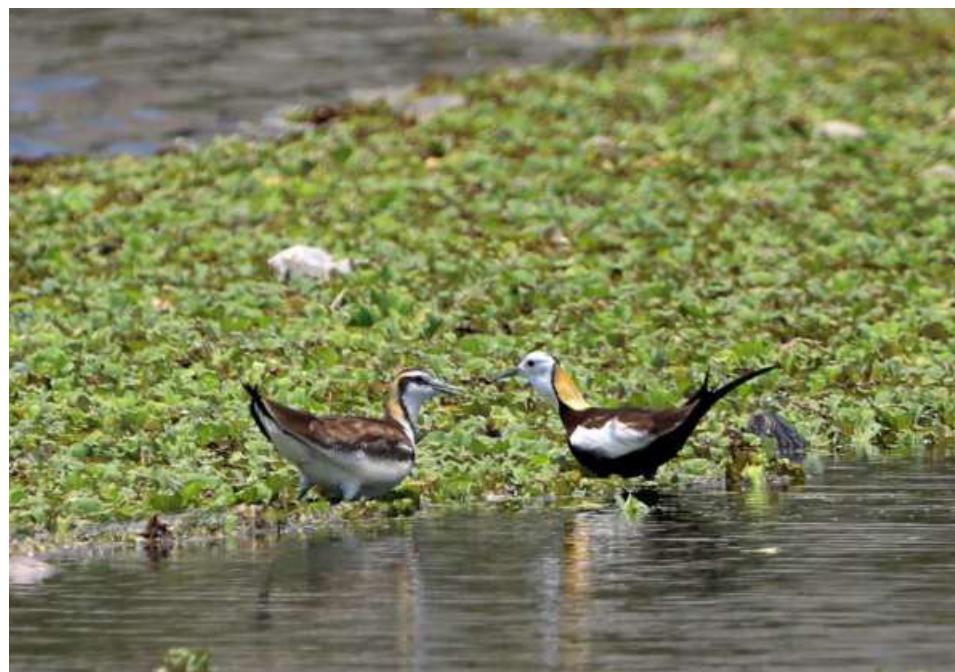
A Curlew sandpiper with a tag at Kelambakkam on April 18, 2025; a tagged Greater flamingo at Pallikaranai marshland on April 21, 2021.  
PHOTOS: JITHESH BABU

And Jithesh knows what exactly to expect.

Around the same time four years ago – April 21, 2021 – he found a tagged Greater flamingo at Pallikaranai marshland and he wrote to BNHS seeking information, and in response, Tuhina Katti, a scientist with the Wetlands Programme, BNHS, wrote back to him: "From the combination on the tag, it appears to be 'AAP'. This individual was tagged in Panje, Navi

Mumbai (on the outskirts of Mumbai) on 24 September 2018. It was resighted in Chennai in August 2020 and since then it has been resighted in Sholinganallur on a couple more occasions. It is interesting that the bird was still present there in April."

Jithesh remarks: "As this happened at the height of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the response took some time. Usually, it is prompt."



Different stages of domesticity

▼  
Two pheasant-tailed jacanas, one in full and the other in partial breeding plumage, at a boggy patch on Nookampalayam Link Road in Semmancherry on April 22, 2025; and at same patch, a moorhen was seen feeding its young, on April 26.  
PHOTOS: PRINCE FREDERICK

## Workshop on mending clothes in Kotturpuram



Clover by River Apartments, a gated-community in Kotturpuram, conducted a dry waste collection drive recently. According to a press release, it is a bi-annual event conducted in collaboration with Wasted 360 Solutions.

During the drive, gently-used clothes, toys, and footwear were collected. Also, there was a workshop on mending clothes so that they could be reused. In previous drives, there were workshops on repairing clocks, footwear and utensils aimed at driving home the message of sustainable practices, adds the press release.

Besides, buttermilk is distributed to

the housekeeping staff and security at the gated community. Each day, a resident sponsors the two-month-long initiative during summer, says the release.

## Waste collection drive in Thalambur



Four gated communities in Thalambur: Casagrand Elan, Casagrand Smart Town, KG Earth Homes, and Adroit District organised a two-day dry waste collection drive at their respective premises recently. It is a joint exercise carried out under an initiative called SIMPLE (Sustainability Improvement through Multiple Projects for a Lovelier Environment) which is led by a group of Thalambur residents who are conscious of environment conservation.

According to a press release, a total of 1,668 kg waste was collected from all the gated communities.

SIMPLE can be reached at simple.elan@gmail.com

## Workshop on mushroom cultivation

Tamil Nadu Agricultural University Information & Training Centre is conducting a workshop on mushroom cultivation on April 30.

The session will be held at the centre's premises at Agro Tech Green Park, First Floor, Thiru. V. Ka. Industrial Estate, Guindy. Prior registration is required. For details, call 044 - 29530048.

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## Visual lesson from design professor

SAHANA MIRA S

**W**hen assistant professor of Interior design and decor, Karthiga T from JBAS College for Women went out on an early morning ride to Marina beach at the end of last year, to catch the sunrise, what greeted her was a shoreline littered with plastic waste – bags, large water cans, abandoned slippers, mosquito bats, and other debris tossed

ashore.

Deeply disturbed by what she saw, this Velachery resident felt compelled to turn her emotion into action. "This is when I decided to take this issue to a wider audience, but through the language of art. We need to keep the conversation going, one way or another," says Karthiga. She later incorporated this into her PhD research project after receiving ethical clearance to collect coastal waste and transform it

Velachery resident Karthiga T draws attention to coastal waste through art



Karthiga T. with her mural artwork; and the JBAS team that collected coastal waste.

into art, which marked the beginning of her mural art, "Coastal Cry in Plastic".

"While my artwork used only plastic waste, our aim at the end of the day, was to clean the beach. Together with my students from JBAS, we collected all forms of coastal debris from Marina and Besant Nagar beach over a span of 30 days," she explains.

After spending another month sorting through the collected waste, separating plastics, and sending the rest for recycling, Karthiga began working on



her mural artwork from home. Between parenting her toddler and teaching at college, she used whatever spare time she had – often on her terrace to bring the piece alive. The artwork is a statue of a pregnant woman form which has around 20 kilograms of plastic waste.

"I wanted it to be a commentary on environmental degradation," says Karthiga. "The mural work is constructed entirely from coastal waste which we collected where I mainly used plastic bottles, bags, caps, wires, and discarded contain-

ers. I wanted viewers to reflect on their own consumption and disposal habits, and think about the sustainable practises of these discarded items through the mural art," says the interior decor professor, who used eco-friendly paints.

"This pregnant female figure is a metaphor for Mother Earth, carrying the weight of our waste," she adds.

Recently, in April, the mural was installed at the Government College of Fine Arts, Chennai. "The mural now sits in a space surrounded by artists," Ms Karthiga says. "I hope to create conversations and inspire more artists to choose sustainable practices in their work."

## Summer camp to develop inter-generational bonding

**D**ementia Care Foundation, a non-profit organisation in OMR, is organising a free summer camp from May 5 to 9 (9.30 a.m. to 1 p.m.) bringing together children and elders living with dementia for a meaningful and inclusive experience.

According to the release, India currently has over 8.8 million people living with dementia.

With rising life expectancy and age being the biggest risk factor, this number is expected to increase by 20 percent by 2050. This unique initiative aims to foster empathy, inter-generational bonding, and awareness about dementia among young minds and the community at large, said the release.

The camp will feature a wide variety of activities designed to engage both children and elders with dementia: yoga, karate, storytelling, music and dance, kolam drawing, flower garland making, arts and crafts, fireless cooking, sewing, and traditional games like *Paramapadam*, *Pallanguzhi*, *Goli*, and *Adu Puli Aatam*, along with laughter therapy. The event will conclude with a valedictory celebration, where children will showcase performances, reflect on their experiences, and create lasting memories with the elders.

For details, call 9344257901 / 044 24964555.

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