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BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

As the construction of an access path on Besant Nagar Beach progresses at a swift pace, questions about its disabled-friendliness looms large.

Recently, members of Disability Rights Alliance (DRA) wanted Greater Chennai Corporation to share the final design drawing.

In September, DRA members met with Regional Deputy Commissioner (South) – GCC and representatives of the architectural firm implementing the project to share their concerns as well as make sure the mistakes that stand out at the Marina Beach access ramp are not repeated.

"At the Marina Beach, the floor level of the ramp is almost equal to the road level. Here, you need to get down by two feet, so we wanted a L-shaped ramp that will run parallel to the road after which the wooden pathway will begin," says Satish Kumar, a member of DRA who was part of the meeting.

Members suggested that sand bags be placed under the wooden pathway to increase the stability of the structure which can happen

Questions over design of access path at Bessie

Disability groups are following this initiative by Greater Chennai Corporation closely and offering the civic body suggestions to make the design better



when sand loosens.

Changes in railing design so as to help people with gripping difficulty; an easily dismantable sea deck that can be moved in the event of cyclone;

wheelchair accessible toilets, storage container for keeping beach wheelchairs, life jacket and mobi mats; and

QR coded multilingual beach "rules" communication board at the road entrance were among suggestions made at the meet.

Although the access ramp at Marina Beach received a lot of positive reviews from across the country, the facility did face many challeng-

es. It suffered partial damage during Cyclone Mandous that hit the city in December 2022 and was out of bounds for the differently-abled. More recently, during the Chennai Air Show, some of the hand railing got damaged.

A GCC official looking after the

Work on the wooden pathway is under way at Besant Nagar beach. This image was taken on October 19. PHOTO : B. VELANKANNI RAJ

project says for some of the recommendations given by disability groups Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) concurrence is required.

"If we deviate from any of the CRZ norms then we need to submit the design proposal again," says the official. Suggestions for a disabled-friendly toilet is not on the sands of the beach, so we can incorporate it. The engineer says they have learnt from past experiences, especially from the ramp at Marina, and the design for Besant Nagar is guided by this knowledge.

"One metre deep (pillar design) and square pavement have been changed from the Marina ramp design," says the official.

Vaishnavi Jayakumar, a member of DRA, asks why design elements they have recommended cannot happen before submitting the CRZ design. "If the key person implementing this can work along with us, that would be ideal," says Vaishnavi.

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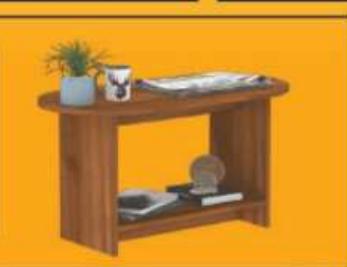
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COMFORT ZONE

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

There is obviously no subspecies called "NIOT pelicans" under *Pelecanus philippensis* (the spot-billed pelican). But NIOT pelicans as a conservation category does exist in the minds of those cheerleading for this squat bird, which began to have Chennai addresses on its calling card a decade and a half ago.

The conducive and safe environment provided by the NIOT campus has contributed in no small measure to the increase in the spot-billed pelican population in Chennai. In terms of conservation, it is a huge success story one displaying no signs of jadedness despite a million tellings. Extraneous factors are brought to bear on the value of a home. Its value is enhanced or diminished by the character of what lies immediate-



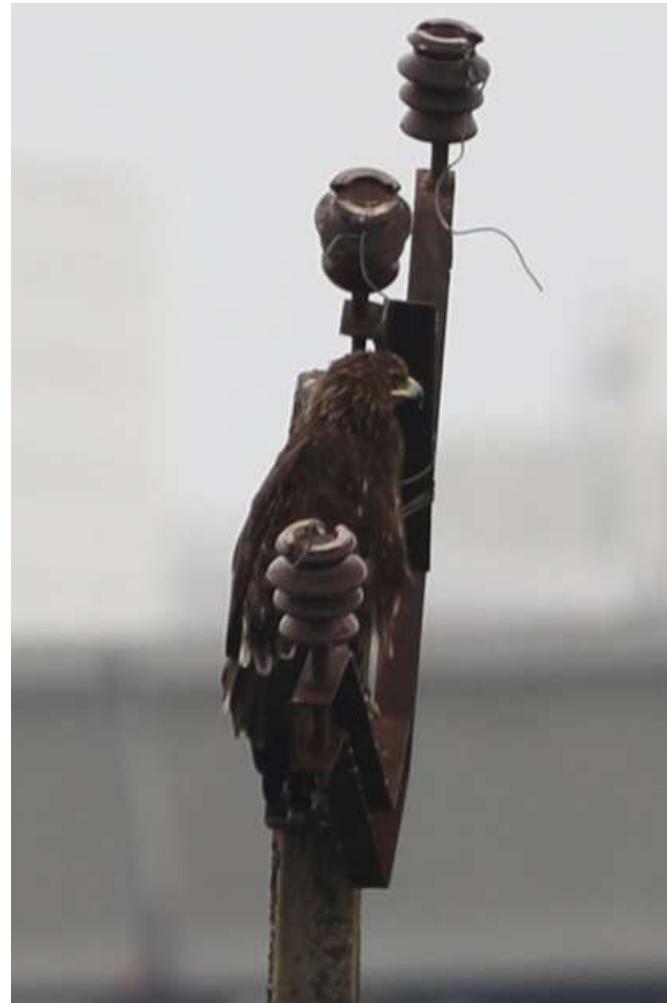
Spot-billed pelicans perched on the pylons and wires at the Pallikaranai marsh, on October 27, 2024. These pelicans can be seen flying from the NIOT campus and settling down on the pylons in the crepuscular hour.

PHOTOS: PRINCE FREDERICK

ly outside its gates. The neighbours, the immediate physical environment and the commerce that allows people to access essentials with ease. The spot-billed pelicans live on the campus, multiplying their numbers by turning the treetops into maternity wards. As the Pallikaranai marsh is cheek by jowl with the campus, the NIOT

pelican parents do not have to cast around for a preschool to prepare the young for the rigours of adult life. The pylons at the Pallikaranai marsh are an equivalent of a sitout. In the crepuscular hour, the pylons are wrapped up in feathers – with spot-billed pelicans taking their place on the iron bars as well as the power wires.

Spotted eagle spotted at Perumbakkam



A greater spotted eagle "owns" an electricity pole at the Perumbakkam wetland on November 2, 2024. The greater spotted eagle is a winter visitor in these parts. In the days to come, the other "poles" will be auctioned off to other winter-visiting raptors, and they will take their rightful places. The osprey is among the raptors that is known to be at ease perched on a power pole. The marsh harrier pitches tent in the Perumbakkam wetland and is not much of a patron of these electricity poles. PHOTO: PRINCE FREDERICK

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

If birding hotspots were to be assigned mascots, the Adyar river bund at Mugaliwakkam, near the military quarters should have the bittern as its mascot. Bittern of any stripe associated with Chennai can fill that role. Sathyakumar Shanmugasundaram, birder and a resident of Mugaliwakkam, notes all bitterns that occur in these parts are sighted at this spot – the black, yellow and cinnamon bitterns. These birds being inveterate skulkers (the black and cinnamon bitterns have skulking down to a fine art) one can have fleeting glimpses of them in flight before they melt back into the reeds, elaborates Sathyakumar.

Sathyakumar paints a picture of the place: this patch is deliciously sequestered. By the side of the bund where birders flock to see feathers, the military quarters is paired with a small patch of re-



Hidden hotspots: spotlight on Adyar bund at Mugaliwakkam

serve forest. Along the opposite bund, on the other side of the river, there is a stretch of reserve forest behind which lies the airport.

In terms of surprise visits, one worth wiring home about, members of the cuculidae family (put

in a plain term, cuckoos) give the members of the botaurinae family (put in another plain term, bitterns) a stiff competition.

"I have seen the grey-bellied cuckoo as well as and the regular hawk cuckoos, which I have large-



A grey-bellied cuckoo; a yellow bittern and a cloak-and-dagger bee at the Adyar river bund in Mugaliwakkam. PHOTOS: SATHYAKUMAR SHANMUGASUNDARAM

ly heard No sight of Eurasian cuckoo," says Sathyakumar.

Sathyakumar's list includes the Indian pitta ("one can surely hear its call"). Sathyakumar remarks that birders have seen the Indian nightjar on the bund – he himself has not as he does not hit the bund at night.

Safety is not an issue on the bund as it is well-hoofed as a walking and to some extent, a jogging track. The bund faces the rear-side of IAS Colony and IPS Colony. Residents of these enclaves hit the bund for walking. The side of the bund bears markings denoting the kilometres – 0.5, 1, 1.5 all the way to 3 kilometre in increments of 0.5 kilometre.



STATUS REPORT

An arboreal fightback in Gandhi Nagar

Give this tree a fighting chance, says a resident

Here is what a resident of Gandhi Nagar shared about a tree, along with images to substantiate his point. With Cyclone Vardah bearing down on it with its gusts, this tree on First Crescent Park Road in Gandhi Nagar leaned dangerously. In no time, the axe was out. Cut down to the ground, the tree however did not want to give up on itself. It regenerated. When toppled trees are being transplanted, it should be less challenging to correct the slanting course of this tree. Rather than helping this brave tree fight back to health, some people have dumped sacks of construction debris on it.



Thoraipakkam resident achieves new feat

Twelve-year-old Lakshay Krishnakumar, a resident of Thoraipakkam, recently completed a 56-km swim expedition from Thalaimannar in Sri Lanka to Rameshwaram to enter the World Book of Records – London. The feat was completed in 22 hours and 25 mins, said a press release.

The child with special needs

started the swimming expedition from Thalaimannar on October 8. He swam past the International Maritime Boundary Line between India and Sri Lanka to reach Dhanushkodi on October 9 at 3.30 p.m.

Lakshay Krishnakumar's accomplishment has been acknowledged by the World Book of Records London, added the release.

Multi-language Kavi Sammelan conducted

Samskrita Bharati, Uttara Tamil Nadu, organised a Kavi Sammelan themed "Vande Valmiki Kokilam", recently at Kokiladhvani, Balakrishna Road, Valmiki Nagar, Thiruvanmiyur.

The kavi sammelan was a vibrant hue of four compositions in Tamil, four in Sanskrit, one each in Bangla, Hindi, Malayalam and Telugu. It saw the coming together of leading scholar-poets proficient in more than two languages - O. R. Devanathan, Mayur, Kale Prashanth, Sridhar Upadhyaya, Sathyaranayana, Sowmianarain, Srinivasan, Iswaryalakshmi, M. Vishvanathan, Dr. Jayaraman, and Vasavi Narayanan. Ananthakalyana Krishnan, from Coimbatore presided over the Kavi Sammelan and presented his poem in Malayalam.

The invocatory prayer, Sri Valmiki Prashasti Ashtakam, composed by the renowned scholar C. S. Radhakrishnan, was rendered by Bhavana. Justice Ramanathan, the chief guest of the day, while praising the organisers for their efforts in planning a poetic evening, congratulated the scholar-poets for their inspiring poetry.

R. Ramachandran welcomed the gathering and stated that it was proposed to conduct such Sahityotsavas every year on Purattasi Pournami which is observed as Valmiki Jayanti, said a press release.

Music event fosters local talent



The MiniTiffin Music Night, organised by the MiniTiffin Community Music Band and hosted by the FOMRAA Performing Arts Club, took place on October 26 at Babaji Vidhyashram School ground in Sholinganallur. This vibrant event showcased local talent and fostered community spirit, bringing together around 22 talented singers and instrumentalists who were auditioned to join the band, says a press release from FOMRAA Performing Arts Club.

With over 2,000 attendees from various communities in and around OMR, the concert was a resounding success, celebrating the love of music. The initiative aims to continue providing heartfelt performances and creating memorable experiences for music lovers, with plans for more events in the future, the release adds.

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Small steps matter

Merike Martsepp from Estonia was drawn to the Theosophical Society for the metaphysical direction it offers, but she is also focussed on enhancing the beauty and health of the campus. A chance meeting with Kiruthiga Udhayanidhi has enabled her to expand her efforts in ridding the campus of rain-induced trash

SHARON JESSICA MICHAEL

While applying herself to understanding the metaphysical truths offered by the Theosophical Society, Merike Martsepp is not inclined in the least to shut herself off from the physical realities surrounding her. From Estonia, Merike visited the Theosophical Society headquarters in Adyar for a one-month stay around New Year. She returned in June 2024 not for another sojourn, but an extended three-year residency. She is open to the possibility of this extended stay evolving into a state of permanency.

On October 22, she was at the centre of a massive clean-up drive at one section of the sprawling Theosophical Society campus.

"This trash was not the result of littering; it was trash that had accumulated on account of the rains in recent weeks, particularly the October 15 downpour caused by a depression," says Merike.

By taking this initiative, she was demonstrating not so much to others as to herself that she has begun to view Chennai as home away from home.

This initiative actually announced itself much before it arrived – by small steps taken by just a pair of feet.

Merike notes she was advised by the doctor to walk one hour a day. While following the doctor's advice and walking in the Park area on a section of the Theosophical Society campus (not far from the Adyar river, particularly the broken bridge)



Merike Martsepp, Kiruthiga Udhayanidhi and some of the other participants in the clean-up drive on October 22.
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Merike came upon garbage, particularly plastic trash.

She added to the doctor's prescription – bags of trash she would collect on these walks, thereby ensuring the health of her immediate environment as well as her own. She would collect the garbage, deposit it in small bags and dump them in bins, carrying those bags herself. The bags increased, but there is a limit to how much ground a pair of feet can cover and how much garbage a pair of hands can pack into the bags, no matter how small. Around the time the limitations of her efforts began to

dawn upon Merike, she had a fortuitous encounter.

Kiruthiga Udhayanidhi, film director and film producer and wife of deputy chief minister of Tamil Nadu Udhayanidhi Stalin, chanced upon Merike's efforts at clearing the trash in the walkers' pathway.

Kiruthiga introduced herself to Merike and put her on to a representative of Cheer NGO with the objective of helping Merike expand her efforts.

That led to the massive clean-up drive, one marked by a train of volunteers pouring in from different quarters. A ballpark figure puts the

hands on the deck at around hundred. With Urbaser Summet (the agency engaged by Greater Chennai Corporation for conservancy operations) and Cheer NGO coming on board, mobilisation of this size was possible. College students, Urbaser Summet conservancy workers and Cheer NGO volunteers made up the chunk of the team that carried out the clean-up.

Merike's passion for environmentalism resonated with her fellow volunteers, creating a sense of community and shared purpose.

Merike plans to take her waste management efforts beyond the

campus. She acknowledges the lack of sufficient waste disposal facilities and is heartened by the presence of small groups in Chennai working towards change. Her approach is grounded in her belief that even small actions can lead to significant improvements, and she remains dedicated to doing what she can, whether that means using biodegradable bags or simply picking up trash during her walks. And as she learnt now, the odd massive clean-up drive will come along at some point, anyway. What matters is the small, continual individual efforts as part of everyday living.

"It is all about taking that first step, no matter how small," she says with a laugh. "And if we can do it with a smile and some laughter, even better."

And as we now know, she has proved the effectiveness of that simple mantra for change.

'Working on a permanent solution'

A representative of Cheer NGO has shared with *The Hindu Downtown* that it plans to "work on a permanent solution with Theosophical Society management and Water Resources Management (which carries out maintenance works pertaining to the Adyar river) to set up trash booms and other equipment on the river to filter the dry waste."

According to the Cheer NGO representative, during the October 22 drive, the trash that was brought in by the rains and was collected predominantly consisted of fish carriers, broken thermocol boxes, liquor bottles, helmets, pet bottles, food packets, saris and other clothes, slippers, bottle caps and tetra packs.

EXTENDED TRAILS

(A column that shows you how to be a tourist in your own city)

Kumizhi lake: as pretty as it gets



Kumizhi lake is deliciously tucked away from the bustle despite being not too far removed from it. It is just a quick roll of the wheels from the Vandalur-Kelmbakkam High Road. And it would take just as much time if one accessed it from GST Road in Guduvancherry. In both instances, one would have to hit Nelliukkampam Road, which winds its way between these arterial roads touching both. In administrative terms, Kumizhi represents nearly a dozen villages where habitations are overlooked by hillocks. For outsiders, specifically the day-trippers, the focus narrows down to what is called the Kumizhi lake. There are two other lake nearby, but this one has a quaint prettiness that is unparalleled. People from various parts of Chennai and even beyond beat a path to this lake during weekends and holidays. On October 31, which was Deepavali day, a bunch of nature-lovers and day-trippers were gathered at the lake. They were residents of Chennai's heartland -- Royapettah, Triplicane and surrounding areas. One striking quality about the lake is that it has been allowed "breathing space". "Beautification" has not reached its door. A restoration exercise by the Government, Ford and EFL has rung in the necessary changes without disturbing the lake soul. A fence that has come up around one side of the lake is a sign of reassurance. For habitues of this spot, little has changed. The lake looks just how it did, five years or a decade ago, except that the restoration has increased its efficiency, its water-holding capacity having been enhanced. Nature does not need cosmetics. It is pretty as it is. The exposed roots of jamun trees, the result of the erosive effect of monsoonal waters, adds to this charm. It is better to have one's own transport as that would enable the day-tripper to reach the patch faster and cover more of the surrounding ground. But if someone swears by public transport, MTC operates 55D from Tambaram to Kumizhi. TEXT AND PHOTOS: PRINCE FREDERICK

Temporary parking on Usman Road bridge to continue

Deputy Commissioner of Police, Traffic — South, says the idea to open up this space for parking was helpful in easing the festival traffic

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

If you managed to shop peacefully in and around Usman Road by leaving your vehicle on the flyover then a share of the credit for this must go to Greater Chennai Traffic Police. For the first time, the traffic department allowed two-and four-wheelers to be parked on one lane of a half-a-kilometre stretch of the bridge thanks to the ongoing construction work on the flyover along South Usman Road and CIT Nagar 1st Main Road.

"This is only a makeshift arrangement as the bridge is currently not in use as work is under way on one side of the bridge. The North Usman Road bridge is going to be linked to Madley junction, and vehicles are not



Vehicles parked at Usman Road Bridge in T. Nagar on October 27.
PHOTOS: VEDHAN M AND B.

VELANKANNI RAJ

plying so we thought of this arrangement to ease the festival traffic," says Bandi Gangadhar, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Traffic - South.

The free parking extended for more than half-a-kilometre



stretch of the bridge and drivers could even take a u-turn to exit. The Department sought permission from both the Highways and Greater Chennai Corporation before opening it up for temporary parking.

"May be next year this arrangement cannot happen as the work on the bridge would be completed, but we are identifying vacant spaces where vehicles can be parked. We are even requesting owners to convert their unused plots into parking zones," says the DCP.

The Department is also working on identifying certain unused GCC lands and those belonging to other government departments that can become parking zones. "This arrangement on the bridge was useful to many people and has eased traffic as well, so we plan to continue this arrangement till the festival season is over, after which there would not be a demand for it," says Gangadhar.

The department's main request to the public is not to misuse the arrangement by overstaying on the bridge. "We have police personnel deployed who are keeping a check on vehicles to ensure they are parked only on the basis of a need," says Gangadhar.

Is Kilambakkam the new Koyambedu?

The bus terminus received a huge number of passengers in the run-up to Deepavali

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Recently, Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority, in a post on X stated that Kalaignar Centenary Bus Terminus (KCBT) in Kilambakkam saw a huge inflow of passengers travelling from Chennai to other districts for Deepavali.

As per the estimates by MTC, more than 5.25 lakh people travelled to their home towns in 8,284 buses from KCBT on the three days preceding Deepavali (October 28 to 30).

These numbers may not be a big surprise, but it holds significance as it officially puts Kilambakkam as the new Koyambedu. Opened in December 2023, this festival season served as litmus test for KCBT as it had an onerous task of proving itself as the new gateway for passengers travelling to the southern districts of Tamil Nadu such as Tiruchy, Kumbakonam and Salem.

This new arrangement has also distributed passenger flow in the



The bus terminus on October 21. PHOTO: M MUTHU GANESH

three bus stands of the city (CMBT in Koyambedu and the Madhavaram bus terminus being the other two, which caters to commuters travelling to west and north respectively).

An MTC official working closely at Kilambakkam terminus says the Deepavali commuter traffic is pro-

mising, and that the department had taken up various measures to cater to the festival rush, most important being pressing more buses into service.

Kilambakkam is the new Koyambedu but with added amenities and features. The fact that buses can be parked inside the spraw-

ling bus terminus is a huge bonus. Within 10 minutes, a bus reaches the bus bay from the parking point," says the official.

To attend to the Deepavali rush, additional parking facilities for long-distance buses was also arranged at Vandalur Zoo and Karangal Sports Ground.

"In Koyambedu, buses are parked near the flower bazaar and Anna Nagar terminus, so there is delay while coming to the bus stand, which is avoided at KCBT thus ensuring there are buses every 10 minutes," says the official.

From buses plying round-the-clock to a host of amenities for passengers, a lot of new features have been initiated at this new facility.

Regular commuters say there is more scope to increase the patronage of TNSTC and MTC buses.

"There must be point-to-point services to Kilambakkam from various destinations in the city. For example, from Anna Nagar to Kilambakkam we need direct MTC services as this will save time," says K. Pandian, a regular commuter who has shared feedback about improving public transport.

There is also a need to implement several new urban infrastructure projects to improve the share of passengers using public transport to reach the terminus. A railway station in Kilambakkam (work on which is under way) will reduce the travel time of commuters dependent on Urapakkam and Vandalur stations.

"There is also a need to ply battery-operated vehicles from GST Road to Kilambakkam bus stand," says Pandian.

Glitz and talent mark ‘Iris Face of Chennai’ event

Two new titles — ‘Iris Face Of Chennai: King’ and ‘Iris Face Of Chennai: Queen’ — were instituted this year

It was an evening of glitz and glamour at the grand finale of the 13th edition of “Iris Face of Chennai”. The annual event seeks to identify complete beauty, talent, personality and positive attitude in young men and women aged between 18 and 28 years.

The event was attended by celebrities and noted personalities from all walks of life. Special guests along with jury members comprising of renowned personalities such as Parvati Nair, actor; Dr Renita Rajan, dermatologist; Sam Paul director and CEO of Paulsons Group of Companies; Upasana RC, model; Dhatsha, costume designer; and Daniel D Studio production house were



Winners along with the special guests during the event. PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

present.

Ramp walk techniques and choreography was lead by Sanjay Kumar Asrani, fashion choreographer, actor and model.

The winners were crowned by actor Parvati Nair, and Vaibhav and Swetha of Naturals Salon.

According to a release, as this is the 25th year of Iris Events, two

new main titles were instituted namely Iris Face Of Chennai - King and Iris Face Of Chennai - Queen.

The winners

Rithiesh - model by profession was crowned as the Iris face of Chennai “King”

Sadhvi Sail - model by profession was crowned as the Iris face

of Chennai “Queen”.

Santra, a BCA student, was crowned as the winner of Miss Iris Face of Chennai 2024

Udith Dharshini was 1st runner up; Sujitha second runner-up; and Ruzaina third runner-up

Prasun Mondal of IIT Madras was crowned as the winner of Mr. Iris Face Of Chennai 2024; Ramsu-

resh L. was 1st runner-up; Hariharan M. second runner-up and Santosh singh third runner-up.

In addition to the main titles, several subtitles were also awarded to deserving participants including Mr & Miss Style Icon, Iris Glam Mr. & Miss Catwalk, Naturals Mr. & Miss Charisma and Slam Mr. & Miss Fitness

Brush with fame



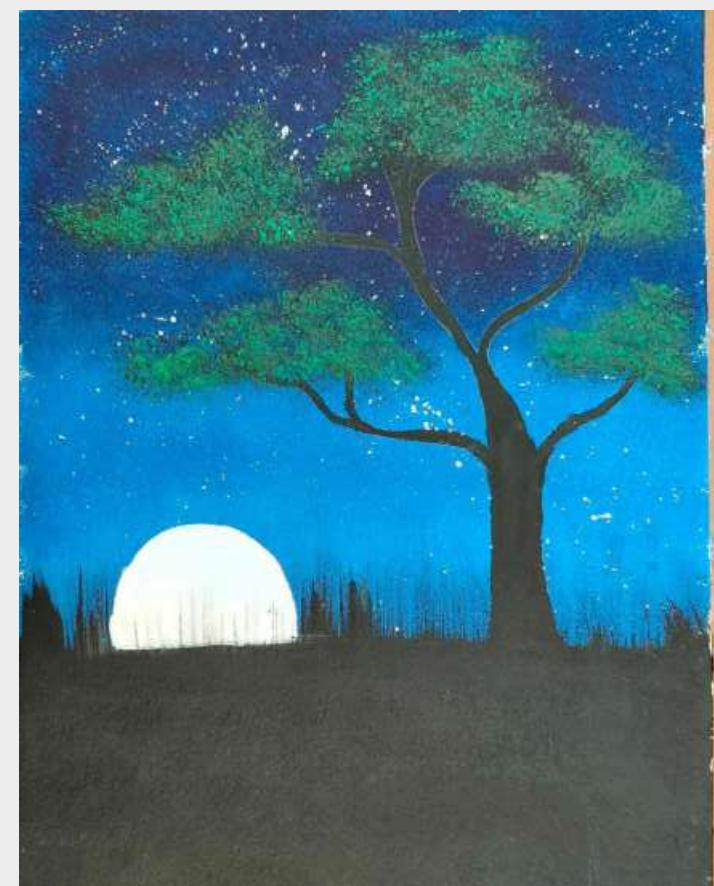
128 artists from 11 special schools showcased their works at the annual exhibition organised by V-Excel Educational Trust



award-winning artist A. Viswam, who applied various oil painting techniques to the canvas and created an illusion of depth and texture, said a press release.

Chief guest Padma Subrahmanyam, who inaugurated the exhibition, expressed her happiness on witnessing the colourful and tranquil creations. She said art is much more than mere aesthetic expression and is a powerful tool for non-verbal communication.

“From painting, sculpting to music and dance, every art form conveys emotions without using words and spreads the message of oneness.” Furthermore, she reiterated “the importance of art



CAPTION

der of Mahisha Studio, appreciated the participant’s artworks and organisers for the success of TATTVA and their contribution to building an inclusive environment for individuals with special needs.

V-Excel Educational Trust is a 23-year-old NGO that offers lifespan services to individuals with special needs, especially those on the autism spectrum and those with intellectual and cognitive challenges.

Aishwarya Manivannan, foun-

Photorealistic paintings and abstract compositions of 128 artists with special needs came alive at ‘Tattva 2024’, a one-day annual exhibition organised by V-Excel Educational Trust.

Conducted at the Alliance Francaise, ‘Nature’ inspired photographs and artworks with vivid hues and brush strokes, and unfolded the pristine glory of Mother Nature and Her five elements.

Participants in the age group of 7 to 40 years, from 11 special schools across Tamil Nadu, showcased their works for this edition.

The event saw a live painting demonstration by national

The picture after Deepavali : pollution, rain and litter



Clockwise from above: A thick layer of smoke engulfed Velachery flyover on November 1; rains lashed many parts of the city on November 2; and conservancy workers clearing the cracker waste lying on a road in Mogappair Eri Scheme. PHOTOS: VELANKANNI RAJ B AND M VEDHAN



Trains for those returning home after festive break

For the convenience of passengers returning to Chennai by buses at the Kilambakkam bus terminus on October 4, the Chennai Division of the Southern Railway is operating additional electrical train services between Kattankulathur and Tambaram. The electrical trains will halt at the Potheri railway station for five minutes.

Between Kattankulathur and Tambaram, the services will be operated at 4, 04.30, 05, 05.45 and 06.20 a.m. It takes around five minutes to arrive by an electric train to Potheri from Kattankulathur.

Between Tambaram and Kattankulathur, the services will be operated at 05.05 and 05.40 a.m..

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