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THE HINDU

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ALL ABOUT KPOP
DEMON HUNTERS P6



Black and white
Chess icon Viswanathan Anand and wife Aruna with their son Akhil Anand. S SHIVARAJ

Sai Akhil Anand, son of chess icon Viswanathan Anand, is gearing up for a solo art exhibition that will feature elements of math and patterns

Meet the Anands

Srinivasa Ramanujam
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Viswanathan Anand hardly has space to play a game of chess inside his house. Art has taken over a bulk of the space at his luxurious residence in Chennai's Kotturpuram. If a painting of lord Hayagriva is located next to a fancy chess board that was gifted to him abroad, a sketch of a tiger is perched right near a chess board made of paper. Anand does not mind at all... because the brain behind these works is his son, Sai Akhil Anand, who is gearing up for his solo exhibition, Morphogenesis. "My house is now 50% art, 50% chess," beams Indian chess legend Viswanathan Anand, "Traditionally, it has always been full of my trophies and newspaper clippings about my achievements. Recently, it has started to fill up with Akhil's budding art journey. I'm happy

to share what art means to the family." The Anands will do more of that in the first week of August when Morphogenesis opens in Chennai. "I do a lot of Indian art like Gond, madhubani, worli and cheriyal and connect it with math patterns," says 14-year-old Akhil about the elements of his show, which has been curated by his teacher Diana Satish.

A numbers game Akhil, currently studying in Class IX at Chennai's Beyond 8, might be the son of a champion synonymous with chess, but it was art that appealed to him from a young age. "I once observed the stripes of a zebra and tiger and noticed its patterns. Ever since, I have been fascinated with patterns." His early works were about people – of popular personalities like Newton, Einstein and Gandhi. This fascination grew into a passion during the COVID lockdown a few years ago. Explains Anand, "With more time in his hands, he (Akhil) got deeper into art. He was deeply inspired by the programmes of David Attenborough that spoke about about patterns and colour in Nature."



WHO IS AKHIL ANAND?

- Trained in art by Diana Satish since he was nine, Akhil, son of chess legend Viswanathan Anand, is fascinated by patterns and uses them in his art works.
- He runs Akhilisms, which strives to make Indian art a giftable and wearable medium. His partnership with Hastha features traditional Indian art forms in a hand block-printed collection.
- He has authored a book titled *The HeART of Math* based on maths patterns in Nature.



To watch the video interview, scan QR code

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 2



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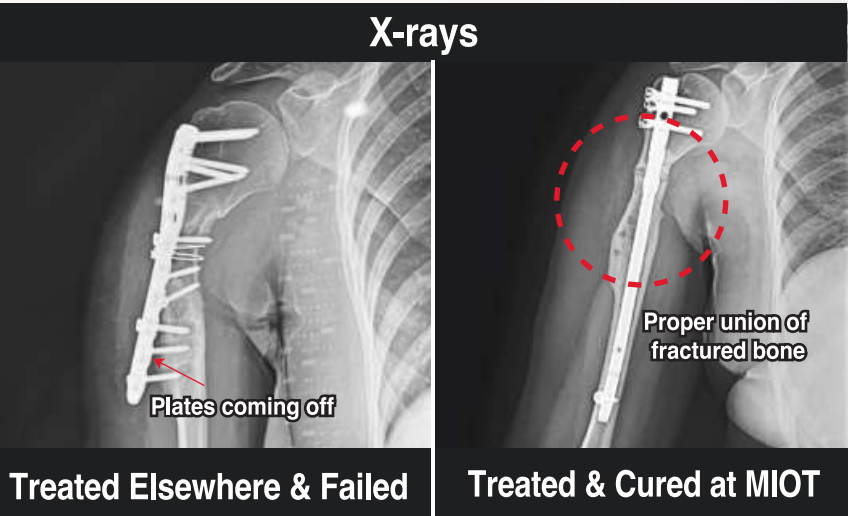
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Meet the Anands

CONTINUED FROM
» PAGE 1

Morphogenesis will feature all that. If the series called the Bindu Bovine involves Akhil’s artistic interpretation of a cow using elements of fractal geometry, the UnBinary series – inspired by the geometric works of Dutch painter Piet Mondrian – features subjects in binary colours. So, what is his personal favourite? Akhil states, “The series on animal superheroes, which talks about a few animals that are endangered and close to extinction.” In that series, close to Akhil’s heart, are sketches on animals like Moo Deng, the hippopotamus from a Thailand zoo that went on to become an Internet sensation, and Tajiri, the giraffe at New York’s Animal Adventure Park, which has become a symbol for giraffe conservation.

The right moves
The Anands – both the chess legend and his wife, Aruna – are cheerleaders for their son’s pursuit of art. Anand recalls, “When I was growing up, my father – who worked in the Railways – had a

more conventional job, which meant strict working hours. He tried to keep up with my passion for chess, and was very supportive. I think it’s the same for me; I try to keep up with Akhil’s artistic pursuits.”
He points out that there are many similarities between chess and art. “In chess, you are forced to sit in front of a board and focus on the job at hand. It’s quite similar in art; you have your tools in front of you, and you need to focus. While technology can help with research, you still need to get back to the job at hand and focus,” he explains.
When they are not discussing chess or art, the Anands indulge in music; English musician Sting and Irish rock band U2 are among their favourites. Anand explains, “For me, it was quite surprising that Akhil ended up liking a lot of music from my teenage days. He is well informed of that time. I have the habit of listening to my favourite song from an album and moving on, but he listens to all of them. But, he is also my gateway into modern music and singers.”
Even as Anand keeps up his duties as a mentor to the current



The queen’s gambit Aruna Anand, Sai Akhil and Viswanathan Anand share a candid moment; (inset) artworks of Akhil. S SHIVARAJ

In chess, you are forced to sit in front of a board and focus on the job at hand. It’s quite similar in art; you have your tools in front of you, and you need to focus

VISWANATHAN ANAND
Chess Grandmaster

crop of rising Indian chess talents, he still plays doting dad at home. Akhil and Anand bond over not just art and music, but also enjoy playing a game of table tennis whenever they find time. And of course, they also play chess. Akhil is yet to win against Anand – but he is currently mastering the hyper accelerated dragon and London System to get one up against the Indian chess legend. He says, “I play a lot of chess, but my dream is to become an environmental lawyer and bring upon awareness about issues like climate change and global warming. I want to fight against plastic and air pollution. My role model is BR Ambedkar, the father of the Constitution of India.”

Morphogenesis is on from August 1 to August 7 at ArtSpace by Kalpadruma, 37, Gopalapuram First Street, Kanakasri Nagar, Gopalapuram.

On the buzzer

The Zifo Open Quiz, formerly the Landmark Quiz, returns to keep its date with Independence Day



Right answer At one of the previous editions of the quiz. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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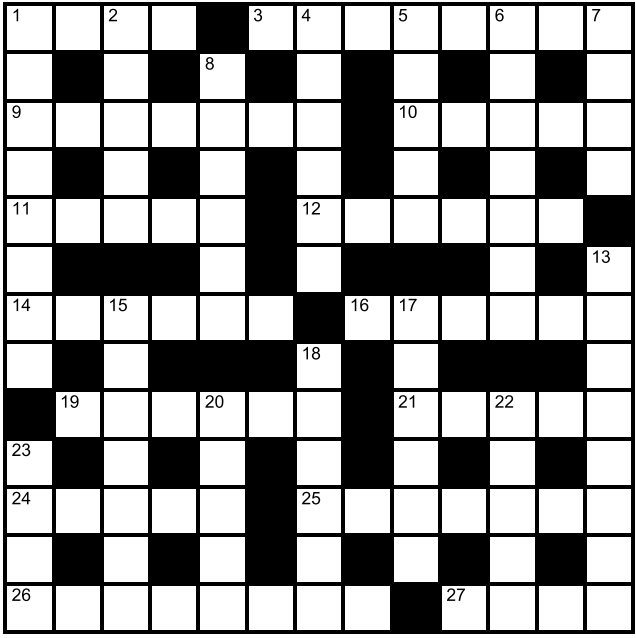
When we speak on the phone, Dr Navin Jayakumar, ophthalmologist and quizmaster, is sifting through hundreds of questions, carefully choosing those that he will ask the gladiators of knowledge who will gather on August 15 for what is arguably Chennai’s most well-known quiz. “Chennai has a magnificent tradition of quizzing on Independence Day,” he says, adding, “From 1994 to 2020 the Landmark Quiz was an event enjoyed by school children, corporates, college students and senior citizens. The quiz was reborn as the Zifo Open Quiz two editions ago, with the city’s own global scientific informatics leader thrilled to reignite the curiosity. Now, everyone knows what the afternoon of August 15 is meant for.”
The journey of the Zifo Open Quiz 2025 kicked off in June with a school round for classes IX-XII. “This allowed a large number of schools to participate among themselves. After the preliminary round, the top two to three teams from each school were chosen based on their scores. They will compete for the best school team and can participate in the general round too. Earlier the top eight made it to the final but now we choose six and for the other two slots hold a semifinal as a qualifier,” says Dr Navin, who has been the

quizmaster except for two breaks in between.

Prizes galore
With its popularity growing over the years, the annual quiz now draws nearly 2,000 participants who battle for top honours and prizes worth ₹5 lakh, putting their omnivorous reading to good use. Prizes are also awarded for best team name, school and college teams, corporate team, senior citizen team and family team apart from audience prizes.
Initially held at the Narada Gana Sabha hall, the contestants now fill the Music Academy from end to end. To cater to participants from Berlin, London, Dubai and Indian cities, the organisers have a concierge service where participants can drop off their luggage.
“The quiz idea was always about getting everyone interested and watching it. So the questions have an element of deductive logic and are a mix of the usual science, history, geography and pop culture with content on both India and abroad. It’s like working out a crossword puzzle,” says Dr Navin, adding that the old-fashioned questions, such as capitals and currencies but asked with a twist, are still the most popular.

The Zifo Open Quiz 2025 will be held on August 15, 1.15pm at the Music Academy. For details and registration look up zifoopenquiz.com or call 8754569948.

METROPLUS QUICK CROSSWORD #14 (Set by Doppelganger)



- Across**
1 A chaise longue (4)
3 Organisations providing specific services (8)
9 Federal republic with 50 states (7)
10 Undergo a chemical reaction (5)
11 In bridge a card that will not take a trick (5)
12 Relating to a cultural tradition (6)
14 Jahangir Khan’s game (6)
16 Something that is easy to do is a _____ (6)
19 Being the second mentioned of two (6)
21 Jenga game has a _____ of wooden blocks (5)
24 Annually recurring periods (5)
25 Take off (7)
26 This hour is the latest possible time (8)
27 Assam, Ceylon, Darjeeling or Earl Grey (4)
Down
1 Mercury is the _____ planet in our solar system (8)
2 Supplies (5)
4 These can be sour! (6)
5 The pole above for Indians (5)
6 Song by John Lennon (7)

To play The Guardian Quick Crossword, The Hindu Cryptic crossword, Sudoku & other puzzles online, scan the QR code.
- Solution No. 14**
- | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| S | R | V | S | L | R | C | R | | | | | |
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Prajwal Parajuly

As accusations go, this is one I am not particularly ashamed of: readers say I am far too positive about Chennai in this column. They point out that, like a gleeful part-time resident who absconds just when the temperatures become unbearable, I choose to focus only on the food, festivals and the finer things. They do have a point. My column has been insufferably upbeat. Chennai, like every city, has its share of issues. Readers have demanded that I talk about them in the same vein as I do the chutneys at Murugan Idli.
To embrace Chennai living further, I have eschewed the Madras Club for a weekend rental at one of the four Seaward Roads. My flat is part of a charming two-storied house on a tree-lined street. Some days Pagir, a community art space that’s housed in the building, hosts rehearsals in the living room, and I wake up to the sounds of thumping feet and singing conches. My place is a short jaunt to the beach, which I seldom take advantage of. Valmiki Nagar is a cute neighbourhood – mom-and-pop shops still thrive, the idli places are inviting, and the four Seaward Roads are somewhat walkable. Not all houses have been torn down, and the community WhatsApp group is a delight as long as you stay away from arguments about stray dogs. Now that I have a little slice of Chennai to call my own, I have unearthed a set of somewhat-first-world irritations with this city I mostly adore. It begins the minute I get off the plane.
My biggest problem with Chennai is its airport.
Back when I was a starry-eyed teenager in America, I often wondered if airports in India would ever catch up with those in the West. Here we are, though, a



SOUTHERN LIVING

10 things I hate about you

Even a staunch Chennai ally like Prajwal Parajuly has to contend with its airport’s packed golf cars and chaotic cab drivers. But, he thrives in its unforgiving weather

mere two decades later, smug about our world-class terminals in Bengaluru and Delhi and Mumbai being better than almost anything in America. The Chennai airport, unfortunately, is where your confidence in Indian airports goes to die. The international wing is dated, ugly and abysmally connected. We do have a direct flight to London, unlike Kolkata, but that does not negate the fact that our airport is far inferior infrastructurally. When Kolkata is outdoing you in terms of development, you know you’re not just woefully behind but doing something completely wrong.
If that’s the international

terminal, the domestic would look ancient in 1980s Delhi. In what metro – nay, in what city – is it acceptable to join a mile-long line after you have retrieved your luggage so a wobbly golf cart can haul you to a carpark that’s only slightly farther than Sri Lanka? What pinches harder is that the neighbourhood is populated with exemplary airports. Hyderabad has the most efficient airport I have encountered in the country. And the Bengaluru airport is, of course, the Leela Palace meets the Arashiyama Bamboo Forest meets the Eden Project.
Ah! Bengaluru. Chennaiites will never admit it, but

Bengaluru is a city they view with a mix of envy and schadenfreude. A Chennai-verses-Bengaluru argument always results in platitudes about our having the beach so what if they have the weather. We are safer and less polluted but also less diverse. Sure, Bengaluru outperforms us when it comes to restaurants and pubs, but it is also worse in terms of traffic congestion and pollution. Our rival definitely trumps us in matters of tree cover and pedestrian-friendliness. We are becoming greener than before, but Bengaluru far surpasses us in walkability. I cannot even sugarcoat this: Chennai is the worst city for

pedestrians in the country.
When you can’t use walking as transportation, you are forced to drive or get driven everywhere. The drawback, though, is that Chennai Ubers are the least professional I have seen in the country. The waiting times are awful (more awful than anywhere else in India), and the cancellations are rampant (more frequent than anywhere else in India). I have come to the sad conclusion that Uber works better in Tier Two cities than it does here. I should, of course, try the city’s bus network, which I have been told is superb. Superb is what I’d describe my rather youthful foray into Rapido as. I hope it doesn’t go the way of Uber, whose shenanigans here, more than anywhere else, continue to shock me.
Only in Chennai have I been confronted with a phenomenon where the driver asks that I cancel my Uber as soon as I get in the car. The idea is for me to pay him the same amount the app would charge me and for him to avoid paying the Uber commission. Now, I am all for any deviousness that involves sticking it to a gazillion-dollar conglomerate, but imagine being asked to participate in this song-and-dance when you’re already late for your flight? It doesn’t help nerves that said flight is from the Chennai airport.
So, yes, dear readers, I do have complaints about this city I love: the lacklustre airport, the lack of walkability and Uber’s lackadaisical service. Not the weather? you marvel. It’s a humid city. So what? Suck it up and eat an ice-cream.

Prajwal Parajuly is the author of The Gurkha’s Daughter and Land Where I Flee. He loves idli, loathes naan, and is indifferent to coffee. He teaches Creative Writing at Krea University and oscillates between New York City and Sri City.



Threads and traditions

The 14th edition of Vastra Utsav, the annual textile and craft exhibition presented by Friends of Dakshinachitra, is a celebration of India's rich handloom traditions and the artisans. Initially, the event was conceived as a fundraiser for Dakshinachitra. Today, the exhibition continues to showcase both traditional techniques and contemporary expressions in handwoven textiles and artisanal fashion. Visitors can expect a curated selection of sarees, fabrics, apparel, jewellery, and accessories from across the country. Exhibitors include Palam Silks and Kumudhini Silks with their Kanchipuram and patola sarees, as well as The NOMI from Assam and TANTUBI from West Bengal, known for sustainable clothing and regional jewellery. Also participating, are Mayuri by Thangam Mathai, Vishal, Jade & Jewels, Ruchi Agarwal, and Paramount Retail, bringing a mix of linen fabric, handloom garments, and designer jewellery. In addition to established names, the exhibition features a diverse line-up of artisanal labels from across India, offering weaving and printing techniques unique to their regions.

@Mayor Ramanathan Chettiar
Centre, Santhome. On August 1 and 2, 10am to 8pm. Entry is free.



a tribute to enduring connections and the power of art to bring people together.
@Lalitkala Akademi, Egmore. From August 1-7, between 11am to 7pm.

Shared roots on canvas

Connect 98 is an alumni art exhibition that reunites the 1998-2002 batch of the Government College of Fine Arts, Chennai. With the attempt to create, curate and celebrate, the exhibition is a celebration of friendship, memories and creative journeys of the several artists over a period of 23 years. The show reflects on shared roots and is



Beyond the shoreline

Join the Marine Explorers – Gulf of Mannar programme for a journey into marine biodiversity. Organised by NatureED, this youth camp includes snorkeling, kayaking, kitesurfing, mangrove walks, birdwatching, and sessions on navigation, survival skills, and marine conservation. Participants will engage directly with coral reefs, seagrass meadows, and coastal ecosystems through guided, hands-on activities.

From October 1 to 5 with shared accommodation. For ages 12 to 17. Departure and return from Chennai Egmore station. For details, call 8056108916.

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Dass Community Hall, No.55, Opp. Maris Hotel - 600086

Egmore:

Guild Of Service, 18, Casa Major Road - 600008

Anna Nagar:

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ALL ARE WELCOME



When wellness is the focus

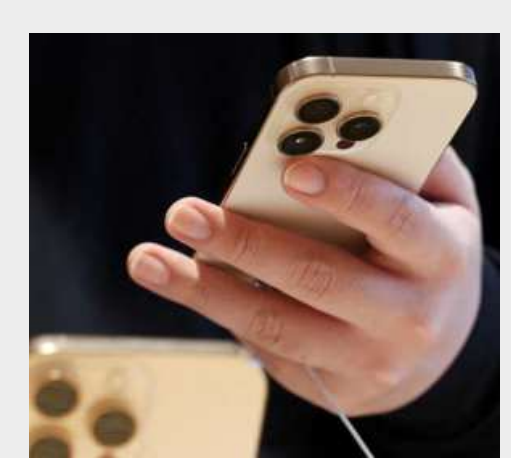
Wellness could be relegated to being a buzzword today, but that does not negate the priority that it must take up in our lives. The 10th edition of the Radiant Wellness Conclave, curated by Dr Renuka David, a doctor who has worked on healthcare for women and young adults, will be held on August 9.

The theme this year is Nine Dimensions of Wellness in an Era of Disruption, with particular focus on holistic well-being across physical, emotional, financial, environmental, and societal verticals. Besides the conversations with a host of erudite speakers, the Radiant Lifetime Achievement Award will be received by actor Shabana Azmi this year. Other achievers in the space of technology, healthcare, and environment will also receive the T.H.E. Awards.

“In a world that is evolving rapidly and often unpredictably, we need to redefine wellness as something that goes beyond individual health. Through this year's edition and the T.H.E. Awards, we hope to not just inspire personal transformation but also celebrate those who are creating large-scale impact in society,” says Dr Renuka.

This year's line-up of speakers features: Dr Renuka David; Colonel David Devasahayam; author and Chairperson, The Hindu Group, Nirmala Lakshman; journalist Barkha Dutt; actor Boman Irani; entrepreneur Josh Foulger; educator Padmini Sambasivam; actor Shabana Azmi; Member of Parliament Shashi Tharoor; finance expert Shyam Sekar; sociologist and politician Dr Sowmiya Anbumani; and cardiovascular and thoracic surgeon Dr Shiram Madhav Nene.

Radiant Wellness Conclave is on August 9 at Taj Coromandel, Nungambakkam. The event begins at 9am. Registration is free. Sign up at radiantwellnessconclave.com. For details, call 8428000001.



Picture perfect

Join a free photography session for beginners and enthusiasts who want to take better pictures. In this 90-minute live workshop, Deepak Subramanian from Box Photo Academy walks you through a three-stage path to move from beginner to confident photographer. If you enjoy clicking photos on your phone, you will also pick up a few simple tips to instantly improve your shots. Pre-registration is mandatory.

@Aura Studio, T Nagar. On August 3 with two sessions at 9.45am and 12.30pm. For registration, call 9884424532.

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A

S Poorvaia
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A cat in a kimono, its face lit up with glee, and brandishing a pair of chopsticks over a giant bowl of ramen, stares down at us in Double Dashi, Chennai’s newest noodle joint. Seated in a room bathed in a luminous neon red haze, we spot a fish cake, chopsticks and an exaggerated bamboo sushi rolling mat on the ceiling. The wall beside us is plastered with posters of every Japanese anime you’ve heard of, as well as posters of Rajinikanth, who has a cult following in Japan.

Japanese restaurants that offer a fine-dining experience are many in the city. However, Double Dashi’s postered walls and neon lights scream an entirely different vibe. “Our idea was to create a ‘rowdy’ Japanese restaurant here; not someplace where everyone comes in for early dinner and behaves well. We wanted loud chatter and laughter, glasses clinking, a chill vibe and everything else that feels like an Izakaya,” says Manoj Padmanabhan, co-founder BORN (Beyond Ordinary Restaurants and Nosh).

Crediting his many visits to Japan over the years and his family there, Manoj and Japtej Ahluwalia, his partner at BORN began to think of putting together an affordable Japanese dining experience, with good ingredients and generous portion sizes. ‘Dashi’ means a broth that enhances the umami flavour in Japanese food and naming it Double Dashi feels fair, given its location, of which there is not much secrecy but some intrigue.

“We aren’t hidden per se, but decided not to actively put ourselves out there on Google Maps. We would love for people to simply land up here, or stumble upon the place,” Japtej laughs.

The beverage menu has two Japanese favourites; Yakult and matcha and we pick probiotics over grass. The bubble trouble, a lychee flavoured icy drink comes topped with a bottle of Yakult and is light and refreshing. There are other inventive mocktails including fruity drinks topped with cheese foam, and iced teas.

There is no sushi on the menu. Instead, there is sashimi (fish flown in from Mumbai), ramen and fresh salads. We begin with a leafy, crisp Tokyo



Send noodles

At just-launched Japanese restaurant Double Dashi, a speakeasy-style noodle bar, revel in steaming hot bowls of ramen, yakult slushies and Rajinikanth posters

green salad, perfect if you want a light, healthy start minus a creamy dressing. We move onto the yakitori or grilled skewers, which Manoj says are made on a traditional charcoal stove. We sample some bite-sized juicy pieces of chicken coated in a slightly sweet soy glaze which is cooked to perfection, and a crunchy miso broccoli which could have done with a bolder kick of flavour.

If you are not a spice fiend, the Temaki tacos are a perfect pick. Try the mildly seasoned salmon aburi taco where crisp seaweed is stuffed with salmon,

avocado and a yuzu kosho cream. The pièce de résistance for our meal is the katsu curry rice. This generous portion that can comfortably serve two comes with crisp fried chicken cutlets on a bed of sticky rice and Double Dashi’s house Japanese curry. You can eat this as is, or enhance it with a generous splash of soy sauce or a sprinkling of togarashi powder from the many condiments on your table.

The menu has both comforting ramen favourites,

It’s gyoza time (Clockwise from left) Ramen; a view of Double Dashi; and Temaki tacos. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



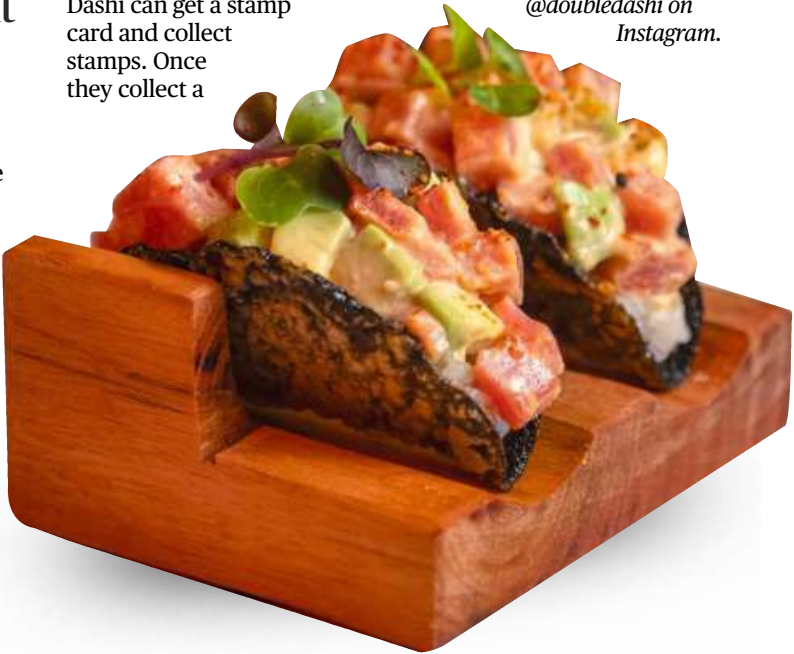
and some offbeat options like a Madras paaya ramen, which is a fun take on local idiappam. Try the creamy pork broth, and the hearty beef drip ramen, which arrive steaming hot to our table with a generous squiggle of bouncy noodles and delicate slices of meat.

In-between bites of a miso caramel cheesecake, we realise that the posters on the wall are not just of anime; there are Japanese posters of *Muthu*, *Kaithi* and even *Thug Life*. Manoj and Japtej credit their ‘Gen Z’ marketing team for Double Dashi’s quirky branding and art that is splashed across their menus, coasters, stickers on the tables and even the specially designed merchandise. “We also plan to introduce a supper club, where regulars who visit Double Dashi can get a stamp card and collect stamps. Once they collect a

certain number, they will have access to these curated dinners and pop-ups where we hope to have chefs from other restaurants coming in,” Japtej says.

For now, as the world continues to travel in hordes to East Asia, and simply can’t seem to get enough of anime or steaming hot bowls of ramen, Double Dashi seems to know its niche very well. Their early guests include not just people from the Japanese Consulate down the road, but members of an anime club from the city as well. Manoj says “We had fun creating the space, and it is now upto our young diners to make the space their own.”

For reservations, DM @doubledashi on Instagram.



An ode to the Lion City



Sowmiya Venkatesan curates a menu showcasing her South Indian roots and years spent exploring Singapore’s dynamic food landscape

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“Cooking for me has always been an amalgamation of a lot of cuisines. Many different food techniques which always intrigued me,” says Singapore-based Chef Sowmiya Venkatesan who will be bringing A Taste of Singapore to Sky Curated Asian Dining at The Residency Towers as a part of Singa60. Organised by *Hindu Tamil Thisai* in collaboration with *The Hindu* and *Business Line*, Singa60 offers a rich tapestry of events showcasing vibrant partnerships between



start-up which empowers farmers.

Sowmiya will be curating a menu that showcases an amalgamation of cultures – an approach shaped by her South Indian roots and years spent exploring Singapore’s dynamic food landscape.

“Quite often, people think that Singapore is perhaps just Chinese cuisine or Malay cuisine. That is something that we want to debunk through the menu. We want to showcase how the Singapore food scape is actually shaped by generations of Indian, Malay, Chinese, Peranakan and Eurasian communities. We want to celebrate the migration, the adaptation, the different communities,” says Sowmiya.

To celebrate the Eurasian side of Singaporean cuisine they have a Prawn Bastador – its name drawn from the Portuguese Creole word for ‘slap’. “Made with prawns in a red chilli paste, slapped with green chillies that we are serving in a sandwich, which is how it was originally served, back then.” Sowmiya explains how Singapore, a melting pot of diverse ethnicities, is home to the same dish prepared differently by

various communities. “The Rojak, which is a salad, will have an Indian version as well as a Malay version. For the menu, we are doing an Indian Rojak – a street salad of crisp fritters tossed in a tangy tamarind-jaggery dressing with potatoes, cucumbers, and onions.”

Then there are dishes like the Chinese Chwee Kueh with Mushrooms – a Teochew breakfast classic of steamed rice cakes topped with sambal and caramelised mushrooms, and the Malay Epok Epok, also known as curry puffs – golden pastry pockets filled with curried potato and egg, a Malay take on the samosa shaped with Eurasian finesse.

“The menu will have a unique perspective because Sowmiya is someone who has a good understanding of both Indian and Singaporean cuisine. We can also see a similarity between the two cultures in terms of the ingredients that are used in both cuisines It is the bridging of two cultures,” says Chef Ajeeth Janardhanan, culinary director, The Residency Group of Hotels.

The ala carte menu is available from August 1 to 10. It is priced at ₹2,500 plus tax per person. For details, call 7010123000.





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Surf's up

With over 150 world-class surfers from 20 countries participating, Mamallapuram will host the ASF Asian Surfing Championships 2025 from August 3 to 12



Riding the wave Surfers practice at Mamallapuram ahead of the championships. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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Have you ever watched in awe as surfers, graceful and agile, take on the waves at the Coromandel coast? Chennai's many surf schools, at any given

point of time, have a clutch of newbies trying to master the basics of this surface water sport alongside skilled athletes who have won laurels over the last decade.

As fascination for this sport continues to grow, the sandy shores of Mamallapuram that has nurtured this surfing revolution, is all set to host the ASF (Asian Surfing Federation)

Asian Surfing Championships 2025 from August 3 to 12. Supported by the Government of Tamil Nadu, the Department of Youth Welfare and Sports Development, and the Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu (SDAT), over 150 surfers from 20 Asian countries will converge in Mamallapuram. "This is the first time that India will host the Asian Surfing Championships and it is a historic event for us. This is the final qualifier for the 2026 Asian Games. The last two championships were held in the Maldives. This year, we were up against Japan to host the event," says Arun Vasu,

president, Surfing Federation of India. Mamallapuram, he says, proved to be the ideal destination for the event given how consistent the waves are. It is also an accessible the place is for travel, accommodation, and other logistics for athletes from across the world. "For the last decade or so, we have been promoting Tamil Nadu as a surfing destination. This is going to be a fantastic opportunity for the surfing community here to see world-class athletes in action," Arun adds. Team India, which was put together after a rigorous selection process has eight athletes from Tamil Nadu part of the larger 12 team members.

Surfers from the 20 participating teams will compete in the Open Men, Open Women, Under 18 Boys and Under 18 Girls categories. For now, all hopes are pinned on good weather persisting throughout the competitions. "Anyone can come in and watch; they can just go down to the beach right in front of the Shore temple" Arun says. The ASF Asian Surfing Championships 2025 will take place from August 3 to 12 in Mamallapuram. For details, log onto surfingfederationofindia.org.



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The singing superheroes

The makers of recent animated musical fantasy flick *Kpop Demon Hunters* chat about representing Korean culture on screen

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Weeks after the release of Netflix's most-watched original animated film of all time, *Kpop Demon Hunters*, people still can't seem to be able to stop dancing and singing to 'Soda Pop', 'Golden' or 'Your Idol'. This week, four songs from this American animated musical-fantasy film have made it to the top 10 of the Billboard Global Music Chart, even as fan theories continue about whether the film will get a sequel.

The film follows the lives of a fictional K-pop girl group Huntr/x, who belong to a long legacy of female demon hunters, tasked with keeping a magic barrier strengthened through their singing, which seals demons from stealing souls of people and feeding it to their demon overlord. It

isn't long before they face hurdles in the form of the Saja Boys, demons disguised as a preppy boy band. Since the movie's release, the girls have gone on to become superhero inspirations and fashion icons.

For directors Maggie Kang and Chris Appelhans from Sony Pictures Animation who co-wrote and co-directed the film, the film's global success has been exhilarating. "At the core, it's a story about people trying to find love and acceptance in the world, despite their imperfections," Chris says, of the film resonating with audiences across the world.

Global themes
The challenge for Maggie and Chris, was in creating main characters who were believable as real Kpop stars, and as real people. "A lot of work went into

creating their musical identities, casting vocal talent, unique choreo, and of course, writing great songs. But it was just as important to develop them as humans... their friendship, their fears, their favourite snacks and pajama pants," says Chris, of Zoey, Mira and Rumi, the three main protagonists.

"We've both wanted to see more relatable female characters, ones that are messy, act silly, make stupid faces, and we thought it would be especially refreshing to see that in the superhero space. It felt like a new take on the female superhero," says Maggie.



The team spent a considerable amount of time getting the casting right. Arden Cho who voices Rumi and Ahn Hyo-Seop who voices Jinu in particular, Chris says, had to balance a lot in their characters. "It took many hours and many recording sessions to find that balance, but they were both determined to nail it," Chris recalls.

Since its release, the film has garnered much praise for its referencing of Korean culture, mythology, and even how real locations in Seoul made for stunning animated frames. Maggie, who was born in Korea and brought up in Canada, says they travelled to South Korea to research locations. "You can't feel the energy of a city from photos. You can only get that by being in it and I think that trip really helped us capture details of our locations – the narrow alleys of Bukcheon Hanok Village, and the

nature and beauty of Jeju Island," she says.

Maggie adds, "I grew up in Canada during a time when Korea wasn't really known. That was kind of the norm for years for me... Korea being this insignificant country between powerhouses China and Japan. So to see Korean culture embraced and loved globally... it's unbelievable," Maggie says.

Chris too has a Korean connection – his wife is Korean-American. "We had an incredible crew with many Korean members who brought their personal experiences that added so much depth."

Movies centered around music are now truly having a moment in the spotlight. So what does it take to get that perfect soundtrack for a film where everything hinges on the music? "Every song has a different vibe and a different kind of message and I honestly think that's what makes the soundtrack so exciting."

Join the tribe

Learn more about the Cholanaikan tribe in Kerala through Unnikrishnan Avala's latest feature

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Unnikrishnan Avala has been nothing less than a spokesperson for the tribal population, be it through his documentary *The Last Page*, his book *Vipareetham* or his feature film directorial debut, *Udalaazham*. The writer-filmmaker's latest work, *Thanthapperu – Life of a Phallus*, breaks new ground – it features the Cholanaikan community, Asia's only cave-dwellers, with over a dozen members acting in the film. The movie is in their language, a unique blend of Kannada, Tamil, and Telugu.

This indigenous group lives in Karimpuzha sanctuary in different caves, 45 kilometres from Nilambur in Malappuram district. "Less than 200 members are in the tribe now. They were one of the three tribes featured in my documentary, *The Last Page*, 15 years ago, the other two being Aalar and Aranadan tribes."

Among those who helped him

bond with the tribe were members of the community such as Vinod Chellan, the co-scriptwriter of the movie, Bellakkariyan Maneesh, the film's protagonist, and Vinayan Karimbuzha, one of the actors.

A significant aspect of the film is that it has to be understood against the context of the 50th year of the Emergency (1975-77) this year, and one of the controversial chapters of the period – the sterilisation programme.

Thanthapperu, he says, shows how this chapter in history continues to impact a tribal community. "Even though vasectomy was not carried out among the Cholanaikans, I have placed my story in that community because, like many other tribes, they have fewer females compared to males. As they cannot marry people from another tribe, there are many unmarried men. This real-life fact is given a fictional touch in *Thanthapperu*," adds Unnikrishnan, who says that it took six years to complete the film, which will do its rounds in the festival circuit soon.



Jungle tales
Poochakkaran Mani and Chincini Bhamini in a still. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



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