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97.2

KHAVIYA AKILA VENKATESH



96

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‘Ramaswamy Chetty Kulam is being desilted; encroachments should be removed’

Recently, the Madras High Court allowed the Tambaram City Municipal Corporation to desilt and deepen the Ramaswamy Chetty Kulam in Pallavaram. The pond, located along Kulakarai Street, Railway Station Road, is characterised by encroachments. Due to a garbage dump and sewage disposal, the bunds have eroded.

Over the years, Pallavaram residents have sent many petitions to departments in the State government, office of Kancheepuram and Chengalpattu district collector, the erstwhile Pallavapuram Municipality, and the Tambaram City Municipal Corporation to rejuvenate the pond.

At present, the silt is being removed through an earthmover.

A section of the trash (in the pond) has been removed.



An earthmover removing silt from Ramaswamy Chetty Kulam in Pallavaram. PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The water in the pond is contaminated and the pond area has trees.

The Madras High Court has granted four months' time to

identify the encroachments, the authorities should initiate the work.

S. P. Gandhi
Pallavaram

‘Chaos at eastern entrance of Tambaram railway station’



The nameboard at the eastern entrance of Tambaram railway station is not well-lit. Besides, autorickshaws and cabs create chaos at this entrance. This should be better regulated. A bus terminus is also located near this entrance and that also adds to the chaos. Further, people new to the station and the city get confused with the bus terminus.

R V Baskaran
Selaiyur



‘Thiruvalluvar Nagar road in a bad shape’

Second Street at Thiruvalluvar Nagar in Alandur is marked with potholes for the past many months. The road is an important one as it connects to St Thomas metro rail station. Hence, the stretch should be attended to at the earliest.

S Balamurugan
Alandur



‘Thiruvengadapuram Main Road needs to be relaid’

Thiruvengadapuram Main Road in Vengambakkam region was battered during the 2022 North East monsoon but is yet to be repaired.

From Mappedu Vengambakkam Road to Rathinamangalam Main Road, the stretch has developed potholes and the entire carriage-way is battered.

The road surface has deteriorated to such an extent that it poses a

threat to the safety of pedestrians and motorists. The peeled-off surface increases the risk of skidding.

It is the responsibility of the Agaramthen Village Panchayat to initiate the road repair work without further delay. The current time is opportune as the South West Monsoon will begin next month.

A. Jyothilakshmi
Vengambakkam

‘Reconstruct the broken walls along Chromepet station’



A broken wall along Station Border Road in Chromepet. PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Recently, portions of the walls along the Station Border Road in Chromepet, along platform 4 at the Chromepet Railway Station, crashed.

The broken walls pose a threat to the safety of commuters. Currently, commuters scale over the

iron and steel railings to board the electric trains.

Southern Railway is yet to take steps to address the broken walls or ensure RPF presence at platforms 3 and 4.

S. Vasudevan
Chromepet

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Dear readers, you can be our volunteer-writer by writing to us about issues and events in your neighbourhood.

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Thiruvengadapuram gets a new park

Residents want Agaramthen Village Panchayat to carry out improvements in and around the green facility

T.S. ATUL SWAMINATHAN

Residents of Thiruvengadapuram, a neighbourhood in Vengambakkam, now have a park that is all theirs. The space was constructed three months ago as a result of the many representations the residents made to Kancheepuram District Collectorate, St. Thomas Mount Panchayat Union, Agaramthen Village Panchayat, CMDA and the Chengalpattu District Collectorate.

With grants from Chennai Metropolitan Development Authori-



Snapshots of the park. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ty, the Agaramthen Village Panchayat started work on the park.

In the layout plan, approved by the CMDA in 1986, a plot of land was earmarked for a recreational facility under the Open Space Reservation rules, on Fifth Street. But the land was prone to rainwater stagnation.

The new space boasts of a walkways path and a play area. However, there is work to be done.

Residents point out that the area around the play equipment and the garden is dumped with construction debris, which should be removed to plant more trees.

“Planting more trees will enhance the park’s beauty. We also want the garbage bins be placed strategically,” says G. Chithra Ganesan, a resident and senior citizen.

More sand should be spread in the play equipment area to prevent children from getting injured, says G. Sunaina Gladstone, a mother of a five-year-old.

The area around the play equipment is dumped with clay soil. Residents want it replaced with river sand and a garden to be grown.

A rainwater collection pit that links to a stormwater drain network is also expected.

The park gates should be locked and a security guard appointed, say residents.

Special buses today

Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation Limited will be operating additional special buses. From Kalaingar Centenary Bus Terminus, Kilambakkam, corporation will operate more than 250 special buses to Tiruvannamalai, Trichy, Kumbakonam, Madurai, Tirunelveli, Nagercoil, Kanyakumari, Tuticorin, Coimbatore, Salem, Erode and Tiruppur.

More than 60 buses will be operated from Chennai Mofussil Bus Terminus, Koyambedu to Nagercoil, Velankkani, Hosur and Bengaluru.

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Not a smooth ride

A section of the road from the office of the Inspector General of Police (North Zone) to Alandur metro station has battered patches that makes driving difficult. A few accidents (largely from night-time driving) have also been reported, say regular users of the road.

PHOTO: DURGA LAKSHMI E.



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Resident of resettlement colony clears Class X exams at age 31

She had to abandon schooling due to family circumstances, but was determined to return to studies

LIFFY THOMAS

Close to two decades after she left formal schooling abruptly, S. Velangkanni took up her textbooks again and completed it.

Recently, she cleared the Class X Board exams. Thirty-one-years-old, Velangkanni is a Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (CMWSSB) employee.

She cleared social science paper, the last of the Class X board examination papers she had to appear to complete her SSLC.

"I was supposed to appear for my Class X board examinations in 2007, but my family had to shift from Mylapore to the resettlement colony at Kannagi Nagar and that signalled the end of schooling for me," recalls Velangkanni, the youngest of four sisters.

An early return to the classroom was dashed in 2010, when her father, a sanitary worker with CMWSSB, died after battling ill health. Being the only bread winner, Velangkanni's mother was focussed on marrying off the four girls including Velangkanni, which



At the study centre in Kannagi Nagar run by Muthal Thalaimurai Trust, and (right) S. Velangkanni.

she did. In these circumstances, studies could not enter the picture.

"Later in 2018, on compassionate grounds, I got a job with CMWSSB and it involved field work, which I was not comfortable with. I had to go from door to door for collection and do assessment of drainage lines at homes," explains Velangkanni, a mother of three now. "To seek a change of role at CMWSSB, I had to have passed SSLC".

Muthal Thalaimurai Trust, a non-profit working in resettlement

colonies in Chennai, came into the picture at the right time. After work, Velangkanni would attend the night classes offered by the Trust at Kannagi Nagar. Based on the advice of Trust members, she sought to take the SSLC exams in batches and she had to clear them within five years. "In 2020, I cleared three subjects, starting by choosing the easy ones," she says. In 2022, she appeared for mathematics and social studies. "Social science was tough, and so I kept it for the last and I managed to get 38

marks," says Velangkanni.

Preparation days

Three months before Board examination was when she would put in the maximum effort. After finishing the household chores, she would settle in to study between 9 p.m. and 11 p.m. and again from 5 a.m. to 6.30 a.m. "The teachers and volunteers in the Trust kept motivating me. They provided me with study material – important questions and answers in each of the subjects," she says.



I got a job with CMWSSB and it involved field work, which I was not comfortable with. To seek a change of role at CMWSSB, I had to have passed SSLC

While commuting to work and during free time at office, Velangkanni would browse through the study material.

Her husband Praveen Kumar, who works as a painter, also supported her.

Velangkanni is waiting for the final mark sheet to present it to the office. "After that I can make a request for the post of a record assistant," she says, adding that clearing Class XII is her next target.

Velangkanni is clearly demonstrating the importance of education in the most dramatic way possible to her three children.

FROM FAILURE TO SUCCESS

A spectacular comeback

After a gap of 10 years, this Kannagi Nagar resident clears Class XII exam

Ten years after she sat down for Tamil Nadu State Board Class XII examinations, S. Sangavi has turned her failure into success.

In 2014, Sangavi, 26 years old now, could not clear Class XII, having failed in economics. That same year she lost all her original certificates and she could not apply for re-examination.

"I could not apply for duplicate certificates as well," says Sangavi, who was a student of Government Higher Secondary School in Maduravoyal.

Learning Tally, she got a job in a clinic.

"Every time I was rejected in an interview, I had this lingering feeling that I should complete my Class XII," she says.



S. Sangavi

Early this year, she found the documents. They had been lying at a relative's house, and they were discovered when the family

was shifting to a new house. "One of the first things I did was inform Viji ma'am from Muthal Thalaimurai Trust who was in touch with me, nudging me to complete my Class XII for long," says Sangavi.

Two solid months of preparation helped Sangavi score 120 in economics.

"I had lost all confidence about studying for and writing an exam. But for the support from family members and the Trust, I would not have achieved this," she says.

Her fiancée, R. Vignesh, who has a B.Com degree, also played a key role in Sangavi's achievement. "I could not take leave often from work to enquire about the exam, so it was Vignesh who did all the running round. Every morning the wake-up call would be to check if I had completed the task for the previous day," says Sangavi, adding that she next wants to get a degree in Bachelor in Business Administration.

A beacon of hope

This free coaching centre in Vyasarpadi has many success stories to its credit

Nine students from Dr. Ambedkar Pagutharivu Pada-salai, a free tuition centre in Vysarpadi, appeared for the Class XII Board examinations and the results managed by two students are now the toast of the institute.

Nanda Gopal and Thareen Begun has failed to clear the Class XI examinations and had to take the supplementary exams as well as appear for Class XII boards in a back-to-back schedule.

"First, these students are given considerable pep talk: we tell them it is okay they failed and they can succeed if they put in efforts," says S. Vijayalakshmi, a teacher-volunteer with the centre for the last eight years. The centre is an initiative of Vyasai Thozhargal, a community of over 50 volunteers from the locality.

Besides positivity, the students received helpful study material and an environment for quiet study. "Thareen, for instance, had arrears in three subjects including Tamil which is toughest for her. She would forget what she learnt, so she would come to the centre in morning to study with a fresh mind," says Vijayalakshmi.

Students were asked to write and learn to remember better.

"The day after I took the XI Tamil paper, I had to write XII Tamil exam, a nightmare. But the way the teachers encouraged me, I got the confidence to face those tough days," says Thareen, who wants to pursue BA History.

"In the previous years, we have had students from other localities, not associated with the centre, approaching us and seeking help to prepare for supplementary examinations," says the teacher.

The Education Department conducts supplementary exams and many students are enrolled for one-month coaching. Vijayalakshmi says the centre has 13 teacher-volunteers who take classes for students from class 1 onwards.

A journey from pain to purpose

On May 11, a fundraiser for support to the cancer-hit unfolded at a concert hall in Chetpet. Here is the path paved with pain that led to that stage that night

SHARON JESSICA MICHAEL

In 2013, Arun Kumar M gained a new sense of purpose in a manner best described as paradoxical: it took the loss of his mother for that purpose to dawn on him. Diagnosed with a rare form of pancreatic cancer in 2011, Arun's mother lost the battle with the disease two years later. During the course of her treatment, while managing to cover the medical expenses, Arun noticed many others in a similar situation were not as comfortably placed in terms of finances. Some of them could not afford even basic care. He decided it need not be that way, and the vision that followed has become a balm for his aching heart, turning the pain into purpose.

Not long after his mother's death, Arun (now 35 years old and a former IT professional) founded Thenmozhi Memorial Trust, named in her honour. The Trust's *raison d'être*: easing the non-medical process of fighting cancer, in multiple ways. Arun had turned his back on a comfortable IT career (he was on the top of the pile at an MNC as senior consultant) for the new-found cause, which he did not want to suffer on account of divided attention. For a living, he would turn to an enterprise he



From the event. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

started (in 2018) – Superstar Pizza in Anna Nagar, a theme-based restaurant. No marks for guessing what the theme is. Being his own boss has given Arun the leeway to focus on the cause without any hindrance.

Volunteer base

Though it is a registered NGO, it is sustained entirely by the spirit of volunteering. Around half-a-dozen core volunteers form the fulcrum around which the voluntary organisation functions, says Arun. Other volunteers join in as per emerging needs, as the cause is made known by word of mouth.

Among the more visible manif-

estations of the Trust's mission is Rhapsody, an annual fund-raiser to support families finding themselves in a financial shadow cast by cancer. The event has so far clocked eight editions, the latest seeing the light at Sir Mutha Venkatasubba Rao Concert Hall on May 11, 2024. Though the venue has changed from time to time, the format has not. It is always a soiree. And the steadily increasing size of the audience is evidence that the event has grown in popularity and impact.

According to the Trust, the sixth edition racked up an audience of 1200. In its first edition, Rhapsody had a gathering of 200

to 250 people. With a little help from Director Balaji Mohan, a friend from school, the event quickly gained momentum. For its next edition, Rhapsody moved to the iconic Museum Theatre, drawing a crowd of 500.

Here are the projects launched and sustained by the Trust.

Support groups

Their first project, Karunya, which means compassion, is about supporting patients in hospitals and hospices. Picture volunteers visiting these places, spending quality time with patients, and bringing essential items like toiletries, adult diapers and groceries. They be-

lieve that sometimes, the best gift is simply being there. Karunya also extends a helping hand to the Royapettah Government Cancer Ward, providing bed sheets during winter, and fresh fruits and groceries regularly.

For children

The second project, Poonthalir, meaning flower bud, focuses on helping children battling cancer perk up despite the reality of cancer treatment. Picture puppet shows, storytelling, magic shows, and arts and crafts events. They provide 200 kg of rice each month for a cancer home. In times of loss, Poonthalir offers grief support, helping families transport their deceased children to their native places. At Egmore Children's Hospital, they provide financial help for children facing cancer relapses and offer emotional support to their parents.

Rural outreach

Prajna, the third project is all about spreading cancer awareness in rural areas, particularly about breast cancer. A mammogram bus parked in a village offers free screenings. Despite cultural taboos, the bus is persistently about its business, heading to villages twice a month on its mission, which includes educating women about cancer and hygiene.

This year, the Trust launched Vaan Ulla, funded by actor Mime Gopi's prize from the "Cook with Comali" show. Ten children from a government hospital experienced their first flight journey from Chennai to Bangalore, followed by a fun-filled day at a resort.

Residents want FOB on Radial Road at Zamin Pallavaram

T.S. ATUL SWAMINATHAN

Residents of Zamin Pallavaram want a foot overbridge (FOB) on a section of Pallavaram-Thoraipakkam 200-foot Radial Road.

Currently, there is a small opening in the median for pedestrians to cross over to the other side of the road. But this is not an authorised median cut and by using it, pedestrians are at risk.

K. Srinivasan, president of the Thiruttani Nagar Residents' Welfare Association, Zamin Pallavaram, says: "Months ago, we took up the issue with the State Highways Department to create an FOB and met the traffic wing of the Tambaram Police Commissionerate to take up the matter with the Department."

An FOB will be of help to residents of Thiruttani Nagar, Thiruchendur Nagar, ARG Nagar (Kalyani Nagar), Pallava Garden and Natpu Nagar.



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Bessy Reads: meet at the beach and stay connected online

A SUBALAKSHMI

On June 11, Bessy Reads would celebrate its first anniversary. Looking back on the ground it has covered, the group has displayed stick-to-itiveness clocking nearly 50 sessions in as many weeks (in 50-overs-a-side ODI cricketing terms, a decent run-a-ball strike rate) and being prompt with its Instagram updates. With engaging content, often laced with humour, its Insta page (@bessyreads) has garnered 10k-plus followers.

The choice of time for its Sunday gathering (6 a.m. to 9 a.m.) is no way unique. A few other silent reading communities in Chennai similarly start early, deciding to take the emerging day by the horns. Bessy Reads has a unique reason to ink in a morning schedule: Besant Nagar beach is most vibrant at that hour with beach sports on the sands and runners and cyclists hitting the road lining it. These images sometimes stream into the videos Bessy Reads posts on its Insta page.

Bessy Reads owes its genesis to two avid readers Sanjana and Kruthika Kumar who started the group inspired by Cubbon Reads of Bengaluru. Sanjay Sriram who has covered considerable ground with the group is now its active curator too.

Among the silent reading community in Chennai, Bessy Reads is believed to be the pioneer in the city moving into the space first. It is also believed to be the fastest-growing si-



On the sands of Elliotts Beach. FILE PHOTO R. RAGU

lent reading group in Chennai, adding new members with regularity and in good numbers.

Factors that make Bessy Reads an attractive option is the availability of sufficient parking on Elliotts Beach Road and presence of restaurants. Every Sunday session ends with a joint breakfast. During one such post-session breakfast, the group got to meet actor Arya.

A newcomer sums it up: "I started reading because my therapist said it

helps in healing but I now know that the Besant Nagar beach, books and the bibliophiles are all helping me through my journey of healing and exploring the world of books and I am grateful to be a part of this community."

New initiative

On May 11, Bessy Reads started a new initiative, Reads Lab, which is about conducting art workshops for readers.

Scholarship for economically weak students

SEEEDS (Service to Educate, Enrich, and Empower a Dream Society), an NGO founded in 2017 by Dr. Ramakrishnan, has announced a scholarship programme to assist economically challenged students studying at

government or government-aided institutions. The organisation seeks applications from eligible children. The last date for submitting applications is May 31.

Students who have completed class X or class XII from a

government or government-aided school, orphans or students with single parent and those from Sri Lankan refugee camps are eligible to apply, said a release.

For details, visit <https://www.seeeds.org>

Four-week yoga workshop



A REPRESENTATIONAL PHOTO ONLY

Satyam Yoga Trust is conducting a four-week Yoga workshop from May 25 at Shri Sudarshan Terrace Hall, B-2, Lakshmi Nagar Main Road, Nanganallur. For details, call 9841227709 / 9445051015. The centre is also conducting a four-week Yoga workshop from May 26 at Thiruveethi Amman temple, No: 2, Thiru Veethi Amman Kovil Street, Velachery. For details, call 8754499334 / 9445051015.

According to a press release, no fee will be charged. The centre follows the tradition and curriculum of Bihar School of Yoga. Time: From 5.30 a.m. to 7 a.m. Sessions on Pranayama, meditation, value education, food habits, recitation of mantra are part of the workshop, adds the release.

Buses to Tiruvanamalai from Koyambedu

The Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation Limited (TNSTC) will operate more than 40 buses to Tiruvanamalai through Arcot and Arani from May 23, from CMBT.

Besides, in addition to existing services (numbering around 11 daily) from the terminus to the city through Kancheepuram and Vandavasi, more than 25 buses will be operated additionally.

From Kalaingar Centenary bus terminus - Kilambakkam, the corporation will operate around 90 buses through Dindivanam and Gingee.

Culinary workshop



A REPRESENTATIONAL PHOTO ONLY

Tamil Nadu Agricultural University Information & Training Centre is conducting a culinary workshop on jams on May 23. According to a press release, varieties of jams made from pineapple, mango, jackfruit, carrot, beetroot, and coconut will be demonstrated. Another session on preparation of detergent powders for clothes and utensils and mosquitoes repellents will be held on May 24. The workshops will be held at the centre's premises at Agro Tech Green Park, First Floor, Thiru. Vi. Ka. Industrial Estate, Guindy. For details, call 044 - 29530049

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