



metro PLUS

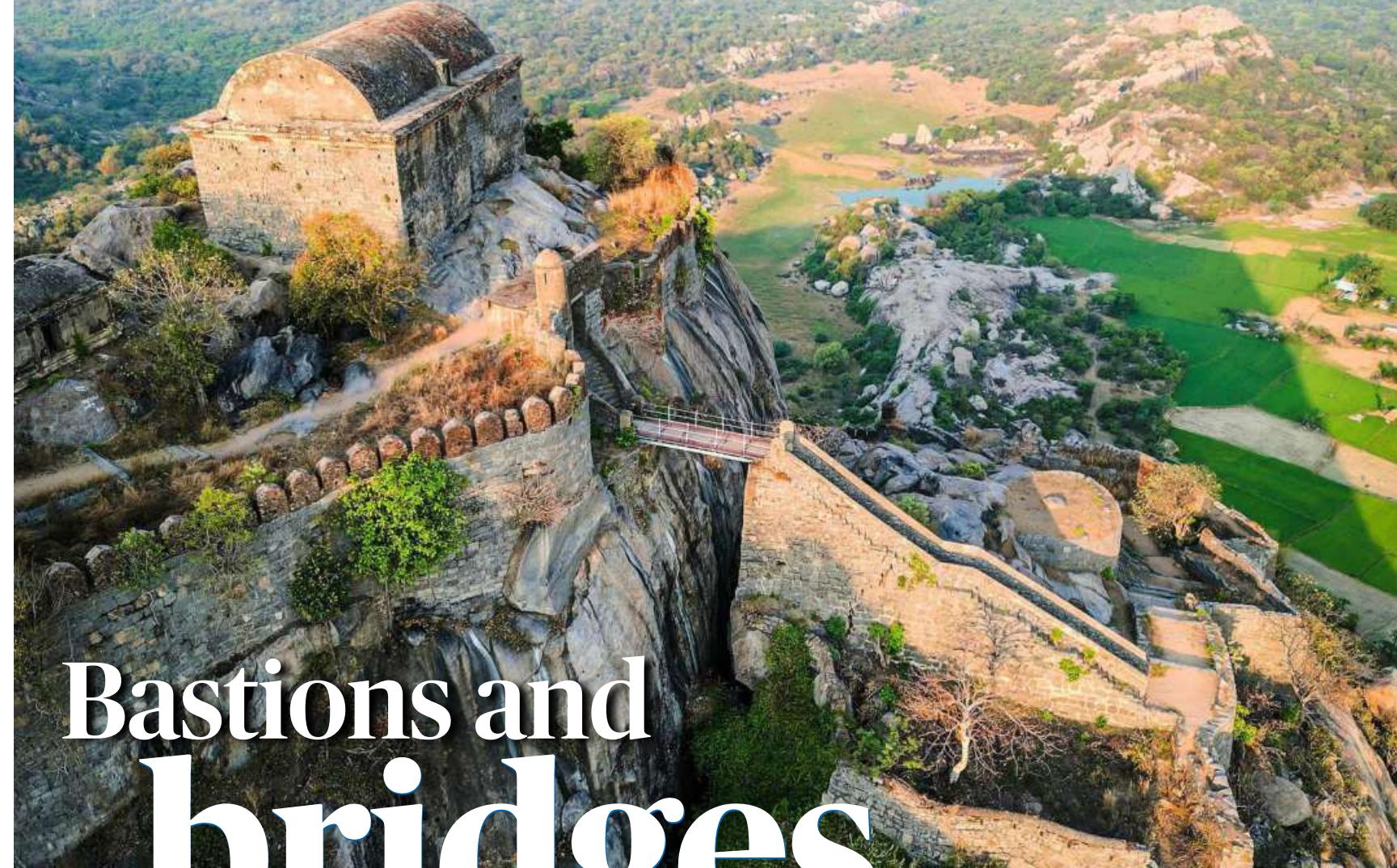
THE HINDU

Journey along the Nilgiris through a documentary that celebrates cohabitation **P2**

WHY GAME CHANGER STRUCK A CHORD P4



SHIVARAJ MATHI



Bastions and bridges

Team MetroPlus curates a list of historic forts to explore, taking advantage of the cooler weather. And they are all day trips from Chennai

Sanjana Ganesh

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In the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918, bombs and guns across the world fell silent as Germany signed an armistice agreement with the Allies, signalling the end of the First World War.

At Chennai's Fort St George, in the only bomb-proof shelter in the premises – St Mary's Church – bells tolled and a signal gun was fired. Back then, this British citadel with the oldest Anglican church east of the Suez, remembered the fallen, with hardly any acknowledgement to the 74,000-odd Indian soldiers who fought at Somme and

Flanders fields.

A hundred and six years after this day, in 2024, the pulpit of the St Mary's Church was decorated in poppies. Wreaths were laid, hymns were sung in praise of the brave, and war veterans who fought in Kashmir, found themselves raising their arms in a salute.

The Church came alive. As the bugles played during the service, one was transported to a time when the fort walls saw hard-fought battles with the French, and rulers like Hyder Ali in the 1700s. A walk down Charles Street inside the fort premises past the houses once inhabited by Arthur Wellesley, first duke of Wellington, and Robert Clive, first British Governor of the Bengal

Presidency, took one back to days when busy officials traded and maintained records.

On Armistice day, Fort St George turned sepia.

Citadels have this transmutative power. Within their thick ramparts are stories waiting to be told. A fine day during Chennai's brief month-long winter is the best time to go history-hunting. Grab your water bottle, wear a cap and strap on your shoes, as Team MetroPlus curates a list of forts to head to within a drive.

The Hindu recently published *Forts of Tamil Nadu: A Walk-Through with the Department of Tourism, Tamil Nadu*. For a copy, contact 1800 102 1878. With inputs from TS Subramanian and T Ramakrishnan.

Gingee Fort

A drive down the road from Tindivanam to Tiruvannamalai, shows the formations of a fortress emerging from a hill. The Gingee Fort complex encompassing three hills, Chandragiri, Rajagiri and Krishnagiri, stands as though forming a triangle. Built in 1200 CE by Ananda Kon I, the chief of the Konar community, the fort was subsequently developed by its eventual inhabitants including the Nayaks, Marathas, Mughals, Carnatic Nawabs, French and the British between 1383 and 1780CE. Many films have been shot at the site and the grave of mythologised war hero Raja Tej Sing (De Singh colloquially), also lies here. One can see early gymnasiums, watch towers, granaries, cannons, a stunning Kalyana Mahal, horse stables, royal harem, a throne, a queen's fortress and temples on the site. A distinct drawbridge which allowed the Marathas to retain control of the fort for several years, often causing enemies to plummet to death, is one of the reasons why it is referred to as the Troy of the East.

Gingee Fort is 160 kilometres from Chennai via road. The nearest bus stop and railhead at Tindivanam.



Sadras Fort

If you swerve off Kalpakkam's atomic power station and the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research, you will find yourself staring at two cannons located at the imposing entrance of Sadras fort. According to J Thirumoorthy, former Assistant Archaeologist, Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), during the period of the Sambuvarayars (local feudatories under the Cholas), Sadras was called Rajanarayanan Pattinam after a Sambuvarayar chieftain. It was referred to as Sadras by the Dutch who took over the fortress. The fort, over time, found itself in the midst of a tussle between the British and the Dutch with the final occupation and eventual abandonment by the English. Muslims, spices, magazines and Chinese porcelain are some of the treasures that were unearthed from the site. The ASI even found Delft Blue crockery, Gouda smoking pipes and arrack-stained glasses here.

Sadras fort is 70 kilometres from Chennai via road. The nearest railhead is Chennai.

Priyadarshini Paitandy

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Three thousand candles light up the Museum Theatre. A magical golden glow engulfs the space while soft music fills the air. With Margazhi and Christmas round the corner, this is perhaps the perfect time for Candlelight Concert to debut in Chennai.

The first concert on November 15, titled Best Movie Soundtracks, will have tunes from Tamil and Hindi films. This includes hits like 'Vaseegara', 'Srivalli', 'Kal Ho Na Ho', 'Lag Ja Gale', 'Uyire' and will feature home-grown talents Lalit Talluri on flute, Bharath Dhamodaran on keyboard, and Sarath Dhamodaran on percussion.

And if you are still brooding about not getting those tickets to the Coldplay concert, here is some consolation. You can check out A Tribute to Coldplay on December 5, 9, and February 9. There is also a show dedicated to the masterpieces by Mozart and Chopin and Queen vs. Abba.

"We have a curation team that decides the music, artists and the venue. We don't believe in flying people from here to there, we look at local talent," says Deepa Bajaj, country head – Live Your City.



Light music Snapshots from the Candlelight Concert in Geneva (left) and Mumbai. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Ed Sheeran to a string quartet playing hip hop beats or Punjabi music.

"It's about bringing classical music to contemporary audience. We want to provide a platform for artists who are skilled," says Deepa. The concert is now in 21 cities in the country, including Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kochi, Pune, Delhi, Ahmedabad... Sometimes, on a particular date there are two to three sessions taking place one after the other. "The whole point is to make candlelight concert a regular part of the city," she adds.

Initially starting out with classical music, the concert now also incorporates contemporary music from films and pop music by bands and singers. Lately, even tunes from *Bridgerton* find themselves being played to cater to a wider audience. "For the Coldplay tribute we saw millennials, and for Taylor Swift we saw parents bringing their kids or a group of kids," says Deepa, adding that one of her favourite shows so far was an Indian classical trio (sarangi, tabla, and harmonium) doing a tribute to Coldplay.

Shows start from November 15. Tickets are priced from ₹899. For dates and tickets, log on to livedyourcity.com.



Weekend giggles

Mumbai-based standup comedian Atul Khatri will be performing live in Chennai. Atul brings his sharp wit and hilarious takes on life, navigating the absurdities of being a Mumbai-based businessman-turned-comedian. The show will be in Hindi and English and is suitable for those 16 years and above. @Club Crest, Phoenix Marketcity, Velachery. On November 17. There are two slots at 4pm and 7pm. Tickets start at ₹999 in BookMyShow.



Peppa Pig is finally in Chennai Here is a chance for tiny theatre enthusiasts to embark on a journey with Peppa, George, Suzy, Gerald, and Pedro in this theatrical adventure titled, *Peppa Pig Adventure Live*, in English. Act 1 unfolds at the nursery, where Daisy's first day is filled with playful games, music lessons and interactive storytelling led by Madame Gazelle. @Sir Mutha Venkatasubba Rao Concert Hall, Chetpet. On November 16 and 17, 10.30am, 2.30pm and 5.30pm. Tickets on BookMyShow.

Keeper of the flame

The Candlelight Concert is now in Chennai. Listen to classical and contemporary music at Museum Theatre, amidst thousands of candles

India. "As for the venue, we end up working with quite a few of them. We look for a unique flavour or for a standing institution in that city," she adds.

First started in Spain in 2019, Candlelight Concert's popularity

has seen it grow to 40-plus countries and over 300 cities. Produced by Live Your City (a brand owned by Fever Labs Inc) in India, the first concert took place in Mumbai in June this year. The series of concerts have musicians

playing classic and contemporary music. There is no microphone to amplify the sound. All is calm except for the appreciation claps at the end of each set. The repertoire is diverse and ranges from tributes to Bach, Chopin and



A wedding portrait of his great grandparents from the 1920s, encouraged photographer G Venket Ram to contemplate the days of yore in his latest work



The roaring 20s
G Venket Ram's work recreates a picture of his family from the 1920s while also displaying contrast. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Venket Ram hence decided to play around with the motifs in the picture. He says that he specifically tried to look for young models (aged 16 and 24) in the shoot, so as to capture this natural innocence that his great grandmother once displayed. But, the idea was also to subvert the gaze with a contrasting sense of the future. "There is hence a recreation from the 1920s, and the same saree and jewellery styled for today," he says.

To ensure that the look could be recreated, Venket Ram reached out to Amrapali to source similar jewellery. "You should see the necklace and the vankis. Exquisite," he says. He adds that the saris were customised by Raw Mango. While the background is consistent, showcasing a timeless painting and an ornate column, the models in the images wear contrasting emotions. There is both timid shyness and a searing confidence in their faces as the photographs sit side-by-side. "There is also a distinction in shooting technique. The 1920s image was shot on a large format film camera (he owns a Horseman LX 4x5), the contemporary image was shot on a 35mm digital camera. Even the carpets and furnishing were carefully picked out from Amethyst," he says.

Venket Ram says that wedding portraits have a diminished value in today's world of technology. "While the act of pictures on a wedding day exists, the frames today are usually crowded with people. If anything, this image has taught me that wedding portraits are precious and must be treated with all seriousness. It is, after all, a rare occasion," he says.

Englishmen who ruled over the country then. However, elements of Indian jewellery and aesthetics are essential to completing his look. A bejewelled turban with a feather, ornate arm bands and a studded necklace, add to the confidence as he sits cross-legged. "Much I know about him [great grandfather] is from my grandmother who says that he was stationed for several years as the prison doctor at the Vellore Central Prison. He lost his wife at a young age," Venket Ram says.

His new doe-eyed wife on the other hand, is draped in a Chinese silk sari with tulips running along the hem, and adorned from head to toe in intricate jewels including chains, rings, nose pins and several ornaments on the ear. "It is almost as if she is shocked by the camera. I wanted to recreate this exact image because it refused to leave me. There is so much fashion in the photograph," he says.



sticky photograph in a 100-year-old family album has encouraged him to meditate on two eternal abstractions while the city remains the background – nostalgia and contrast.

"Have you seen those old albums that are somewhat falling apart, with photographs sticking to each other? I chanced upon one such album with a wedding portrait of my great grandfather and great grandmother from the 1920s and the image struck me," he says.

In it, the couple – Dr Ramadheni Seshagiri Rao and Ranganayaki Bandala – dressed in their wedding finery can be seen exuding two vastly distinct emotions. The photo in black and white, shows the young doctor in a dapper suit, tie and well-constructed shoes, much resembling the

A glance at nostalgia

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In previous conversations with *The Hindu*, celebrity photographer G Venket Ram has enthralled readers with myriad tales about his relationship with Chennai and photography.

He has recounted his childhood in George Town; spoken of sprinting down Napier bridge at dawn; narrated a story of accidentally stopping a train whilst wearing a red T-shirt; and has quipped about spending time clicking picture-perfect shots of actor Suriya's abs.

Over the years, readers have watched this lensman experiment with styles and fashion, showing facets of the city peeking through his personality. This time, a

To play The Guardian Quick Crossword, The Hindu Cryptic crossword, Sudoku & other puzzles online, scan the QR code.



16 Low wall around a balcony (7)
17 Riddle (6)
19 Rice dish cooked with meat, fish or vegetables etc (5)
21 East end of a church, containing the altar (4)

Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated XXXXX XXXX XXXX.

Solution No. 13615

R	O	B	U	S	T	N	I	M	B	U	S
A	A	C	P	M	O	L					
D	E	S	P	A	I	R	P	E	N	N	E
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Across

1 Lowered area between stage and audience (9,3)

9 Way beyond the norm (5)

10 Affinity (7)

11 Dingy (4)

12 Melancholy (8)

14 Involve (6)

15 Autocrat (6)

18 Someone who interprets or explains (8)

20 Get anxious (4)

22 Digging deep (7)

23 Learner (5)

24 Spies working for more than one side (6,6)

Down

2 Withdraw (7)

3 Prank (4)

4 Homily (6)

5 News hound (8)

6 Verification (5)

7 Gossip (6-6)

8 Confused (6-6)

13 Every second year (8)

Nifty fingers

Learn the art of using quick stitches to crochet some timeless pieces while looking away from the phone screen at this crochet workshop. While the fee for participation is ₹1,400, all the materials required for the workshop will be provided. It is suitable for people over 12 years. This workshop will be conducted in English, Tamil and Telugu, and one trainer will be assigned to a group of five. @Backyard, Adyar. November 17, 11am to 2pm and 3pm to 7pm. For details, call 7358458117.



G Venket Ram's work can be viewed on his Instagram and Facebook @venketramg. It will be displayed in Amethyst on November 15.

Beauty in coexistence

In Nilgiris - A Shared Wilderness, filmmaker Sandesh Kadur explores India's oldest biosphere reserve

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The Nilgiris, a UNESCO biosphere reserve nestled in India's Western Ghats, is a region unlike any other in the country. From leopards to the laughing thrush, the species found here often adapt in unexpected ways to the encroaching human landscapes. However, it is not just the animals but also the people, following an ancient tradition of coexistence, who play a role in preserving this delicate balance. This interdependence is the subject of *Nilgiris - A Shared Wilderness*, a newly-released documentary by Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies production and directed by acclaimed wildlife filmmaker Sandesh Kadur.

Sandesh says, "This journey began about three years ago with a conversation between Rohini, Nandan Nilekani, and myself." Despite extensive literature on the Nilgiris, the group found no comprehensive documentary specifically about this mountain range.

As a filmmaker with a deep connection to the Nilgiris, Sandesh was well-suited to the task. "I spent a lot of time exploring all sides of the Nilgiris. It was my first proper introduction to this unique landscape, where you can experience a variety of habitats within half a day. You can go from scrub forests on the north side to tropical forests along



the slopes, then to grasslands and sholas. It's incredibly unique in that way," Sandesh explains. "The nature of the place is such that there's a lot of wildlife spillover into tea gardens, private homes, and other spaces." He notes that while wildlife numbers are declining globally, the Nilgiris present a "reverse story" where species like leopards and gaur are increasingly seen cohabiting with humans.

"Animals are going to be everywhere. We cannot keep them locked up in forests," Rohini says.

The film encourages audiences to embrace a broader understanding of wilderness, one that includes human-occupied spaces. His aim is to instill an appreciation for the unique species of the Nilgiris and encourage viewers to support conservation efforts.

While the film touches lightly on human-animal conflict, Sandesh was careful not to dwell on it. "We consciously avoided focusing on human-wildlife conflict stories," he notes, adding that while these stories can be dramatic, he wanted to highlight a message of peaceful coexistence.

A birdsong (Inset) Nilgiri Chilappan; (right) Mukurthi National Park
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Why chess champion Levon Aronian is connecting with the Armenian community in Chennai

In search of Armenia

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Chess grandmaster Levon Aronian, based out of the US, has a habit whenever he travels for tournaments. He arrives three days in advance. In the build up to the tournament, Levon becomes a solo traveller, exploring the city and connecting with the locals. That is not all: he takes a special interest in exploring Armenian landmarks and connecting with this community settled in the cities he visits.

The 42-year-old did exactly that in Chennai over the last few weeks. He was in the city for the Chennai Grandmasters classical tournament. "There's the Armenian Street here in Chennai. I also found Armenian lettering on the cross in the church of St Thomas Mount." The visit to the three centuries-old Armenian church in George Town, in particular, was of special interest to the chess grandmaster. "It is beautiful. The fact that it still stands and is well preserved makes me very happy."

This fascination for keeping in



touch with the community arose from a couple of meetings he had with Charles Aznavour, popular French singer of Armenian descent. "I remember talking to him in detail once about travelling the world and he said, 'I would recommend you visit the Armenian community wherever you go, just to inspire them. For you, it is just a couple of hours, but for them, it is a memory and something that will inspire them to excel in whatever they do. I firmly believe that every person is an ambassador of his nation or country,'" says Levon, who was home-schooled by his scientist parents in Armenia, then Soviet Union, and has been playing chess since he was nine.

While making giant strides in the sport is important, Levon is

also deeply passionate about connecting with fellow Armenians. "It's just something that small nations do. We try to connect and support each other."

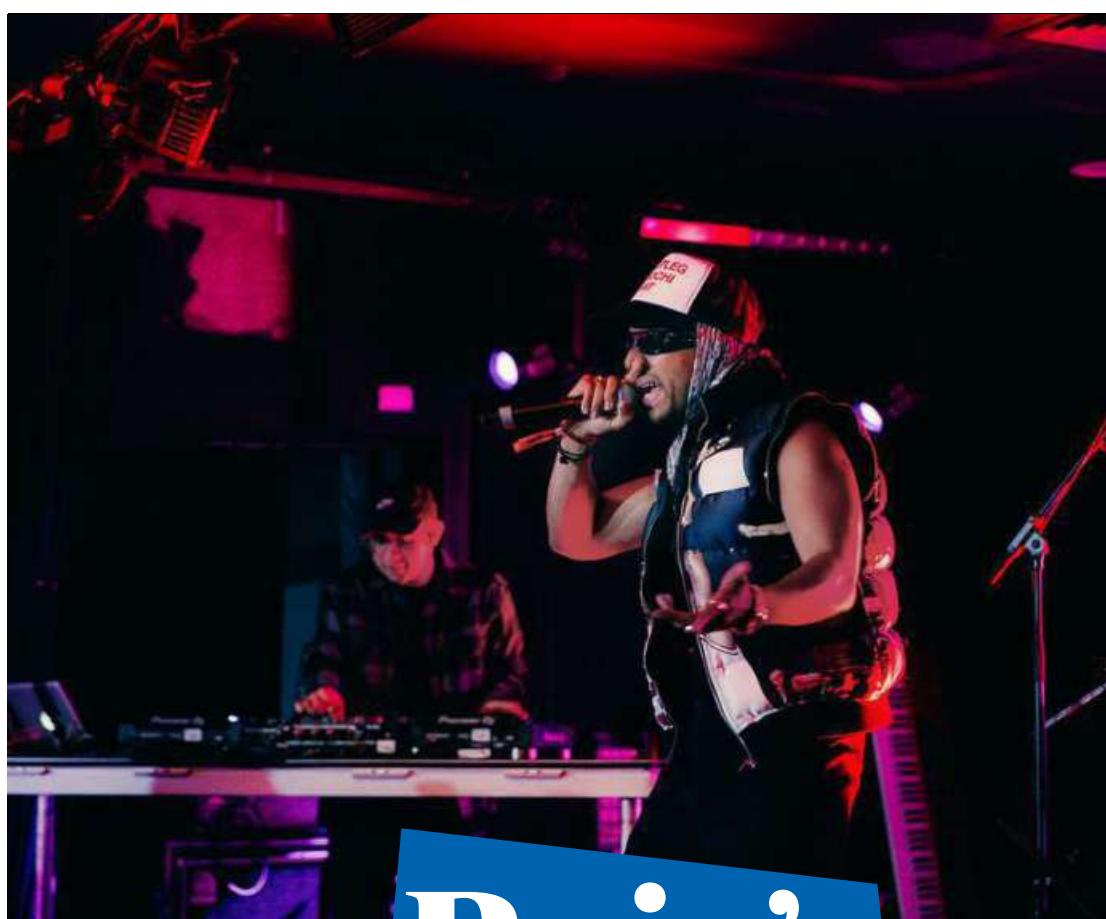
A major shift

Though Levon loves all things Armenian, he had to shift to the US in 2021, a decision he still describes as the hardest. "I have played for Armenia for many years, winning several tournaments. Chess was extremely popular. Our previous

I love exploring Armenian connections to any city I visit. Chennai has a beautiful Armenian church. The fact that it still stands and is well preserved makes me very happy

LEVON ARONIAN





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Yung Raja's idealism about the future is infectious. The Singaporean-Tamil rapper is currently basking in the success of his new single 'Podu Mike' with Bengaluru-based artist Killa K and is thrilled about having gained a sharper perspective of India, its beats and people, this past year.

"I have made visits at least once a month, this past year. It is glorious to come back to my mann, the motherland, and understand it better," he says.

His chartbuster with its arresting *kuthu* (folk) beats and funky dance moves set in a Bengaluru dive bar, was released in August earlier this year. It has been steadily gaining new listeners over the last few months with a peak in streams earlier last month. Raja says that bringing two lesser known Tamil dialects – the Singaporean and Bangalorean forms of the language – have been essential in providing spice to this bop. With a whole new generation of keen, musically tuned ears as his audience, the plan is to 'keep things fresh'.

"It took us only a few days to come up with the first few verses. Immediately after, we got a demo out. Killa K, who is like a brother to me, and I took some time to figure out how exactly

Raja's new clothes

Dialects, aspirations and sounds of his motherland are keeping Singaporean-Tamil rapper Yung Raja going this year

the song would look visually. I flew to Bengaluru after a couple of months and shot the video. After this, we wasted no time getting the song out. It is amazing how we are two people with different experiences of Tamil and have come to create a different visual and sonic palette of the South," he says.

Raja says that this is one of several exciting collaborations that have kept him going. His frequent India visits have

It is amazing how we are two people with different experiences of Tamil and have come to create a different visual and sonic palette of the South.



Knowledge of the verse
Singer Yung Raja performing for an audience in his latest look. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

taken him to studios of artistes like Yuvan Shankar Raja, Sid Siram, Santhosh Narayanan, Dhee and Hanumankind. Each of these meetings have transported him, reiterated his interest in the music and entertainment industry and deepened his perspective about the art. He is excited to work with several other Southeast Asian and Indian artistes, to put the rap scene from here on the map, especially since the milieu is buzzing at the moment.

"To think that I have now positioned myself a certain way, created my own music and have the ability to step into Yuvan's studio and listen to the tracks he plays, still blows my mind. I am excited every time I board a flight to India and am grateful for every opportunity. I have come to realise that my aspirations have skyrocketed," he says.

Raja says that he wishes to write a book about how his family has contributed to his journey. At no point in his career when he would spell out his self-proclaimed outlandish dreams, have they clipped his wings, he says. "My loved ones think that I'm delulu (delusional) but that is a story for another day. I have told my parents things like 'I want to meet AR Rahman. I want to act with Rajinikanth'. My immigrant parents (father is from Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu) haven't once humbled me when I have said these audacious, obnoxious things as a child. I am able to pursue my dreams because of them," he says.

When he first began, the aim was to make just enough money to provide for his family while doing something he is

passionate about. Cut to today where Raja prattles on about exciting collaborations, the end of shows till the end of the year in India, Singapore and Malaysia, and his own new records and albums that will come in the near future. Plans have become exponentially bigger from when he started off in 2018, he says.

He adds, "Coming to India for the first time was a powerful, polarising experience. Today though, I have a big smile on my face when I think about my plans for 2025."

burnt my chin, so I couldn't go to school and decided to learn the guitar," he says. "A few others and I started a band. It was me, a guy from Alwarpet, and his brother, who was only 10 years old and played the bongos. So we had our first big show, and we became a big, small-time hit because we were so young," he laughs.

Recounting his history with the city, Konarak speaks about how his family moved frequently. "We had so much history with the city, and I'm simply retelling these stories, but musically," he adds.

Bangalore 1974, performed at Bangalore International Centre in May this year which served as a prelude to *Madras 1968*, explored his connection with Bengaluru. It was in Bengaluru that Konarak learned to play the piano. "There were no guitar teachers in Bengaluru at that time, so I learned the theory and started transcribing those notes into guitar music," he says, adding that there will be a video showcase of this, including glimpses of how Bengaluru looked back in the 1970s.

"The way we Indians experience music is very different from the way the world experiences music. There's a whole world that exists in these experiences, and I want younger generations to incorporate them into their lives," he says.

What I'm doing with this concert is just reminiscing and playing bits of only my music. I have learnt such varied things – Indian music, western classical, jazz, rock – at different stages of my life

KONARAK REDDY

this concert will also include background videos generated by Artificial Intelligence (AI).

He adds, "I learnt classical guitar in Madras when I was 13. During a Chemistry lab experiment, the sulphuric acid

Chords of yesterday *Madras 1968* is Konarak Reddy's (above) tribute to the city. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Guitar time machine

Guitarist Konarak Reddy returns to his roots with *Madras 1968*, an intimate music concert that journeys through decades of memories

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English sculptor Henry Moore once said, "There's no retirement for an artist; it's your way of living, so there's no end to it." While there may not be retirement, there is a transition into a certain sense of ease in one's art. For guitarist Konarak Reddy, this transition has been shaped by life before and after battling cancer. "I think it's that time of my life when I should play small venues and interact with the audience," says Konarak who has been a musician for over 50 years, ahead of his performance in Chennai.

This guitar concert titled *Madras 1968*, hosted by the Alliance Française, is part of a series of performances across South India in intimate venues, including Tiruvannamalai and Puducherry after Chennai. *Madras 1968* is all about Konarak revisiting the nostalgia of his childhood. Having grown up in the city where he also learned to play the guitar, his focus is on paying tribute to it. "What I'm doing with this concert is just reminiscing and playing bits of only my music. I have learnt such varied things – Indian music, western classical, jazz, rock – at different stages of my life," he says, adding that



What I'm doing with this concert is just reminiscing and playing bits of only my music. I have learnt such varied things – Indian music, western classical, jazz, rock – at different stages of my life

KONARAK REDDY

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Chords of yesterday *Madras 1968* is Konarak Reddy's (above) tribute to the city. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

This World Diabetes Day, make a healthy choice with camel milk

In recent years, India has been labelled the "diabetes capital of the world". There are currently close to 80 million people with diabetes in India and this number is expected to increase to 135 million by 2045. The rising number is alarming.

But in the ever-evolving landscape of diabetes, knowledge is power and helps manage diabetes better. Like consulting with your doctor and knowing what exercises are good for you, what lifestyle changes to make and what foods to eat.

Which is why making healthier food and lifestyle choices are important. Like trying the new Amul Camel Milk. Why? Because Camel Milk is a source of natural insulin like peptides that aid in managing Type 1 diabetes. It helps reduce blood glucose levels and insulin requirements to further limit diabetic complications.

Rich in Vitamin C and Iron, this milk's low fat content and cholesterol

make it light on the stomach and suitable for daily consumption, while keeping obesity at bay. Which means it's a great choice for lactose intolerant diabetic patients too. It is processed in a state-of-the-art processing plant and packed to make it convenient to consumers across the country because of its 6 month shelf life and that too without any preservatives.



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*CONSUMER CONNECT INITIATIVE

The art of letting go

Koffee and Kalavaram's sixth edition will be discussing how one can stop dwelling. Participants can attempt to turn the page over and start to look forward. Every

participant is expected to bring a hard copy of a photograph, one that symbolises a moment of release or growth. The idea is to encourage reflection and positivity while inviting women to share personal photographs and their stories behind the same.

@Backyard, Adyar on November 17, 3pm to 5pm. Tickets at ₹350 available at [instamojo](http://instamojo.com).



A royal feast

Le Royal Méridien has relaunched their restaurant, Navaratna. The menu celebrates the Royal Indian cuisine with food from nine Indian states: Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Karnataka, Goa, Rajasthan, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh. Try specially curated dishes such as Udupi aalooggeddi battani playa, Andhra pappukura, safed sultani murgh korma, doodhiya jheenga and regional desserts.

@Le Royal Meridien, Alandur. For reservations, call 9940253457.

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Back in time
Varun Tej in a still from *Matka*.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Actor Varun Tej discusses his new Telugu film *Matka*, a fictional tale inspired by gambler Ratan Khatri

On the cards

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After playing an officer of the Indian Air Force in *Operation Valentine*, actor Varun Tej awaits the theatrical release of his new Telugu film *Matka*, in which he plays a character inspired by the gambler Ratan Khatri, referred to as 'matka king'. "I was keen to be a part of a film that has the potential to appeal to a wide audience. I liked director Karuna Kumar's raw and rugged narrative style in *Palasa 1978*, and I was eager to work with him when he narrated a fictional story inspired by the life of Ratan Khatri," Varun Tej explains.

Varun emphasises that *Matka*, to be released in multiple languages on November 14, is essentially a Telugu film, staying true to its home language and cultural context. As the script evolved (Karuna Kumar wrote 13 drafts), Varun was taken in by portions that emerged as a spin-off of happenings in Khatri's life. "It is interesting to know how Khatri expanded his network and gambling spread across India and affected the Indian economy. We have included a few events about the Emergency and the demonetisation of high denomination bank notes (1978). However, we were not keen on making a biopic."

The character Vasu portrayed by Varun, is fictional though created along the lines of Khatri. *Matka* traces his journey, transforming from a youngster desperate to make ends meet to becoming a power-hungry gambler. "Khatri came to India during the Partition. The film is set

in Visakhapatnam and Vasu arrives as a refugee from Burma. Later, he narrates the story of his early life to his daughter in a fairytale format, referring to his character in the third person. I liked how Karuna Kumar has written these segments," says Varun, adding that *Matka* depicts nightclub glitz, crime and the underworld in the port city in the Sixties and Seventies, a facet that has not often been explored.

In Varun's decade-long career since *Mukunda* (2014), he has often chosen films from diverse genres and settings – a world war backdrop in *Kanche*, a gangster comedy in *Gaddalakonda Ganesh*, science fiction adventure in *Antariksham 9000 KMPH* and a boxer in the sports drama *Ghani*. He has also been a part of romances such as *Tholi Prema* and *Fidaa* and the comedies *F2* and *F3*. "I strive to do something different in each film. Along the way, I have also realised the need to cater to a larger audience."

Varun asserts that *Matka* does not celebrate Vasu as a superhero.

"We show his glamorous side as he splurges, but we also show the repercussions of his actions. If the film were to glorify him, I would not have been comfortable doing it." *Matka* involved extensive pre-production to plan the production design, cinematography and other technical aspects. "Cinematographer Kishor Kumar (*Thangalaan* fame) used anamorphic lenses for the initial portions and the camera movements will reminisce the trends of the 1960s and 70s."

Matka was filmed in 75 days, of which Varun shot for nearly 65 days. "I had read the script multiple times and analysed Vasu's behaviour. Yet, I was nervous on day one to see if the director liked what I portrayed. As my character goes through four stages, I was nervous each time I portrayed the character in a different age," he laughs.

Matka is slated to hit theatres on November 14, 2024



Reel image

In the promos of *Matka*, a few glimpses of Varun Tej's character in his 50s, with silver-streaked hair swept back, are reminiscent of Kamal Haasan from *Nayakan* and Marlon Brando from *The Godfather*. Varun smiles at the mention and says, "The direction team used prompts to generate images with the help of AI (artificial intelligence) for the different looks I sport in the film; the image we got for the middle-aged character was

a combination of Brando and Kamal sir. These images were our initial references. We worked on each look to suit a specific age group and decade. In the younger phase, the hair keeps falling on my face and as my character grows older, acquires wealth and is sophisticated, the hair is swept back. At this stage, my character is in tune with fashion trends and sports a tie and pocket square."

Keep it short

The 'Take One Short Film Contest', promoted by KYN (Know Your Neighbourhood) connectivity platform, recently invited aspiring filmmakers to share a short film set around neighbourhoods in Chennai. Over 500 short films were submitted on the app, each bringing unique stories to life. Among the submissions, 45 entries were shortlisted and the jury, comprising of directors Gautham Vasudev Menon, Pushkar-Gayathri and producers Sashikanth and Sameer Bharat Ram selected the top three films: *Yethai Kalaim Dhan* (Vigneshkumar B), *Maa* (Salauddin Satru) and *Oru Melasana Kodu* (Ram Gautham). Selected participants have an internship opportunity with the jury members to hone their skills. "The younger generation's attention spans are decreasing and media formats are evolving to shorter versions. The 'Take One Short Film Contest' was a step towards capturing the newer generations' attention," explained Gayathri Thyagarajan, CEO of Kynhood Technologies in a press statement.



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Rules of the game

All about the teaser launch of director Shankar's *Game Changer*, starring Ram Charan, Kiara Advani and SJ Suryah

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A starry-eyed man decked in 'Global Star' Ram Charan's merch awaits to catch a glimpse of his idol at the teaser launch for the *RRR* star's latest film. In Hyderabad, this would hardly be news, of course. But in the dazzling wash of lights that illuminates Uttar Pradesh's regal Vidhan Sabha, the eager fan seems both singular and symbolic. This was Lucknow after all – a city well beyond the bustle of Hyderabad and the conventions of Telugu cinema, or even Southern Indian cinema.

Reflecting all the glitz at the theatre grounds and the vibrant lights at the nearby Vidhan Sabha, a striking teaser of Ram Charan's *Game Changer*, directed by director Shankar, arrived at the Pratibha Theatre in Lucknow recently. In addition to the lead star, the event featured appearances by co-star Kiara Advani, actors SJ Suryah and Anjali, and producer Dil Raju.

Fresh off the global success of his career-defining role in SS Rajamouli's *RRR*, Ram Charan was visibly moved by the warm welcome he received. "Lucknow is one of the biggest cities in the country, and I can see that even the hearts of its people are so big. I saw how you all celebrated *RRR*, and I'm thankful for it," he said.

Reuniting with Ram after their previous collaboration in *Vinaya Vidheya Rama*, Kiara shared her fondness for the city: "Lucknow is very special to me. In fact, three years ago, I was here shooting when I got the call from Shankar sir for *Game Changer*. To now be back here for the teaser launch feels surreal."

SJ Suryah was stunned by the



warm reception from the Telugu-speaking audience in Lucknow, especially after his impressive turn as the antagonist in *Saripodhaa Sanivaaram*, starring Nani. "I feel like an upcoming star

Director Shankar, whose last film was the Kamal Haasan-starrer *Indian 2*, is ready with *Game Changer*. Its recent teaser includes shots of extravagant sets and picturesque locations, which are unique to Shankar's films

Star-studded
Ram Charan and Kiara Advani at Lucknow's Pratibha Theatre.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

in North India!"

From towering cutouts to fans dancing to the iconic Oscar-winning 'Naatu Naatu' and the latest 'Raa Macha Macha', the teaser launch event was Ram Charan's humble exhibition of the northern territories he has conquered in the wake of *RRR*.

With music by Thaman S, *Game Changer* also features Samuthirakani, Sunil, and Srikant. The story is penned by Karthik Subbaraj. Produced by Dil Raju and Shirish under the Sri Venkateswara Creations banner, *Game Changer* is set to release on January 10, 2025.

SATHYAM | ESCAPE | INOX | DEVI | SANGAM | CASINO | ALBERT | PVR - AMPA | PALAZZO KAMALA | TNAGAR | AGS | UDHYAM | S2 PERAMBUR | BHARATH | IDREAM | MAHALAXMI | KRISHNAVENI | KKNGAR KASI KASI TALKIES | INOX LUX | PVR GRAND - VELACHERY | PVR GALADA - PALAVARAM | PVR ICON VR MALL | REDHILLS PVR ECR - PVR | INOX NATIONAL | INOX MARINA | S2 THIYAGARAJA | MAYAAJAL | ECR - VIJAY PARK | MAMANDUR - C3 CINEPOLIS | EVP CINEMAS | AMBATHUR - RAKI & MURUGAN | VILLIVAKKAM - AGS | OMR AGS | MADURAVAYAL - AGS KOYAMBEDU - ROHINI | PORUR - GK | THAMBARAM - VIDHYA | MR & NATIONAL | CHORMPET - VETRI | KOLATHUR - GANGA PADI - SIVA SAKTHI & LAXMI BALA RADHA | GREEN | REDHILLS - RADHA MOVIE PARK | THIRUVALLUR - RAKI & ROJA & THULASI ST THOMAS - JOUTHI | PONNAMALLE - SUNDHAR & VIGNESWARA & BHAGAVATHY | CHENGALPET - SRK & LATHA PALLAVARAM - JANATHA | THIRUNINRAVUR - VELACINEMAS | MINJUR - MANI & KK CINEMAS | MEDAVAKKAM - KUMARAN KANCHIPURAM - BABU & ARUNA & KARTHIKEYAN & BALAJI | MOOLAKADAI - SHAMUGA & PANDIAN | THIRUVOTRIYUR - MSM & ODEAN MANI ANAKAPUTHUR - GANESH & VELCO | AVADI - MEENAKSHI & REMI | UTHUKKOTTAI - KUMARI | GUDUVANCHERRY - VENKATESWARA SRI BRINDHA | TIRUTHANI - DURGA & GK GODEN | AMMAYARKUPPAM - BABU | PALLAVARAM - JANATHA | ADAYAR - GANAPATHYRAM

