

T. NAGAR

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‘Park premises unkempt’



The park at Saligramam on Arcot Road. The images were taken on December 24.

The entrance of the Greater Chennai Corporation's park at Saligramam on Arcot is unkempt, especially near the compost pits. It is littered with all kinds of plastic bottles and food packets. Also, a line of dustbins are placed at the entrance. Regular visitors want the compost pits removed and the dustbins placed at the various spots across the park.



You can be our **volunteer-writer**

Dear readers, you can be our volunteer-writer by writing to us about issues and events in your neighbourhood. You should send the write-ups to downtownfeedback@thehindu.co.in.

Letters must carry the postal address and contact number.

‘Speed breakers necessary on this road’

This is in response to the article titled “Safety concerns on Dr. Ambedkar Road” published in the T Nagar edition of *The Hindu Downtown* on December 15, 2024. I happened to witness a fatal accident that occurred on this road on November 5 at half past six in the morning at the intersection of Fourth Avenue and Second Avenue (near R 3 Ashok Nagar police station) wherein a

truck rammed into a motorcyclist.

The sole reason for the untoward incident is violation of traffic rule: The motorcyclist drove on the wrong side of the road. However, neither the public nor the law enforcing agencies have learnt any lesson. Motorists continue to drive on the wrong side of the road and the Greater Chennai Traffic Police is not taking any

stringent measure against this violation.

Hence, I suggest laying of make-shift rubber rumble strips on accident-prone spots on both sides of the Dr. Ambedkar Road which could effectively slow down the vehicles. This small measure would go a long way in preventing any untoward incident.

R. Jayachandra Singh,
Kodambakkam

Pedestrian safety compromised



A stretch of Anna Salai from CIT Nagar to YMCA in Nandanam is unsafe for pedestrians. Due to the ongoing flyover construction, the footpaths on both sides of the road are demolished. This forces pedestrians to step on to the road where they are at risk of being hit by vehicles. The authorities concerned should take measures to ensure pedestrian safety such as placing barricades and traffic diversion to decongest the stretch.

Varadarajan C M
West CIT Nagar

‘Mended road looks battered again’



The images were taken on December 13.

Kalaigarnar Street at Kaveri Ranganagar in Saligramam that was dug up for some civic work was restored a few months ago as part of monsoon preparedness exercise.

However, the recent rains exposed the poor quality of the work. The road is worn out and eroded in some spots. Repeated complaints had to be made to address this issue. However, the mending exercise is being carried out in installments.

S.N. Rajaram,
Saligramam



A lane plagued by waterlogging



The lane under Dr. Guruswamy Bridge in Chetpet which leads to the Tamil Nadu Cooperative Union is prone to water stagnation. Passers-by say the lane remains waterlogged for four days in case of moderate to heavy rains and motors need to be used to pump out water. They also pointed out water from the Cooperative Union's building is also let into the lane. The images were taken on December 17.

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The ping pong magic at work

Seated in his wheelchair, Valasaravakkam resident Ramgopal D. fights the odds and triumphs



Joining Laser Soft Infosystems Limited (later acquired by Polarsis) made the big difference in life. "Founder Suresh Kamath does not treat us challenged persons. I go on the same plane and am treated like everybody," says Ramgopal, who currently works with Patterns Cognitive.

The office had a TT table and Ramgopal would sometimes find time to learn the strokes. The turning point came when he was assigned on a project from the company to NABARD. "The company had all kinds of sporting amenities for their staff and employees would stay back after work to play. That is where my love for sports and job got married. I spent a good 1.5 years in the project and actual introduction to TT happened there," he recalls.

Finding Michael Roy, a para TT champion, was another silver lining. "In 2018, Michael introduced me to competitive paralympics and I made my national debut in 2018 to be ranked seventh," he says.

Since then Ramgopal makes it a point to balance his professional commitments and attend as many

tournaments he can.

He says most table tennis academies have their classes on the first floor and that was an obstacle for him to practise on a regular basis.

"Ram's Tennis Academy, where I attended for a brief period, would bring the TT table down for me, park it on the parking shed for me to practice," says the Valasaravakkam resident.



LIFY THOMAS

In 2004, when Chennai-based Shakthi Foundation roped in Sachin Tendulkar for a video to promote the need for ramps in all public places, little did Ramgopal D. realise that it would lead him to a door of opportunities in para table tennis.

The short film conceived by Mani Ratnam and directed by Deepak Bhojraj has A.R. Rahman lending music and Shibu Cyril as art director. It was shot at the Nungambakkam Tennis Club, with a small team of wheelchair users from Laser Soft Infosystems Limited (the company was one of the early movers in the industry to hire the physically challenged) as supporting actors, Ramgopal being one of them.

Boniface Prabh, a national para lawn tennis player, was cast as the main actor in the video where he plays against an able-bodied player. "I met him during the shoot and that is when I came to know that there are organised tournaments for wheelchair users," recalls Ramgopal.

The simple, naive Ramgopal, who was then in his late-20s, was new to the city, having faced a lot of rejections from recruiters as he

was wheelchair dependent and companies did not have the infrastructure to welcome the differently abled.

In all these years, Ramgopal has not allowed his disability to define him. His journey is inspiring as he made his debut in competitive paralympics in his mid-40s, managing a busy career as a senior project manager.

Today, he is a promising para table tennis player from the city, who is clearly impressive dealing with challenges on the ping pong court. In the recently-concluded National Open Rotary Para Table Tennis Tournament he came third in class IV category.

For the first time, the 49-year-old software professional also officiated as judge.

Early days

Ramgopal was like any other able-bodied child till the age of four, but got affected by polio due to wrong medication.

He was a sports enthusiast but did not have any exposure and therefore derived happiness from playing gully cricket and watching matches from the stands.

Ramgopal D. receives the certificate from dignitaries at the National Open Rotary Para Table Tennis Tournament; and other participants from the event. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Para TT tournament gets bigger

More than 220 para table tennis players, both men and women from across India, registered for the 3rd season of the National Open Rotary Para Table Tennis Tournament, organised by the Rotary Club of Madras Chenna Patna RI District 3234 on December 14 at the Nehru Indoor Stadium.

This season of Para TT was much bigger event, said a release.

Alex Paul Menon, Development Commissioner, MEPZ Special Economic Zone and N.S. Saravanan, District Governor of RI Dist 3234, were the special guests. Rotary Club of Madras Chenna Patna, under the leadership of presi-

dent Rotarian Karthikeyan and Para TT event chairman Debasish Mohanty ensured participants received the best of facilities that included free train fare with comfortable stay with 100% accessibility, said the release. Each participant received a cash prize of ₹1000 and a certificate. The winner and runners-up received cash prizes of ₹10000 and ₹5000 respectively under each category.

The trophies were awarded to winners along with cash prizes. Table Tennis legend Sharad Kamal gave away the prizes.

Dhinesh D. in the spotlight; with his mother; and some of his works.



A world turned 'upside down'

Impaired vision is a thorn in his flesh, but Dhinesh D. has honed a special skill as an artist that is earning him considerable attention

RAJALAKSHMI V.

Diagnosed with severe myopia in his second grade, Dhinesh D. (now 27) found his world getting blurred. Amidst that engulfing haziness, one thing was however coming into sharp focus – art. In grade 8, he discovered a talent for art. This discovery no doubt brightened his life, but there was the resultant challenge and anxiety of having to make it as an artist.

“Due to my impairment, it was tough to follow lessons in school, especially when teachers used the board,” recalls Dhinesh, who did his schooling at a government-run institution in Thiruvannamalai. “Studying was a constant battle. I could not afford new glasses, so I used the same pair for two or three years, even as my eyesight worsened. Despite all this, I worked hard to secure pass marks.”

And when he was in eighth grade, that transformative moment arrived. “An art teacher joined our school; he was strict and particular about us bringing our art books. I always sat close to the board to co-



py what was written. In his first session, he drew a candle, and I copied it down. He was amazed by my work and encouraged me to keep drawing. That moment changed everything—it was the first time someone recognised my talent,” Dhinesh shares with a mix of gratitude and pride.

Past schooling, Dhinesh arrived in Chennai with the dream of earning a degree in fine arts. When faced with the steep fees, he had to

give up on that dream. Undeterred, he shifted his path and pursued both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Tamil literature, all while nurturing his passion for art. “My dream was to study art, but financial constraints made it impossible,” Dhinesh explains. “I ended up enrolling in B.A. Tamil, hoping I could still learn something from the Visual Communication department. I had no one to guide me, but the Help the Blind Foundation

supported me with a scholarship during my undergraduate years.”

In Loyola College, where he was pursuing collegiate education, he found a platform to showcase his talent, with faculty and peers encouraging him to participate in cultural events and competitions.

A rare skill

It was not long before Dhinesh discovered his unique ability – one that enables him to paint portraits upside down.

Dhinesh's breakthrough came during his hostel day celebration when he was given a ten-minute slot to demonstrate his talent. Painting an upside-down portrait of Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, he captivated the audience. “That moment was pivotal,” he shares. Encouraged by his success, he began actively participating in college events, which also helped him financially.

However, Dhinesh's journey was not without moments of doubt. “There was a time when I decided to stop drawing altogether. I felt stuck,” he admits. But one of his professors intervened, asking him to create a portrait and offering ₹5,000 for the work. “I was hesitant, but he encouraged me, saying it could help me financially. That was the turning point—I began selling my artwork on request, though I have never been business-minded about art.”

Through resilience and talent, Dhinesh transformed challenges

into opportunities.

Currently, Dhinesh works at Amazon AGI-DS as an ML Data Associate, a role he shares with six other visually impaired colleagues. He is among the first seven visually impaired individuals hired by Amazon in Tamil Nadu—a milestone that brings him immense pride. Dhinesh speaks warmly of his job, appreciating the professional support and the encouragement he receives for his artistic pursuits.

“I was invited to the India Inclusion Summit in 2023, held in Bangalore, and it was an unforgettable experience,” he shares. “My mother accompanied me and saw my artwork displayed, which made the moment deeply personal. Being one of the award winners added to its significance. As the sole breadwinner in my family, with both my parents dealing with health issues, their struggles drive me to succeed in my career and my art.”

Dhinesh's latest artistic endeavor is creating textured art that incorporates Braille, enabling visually impaired individuals to experience art through touch. “I recently gifted a piece to a visually impaired coworker. My work often reflects societal issues and celebrates freedom fighters and change-makers. Through my art, I hope to inspire others and prove that having a disability is not a barrier to success.”

Wearing many hats

Dhinesh owns a YouTube channel and an Instagram account under the name Pattampoochi Arts, where he independently creates and shares his content.

Recently, Dhinesh participated in the Margazhi Matram 5th Edition organized by Sciartus, a California-based NGO. In addition to his artistic achievements, he is a national-level cricket player, representing Tamil Nadu in blind cricket. He is currently training to make it to the national team.

Follow @pattampoochi_arts on Instagram and YouTube to witness Dhinesh's inspiring journey through his artwork and content.



SHARON JESSICA MICHAEL

Reviewing a concert that happened five years ago is the equivalent of doing multiple backflips. Supposing that concert has to do with Christmas carol singing, a swan song by a celebrated choir fading into the sunset, the review enters trickier terrain. Emotions and not just notes need capturing.

The 2019 Christmas carol concert at St. Mary's Church in Fort St. George was its famed choir's last gasp. It was probably not officially announced, nothing put down in black and white, but the choristers could see the writing on the wall, as clearly as when each letter is the size of a football.

Jabez Janagaraj, the chief architect and conductor of the choir, John Millns Chorale, had passed on the previous year. It was going to be an emotion-packed concert from the get-go. The quaint little church that has aged well was packed to the wooden rafters. The pews were overflowing with the faithful. The choir had to bring their beloved 'Uncle Jabez' alive in every song they sang. The most memorable performance of the concert had to do with Jingle Bells, uniquely arranged by Jabez.

In addition to the songs that were performed, the audience listened in to one that was not, that evening. The John Millns Chorale had its anthem – an old anthem that Jabez discovered by chance and brought to life recreating it in its "atelier". It was "Bells in the Church Steeple Ringing". It became the choir's signature piece, and Jabez's wife Cheryl Janagaraj recalls how the choir's voices would blend perfectly with the rhythm, filling the St. Mary's Church with something irresistibly haunting.

"When we finally nailed that harmony," Cheryl recalls with a smile, "it was not just about the music. It was the joy of creating something together, of sharing that perfect moment." Jabez had worked on this old composition he literally picked from nowhere, but only when the choir perfected it was the cup of joy full.

The preparation for the annual Christmas concert at St. Mary's church would be on a slow boil but the fires would be stoked regularly. Multiple-part singing

amplified by an orchestra would automatically mean diversity. Diversity usually presupposes various entities drawn from multiple addresses. The choir obviously sported talent not just confined to the church. The John Mills Chorale was famously associated with the orchestra led by Jerry Fernandez. Marshalling resources drawn from various sources takes passion and patience, boxes Jabez ticked.

John Collison, a pianist who was assistant conductor when Jabez was around, and now played the pipe organ at St. Mary's Church, Fort St. George, says: "The John Millns choir is unique to interpretation, tone and balance." Note the present tense, suggesting hope – John Collison remarks that to "continue the legacy of Jabez Janagaraj," the choir should regroup, and he believes it could.

Months of preparation

For those who were part of it, the run-up to the annual Christmas carol service was a time of anticipation, a season unto itself.

Cheryl remembers the excitement that filled the air long before December. John Millns Chorale had a "practice pad", an upper room at a home in Thacker Street, Purasawalkam that was swept into the overall excitement.

"Practices often started in June, but Christmas – Christmas was always the highlight," she said. "There was something about the way the music came together, the way the room felt when we sang, that made everything seem possible."

Massive choral concerts are obviously about teamwork and alignment, but to leave leadership, organisational skills and human resource management out of the picture is to ignore the giant piece in the puzzle. Jabez had these skills, imparted to him in his early years.

Jabez's music journey began on the right note, and kept hitting the right notes as it progressed. It started with piano learning with A. Charles of Thanjavur and J. Dawson of Madras. He then became a student of singing under the teaching and mentorship of Rev. John Millns, a renowned tenor, organist and conductor. He also learnt signing from Marina

Listening with the heart

The John Millns Chorale might have been silent during the carol roll call, but its Yuletide sounds from years ago still resonate with the Christian music cognoscenti. Let us revisit the magical notes that used to fill St. Mary's Church at Fort St. George

Cocali, a gold medalist of the Salzburg Academy and Prima Donna of the Athens Opera. Jabez's training was further enriched with speech lessons under Colin Mortimer, a British Council speech expert. This was as robust a foundation as one can get to raise an edifice of choral music.

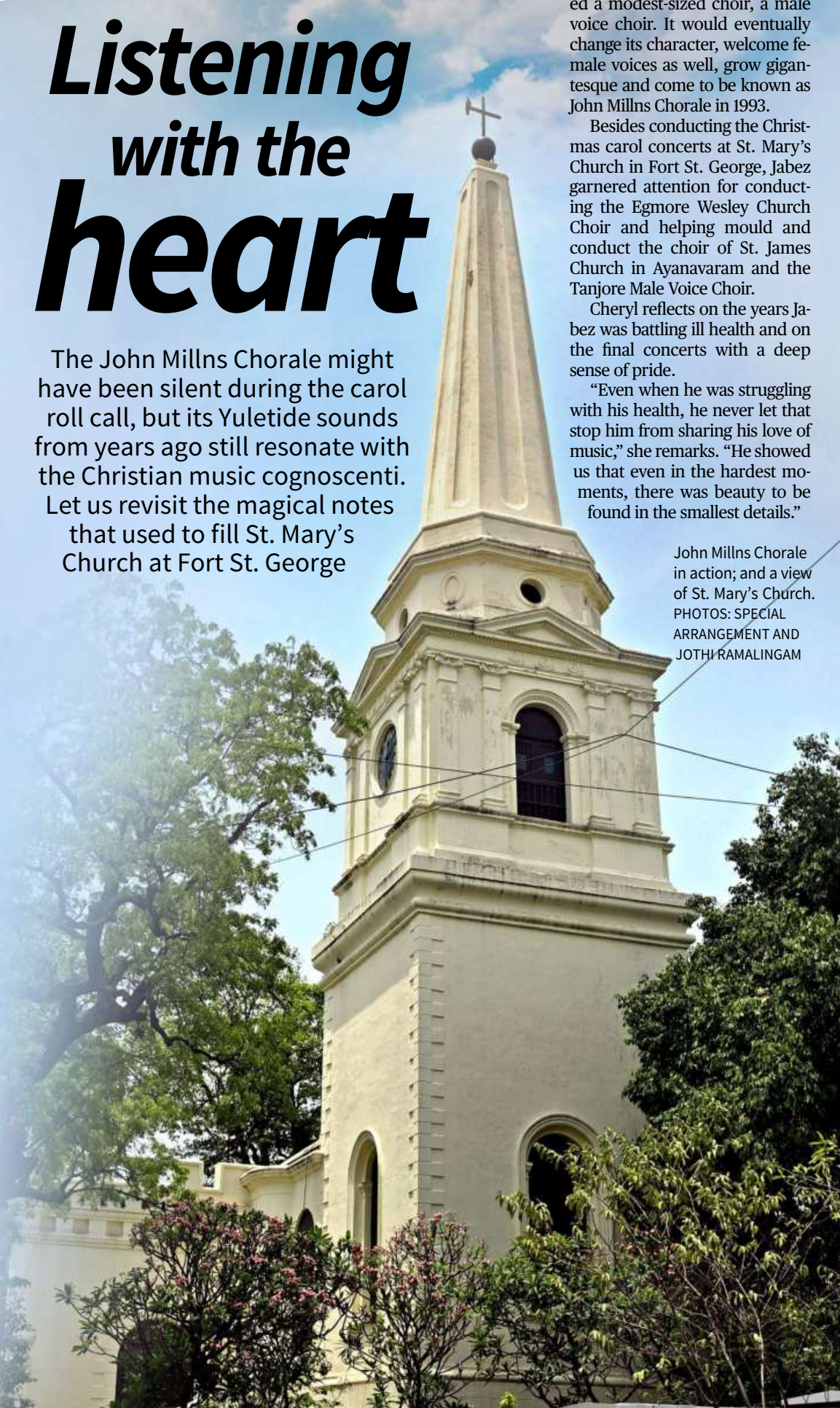
Employed in the Secretariat, Jabez was instrumental in getting Tamil Nadu Government Staff Choir started. In 1968, he founded a modest-sized choir, a male voice choir. It would eventually change its character, welcome female voices as well, grow gigantesque and come to be known as John Millns Chorale in 1993.

Besides conducting the Christmas carol concerts at St. Mary's Church in Fort St. George, Jabez garnered attention for conducting the Egmore Wesley Church Choir and helping mould and conduct the choir of St. James Church in Ayanavaram and the Tanjore Male Voice Choir.

Cheryl reflects on the years Jabez was battling ill health and on the final concerts with a deep sense of pride.

"Even when he was struggling with his health, he never let that stop him from sharing his love of music," she remarks. "He showed us that even in the hardest moments, there was beauty to be found in the smallest details."

John Millns Chorale in action; and a view of St. Mary's Church. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT AND JOTHI RAMALINGAM



V.S. SUKUMAR

‘A residents welfare association in disguise’

Gandhi Nagar Cricket and Sports Club (GNCSC) is entrusted with the beautiful Adyar Riverside Cricket ground in the first ever-model-residential colony built in Madras in early 1950s.

With rules and regulations set in stone, GNCSC is widely acknowledged as being professionally and efficiently run during the course of its existence spanning 70 years.

The Ground forming part of the common areas provided in the original layout that accounted for 332 bungalows is well looked after by GNCSC. It is recognised as a well-maintained playground.

The main objective of GNCSC is to provide residents of Adyar and surrounding areas with amenities for recreation and sports – in fact, we use it purely for sports purposes.

The ground has been entrusted to GNCSC to help it dispense its duties and connected activities. We have undertaken not to use it in any way to cause nuisance, annoyance or inconvenience to the residents in the neighbourhood.

In furtherance of the afore-listed objectives and purposes, GNCSC has functioned truly and honestly over the years.

The ground is maintained in its

original, natural condition and well-protected at any given time for the good use of residents – children and adults of Gandhi Nagar and the areas adjoining the locality.

Cricket coaching and physical fitness training have been provided to 60-80 children every season, who not only learn the game from our coaches, but also participate in matches and tournament, all conducted by GNCSC at the ground. We contribute to their overall growth and success.

Every year, around 50 cricketers form part of our senior cricket team and make good use of the practice facilities, improve their skills, participate in matches and TNCA League. The visiting teams are happy with our facilities and hospitality.

The well maintained walking track around the cricket field has been extensively used by public both in morning and evening. They enjoy the sylvan surroundings and the only remaining lung space of Gandhi Nagar – which offers space, breeze, shade, sunshine and total security, all in one, to walkers, including senior citizens and women.

GNCSC, registered under the



Tamil Nadu Societies Registration Act, 1975 is well and truly a residents' welfare organisation. It is a

non-profit institution.

With the change in times and with the continued commitment

to residents, GNCSC has vision to suitably widen their objectives and to contribute more to the residents in the forthcoming years. We propose to take steady steps in the direction in the days ahead.

The huge challenge faced by GNCSC in recent years has been the monsoon impact. Rains have been longer and extended over nearly three months. After construction of a compound wall by the authorities for the entire length of the riverside boundary and the high river bund behind, the original natural free flow of rainwater from the ground to the river remains severely obstructed. That has led to unprecedentedly high level of ground water in the cricket field, which is indicated by the overflowing of the two shallow wells after a rain. However, GNCSC rises to the occasion in taking appropriate steps from time to time to overcome the situation.

GNCSC will plan to serve the residents welfare in very many new ways in future.

(V.S. Sukumar is a chronicler of Gandhi Nagar history and is associated with GNCSC for a long time, and is currently its president).

▼
A file photo of the Gandhi Nagar cricket ground



Velammal Nexus Group felicitates world carrom champions

In a gesture of appreciation and encouragement, Velammal Nexus Group Correspondent M.V.M. Velmohan felicitated world carrom champions M. Khazima, V. Mithra, and K. Nagajothi for their exceptional achievements on the global stage.

The felicitation ceremony, held recently, highlighted the champions' dedication, perseverance, and remarkable contributions to the sport of carrom, says a press release.

The champions, who have brought immense pride to the nation with their stellar performances, were each awarded a cash prize of ₹50,00,000/- by Velammal Nexus Group, the release notes.



Year-end discounts at footwear store

As the season winds down, Hush Puppies has rolled out an end-of-season sale on select merchandise, offering customers an opportunity to grab high-quality footwear with unbeatable discounts, says a press release.

For a limited time, discounts are being offered on a wide range of Hush Puppies products, from iconic casual shoes to elegant formal options, the release adds.

Visit the Hush Puppies store at Express Avenue Mall to discover the full selection of discounted items, says the release.



KK Nagar resident excels on global stage



Globalart's International Competition conducted recently at Mariot Hotel in Putrajaya, Malaysia drew 350 participants across the globe, including 48 from India.

The theme for the competition was 'I Love my country'. Children in the age group of 4-18 years showcased their creativity through artwork, says a press release.

All 48 Indian students excelled in this competition and won prizes in the various categories.

Alorika Sinha (aged 17) from Chennai and a student of Globalart, KK Nagar was adjudged Champion in Group D (for participants between 13 - 18 years) which is the senior most category in the Competition, says the press release.

The participants were from 17 countries - Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, UAE & USA, the release adds.



IIT Shaastra 2025:

Spotlight Lecture Series to feature 10 eminent speakers

The flagship Spotlight Lecture Series of Shaastra 2025 by the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT), promises to be a feast for intellectual minds.

The Hindu is the media partner for the event.

This year, the series will feature 10 eminent speakers, including Dr. Arokiaswamy Velumani, Founder-CEO of Thyrocare Technologies; Smt. Ruchira Kamboj, former Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations; and Dr. Subir Sachdev, Herchel Smith Professor of Physics at Harvard University, says a press release.

Renowned for its lineup of thought leaders, the Series has previously hosted prominent personalities such as former President Ram Nath Kovind and Kiran Bedi, offering

attendees rare insights into the minds of some of the world's most brilliant thinkers.

Adding to the event's grandeur is the Caterpillar Autonomy Challenge, where robots designed for space exploration will demonstrate their autonomous capabilities and precision picking skills. Additionally, the FedEx SMART Centre, an IIT Madras body, will host the pilot edition of its flagship hackathon, offering students the opportunity to secure summer internships, says the release.

To register for the event, scan the QR code (attached).



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Shops with a new look



When Greater Chennai Corporation had plastic cone dividers installed on the pavement on one side of Besant Nagar Second Avenue, the air has some haziness about it. The effort was aimed at restricting vendors to one part of the pavement so that they leave the rest of it to pedestrians. The shops were assigned numbers. It was understood stools for visitors should be placed behind the plastic cone markers. Beyond that, there were questions. The shops -- some of them, pushcarts -- stayed in a manner that was not pedestrian-friendly. Now, the missing piece has slotted into place with a "metallic clang". Greater Chennai Corporation has lined up metal kiosks that bear a streamlined look, having been designed to occupy as little space as possible. They are expected to replace the existing shops soon. The shop keepers *The Hindu Downtown* spoke to, gave nods of approval to their new shops. The images were taken on December 27, 2024.

PHOTOS: PRINCE FREDERICK



A primer on how to have your apartment painted

In 2024, S&S Sarvam, a gated community, undertook a massive painting project and despite the odds, pulled it off. Other apartment associations seeking to impart a bright new look to their buildings can take a leaf out of their book



B. VIJAYALAKSHMI

The repainting of our nine-year-old apartment complex, S&S Sarvam, on 200-foot Pallavaram-Thorai-pakkam Radial Road was one of the most challenging projects we undertook in 2024. The complex consists of two 14-storey towers, and the project to impart a bright new look to it required considerable time to be spent at the drawing board as well as the field. Windy conditions and intermittent rains caused interruptions to the painting work. But the job was done: here's how we had it done.

The plan took three years to be drawn up in its entirety: we dedicated countless hours to researching, evaluating feasibility, and comparing implementation strategies.

We sought proposals from top painting companies, inviting their teams to inspect our premises and provide quotations. After thorough discussions and multiple evaluation rounds, we finalised one company. We also spoke to their previous clients and visited an apartment recently painted by them to ensure quality.

To oversee the project, we formed a special committee, including both residents and experts from within our community who volunteered to help with implementation and supervision.

One of the major challenges we faced was relocating cars from the stilt and basement areas during jet-washing and painting of

common area walls. Daily schedules and progress updates were shared in the residents' WhatsApp group, which also helped in managing car parking issues effectively.

During Aadi (July-August), strong winds posed difficulties for the painters. Paint spilled onto cars parked near the restaurant in front of our building, prompting us to reschedule painting to early mornings. For over a week, the painting team arrived at dawn to complete the work on sections facing the road.

Despite starting in June, intermittent heavy rains disrupted the project. On rainy days, the team focused on indoor common areas. We covered open-to-sky (OTS) areas with tarpaulin to prevent rain damage, but sudden showers occasionally caught us off guard.

By November, as the project neared completion, we conducted regular inspections and compiled snag lists. The painters addressed all concerns and unfinished tasks. For almost a month, they cleaned paint spillages in all common areas. Finally, on December 1, six months after starting on June 3, the team completed the painting work.

Today, Sarvam stands tall and revitalised, a testament to our dedication and concerted efforts and residents' cooperation.

(B. Vijayalakshmi is Secretary, Sarvam Apartment Owners Welfare Association, S&S Sarvam apartments on 200 Feet Radial Road, Pallikaranai)