



metro PLUS

THE HINDU

We go on an iftar trail in search of the best Ramzan snacks and feasts in Chennai P4

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Chennai is boring," announces Karun B as we try to find a somewhat quiet corner at Cafe Manana on March 9. It is 2.30 on a Sunday afternoon and Chennai seems especially hot. Yet, the sweat hardly impairs the vibe at this cafe in Anna Nagar which is hosting the second edition of its coffee shop rave. DJ Karun Mahtani is playing Peggy Gou's 'Nanana' and a crowd has gathered around the makeshift DJ console set up next to the coffee shop's immaculate Sanremo F18 coffee machine.

As the beat drops, Karun and I end up swaying involuntarily despite being in the middle of an interview. Since 1pm, this coffee shop swaddled in the perfectly aesthetic Instagram pink and white, has transformed into a club. Instead of drinks, we are sipping on iced coffee and cold brew.

"Chennai is boring but we want to switch things up. The thing is, people are looking to do something different. I don't drink or smoke but I enjoy socialising and meeting new people. There are not many such avenues in the city. That is when a rave like this at a coffee shop comes handy," he says. Karun says "we" because his older brother Kavin (founder, Noma.ent) was the first DJ in the city to play afro house music at the first edition of the coffee shop rave in the city at Manana on February 8.

"I was in London last year and saw massive crowds outside a bagel shop. I decided to go in and ended up catching a set by a DJ there. I knew that Chennai needed this," he says.

Trisha Jain, the owner of Cafe Manana, says that she bought into the idea instantly. "When we began putting out posts of the event on Instagram [as they regularly do about events at the cafe], there was a slow response at first. However, the invite got quickly circulated in the last few days. We ended up having to refuse entry to a lot of people on February 8," she says. Videos of the event went viral and Trisha was flooded with requests. The second edition, hence, quickly came to be.

Today, there are three DJs, the entry is set at ₹1,500 including food and drinks. The crowd entails most people born after the millennium who are wearing sunglasses indoors and bobbing to sets akin to the Boiler Room (underground dance music events) ones we see online by famous artistes. I sip on the mango-passionfruit cold brew as the crowd collectively pines while singing Gotye's 'Somebody that I used to know'. The melodic song released in 2011 has a xylophonic beat and interludes that lend itself to techno versions. Quickly, an 'uns uns' beat takes over and the crowd loses itself. Everyone jumps and hands are raised. The party has been underway for a few hours now but it isn't going to stop soon.

As I take a break from observing on the floor, I spot Remmiya Mary Vergheese and her husband Robin Babu hanging in the periphery, taking it all in. The couple frequents Manana for their coffee. When they saw flyers for the event, they



A rave at a coffee shop?

Chennai's youth are restless about the city's slow social scene. They switch it up with a coffee shop rave. We put on our kicks to scope out the vibe

decided to leave their child at home with a nanny and dance the afternoon away. "We've been out of the party scene for a while now because we have a child. A sober party like this means that we get to catch up with all that's new," says Remmiya. Robin chimes in and says, "this is our time".

Trisha says that sober parties are taking over. The youth in Chennai want to step out and meet new people but not necessarily drink. "Why do you think Anna Nagar's food streets are crowded until 3am on a Tuesday night?" she asks.

Karun says that while music is a

huge draw, the idea of a space to say hello to new folk is huge. "We all have name tags. It helps," he says. Karun runs Clocka, a run club that has been running together, while drinking coffee and networking and building friends afterwards. The brothers are planning a run and a rave later this month and are excited to see how many turn up.

Trisha envisions the creation of a community that does not only listen to coffee shop jazz and pop. She would like for new sounds to take over while being inclusive. It is why she envisions it as a monthly event. "I want your uncles and aunts to come and dance at this rave," she says. As Kavin takes over the console to play house music, an elderly couple in a saree and a collared shirt and pants dining at the cafe's first floor, walks out. They pause at the entrance of the event and peer in. I ask if they would like to watch. "It's very dark for us. We may not be able to watch our step. But maybe next time," the woman says, looking at her husband. "Next time," he nods.

I don't drink or smoke but I enjoy socialising and meeting new people. There are not many such avenues in the city. That is when a rave like this at a coffee shop comes handy

KARUN B
Founder, Clocka

Hands in the air (Top) DJ Karun Mahtani; (above) DJ Kavin B throwing a rave at Cafe Manana in Anna Nagar. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

HINDI FILM INDUSTRY IS TOO TOXIC: ANURAG P6



Pixie dust on jazz

Artistes frequent Vinyl and Brew cafe to play music ranging from jazz to exotica, fostering a community that loves coffee and collective listening

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Maarten Visser, a legend in the Chennai jazz scene, believes that the city has always loved its music. "But today, it feels like it is craving a community," he says.

When he recently played a concert full of pixie jazz (an experiment by the duo envisioning music enjoyed by pixies), to a packed audience at Vinyl and Brew, a cafe in Alwarpet with his frequent collaborator Holger Jetter, one could hear the occasional clank of cutlery. That is how focussed and quiet the audience was. "What we played was not mainstream even within the jazz genre. The audience was cross-generational and cross-societal. Most importantly, they were an audience that was willing to receive," he says.

Vinyl and Brew has been the venue for several

intimate performances like that of Maarten's since they opened in 2024. Besides concerts, there are listening sessions held of interesting bands with vast musicality.

One day, the cafe has an event where MS Subbulakshmi's favourite songs are being discussed. On another, they attempt to decipher exotica – a genre that transports people to whole different, mythical worlds. The aura changes for each such gig. However, on most occasions, the lights are dim; chairs are pointed in the direction of the artiste; phones are silent. There is only space for claps, hoots and sways to the music.

Ragu Muthiah, who runs the coffee shop, says that while coffee is the mainstay here, the establishment has been taking a music-forward approach because he likes listening to good music. "Today, music comes from the pocket but

Evolving sound Maarten Visser at the performance. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the sound from an LP and a vinyl record player is vastly different. Look at how beautiful it is," he says as we listen to Fleetwood Mac and Miles Davis during the interview.

Vinyl and Brew's audience is different from the one that attends the coffee shop raves. The crowd here is more older

millennial. It is one that seeks the quiet of a musical experience. There are overlaps too though – many young folk frequent the cafe as vinyls have been making quite the comeback recently. A listening experience with several other people who have similar interests, is the biggest take away of the experience.

Vivek Ayer, one of the four founders of Alteration that hosted Maarten's gig on Saturday says that he has also noticed that people at this venue are willing to pay to listen to good music.

"Music is a collective experience. One is often carried by the audience. The divide falls off at some point and they are just as much a part of the set as I am," he says. "It is nice to be in a place where musicians are seen," he says.

Follow Vinyl and Brew on Instagram to sign up for the concerts and events @vinylandbrewindia





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Rachel Vetch and Katrina Hutchinson hop on an auto rickshaw. Not as travellers this time, but as drivers.

The two British nationals, along with 52 other women, in the age group between 23 and 62, arrived in Chennai on March 4 to participate in the Sisterhood Group UK for Let's Goa 2025 Rickshaw Rally, organised in collaboration with Madras Midtown Round Table 42 and Madras Midtown Ladies Circle 7. This 1,000-kilometre adventure from Chennai to Goa, aims at raising between ₹1 to ₹3 crores to empower women and children in India.

Katrina explains that all the participants are entrepreneurs, founders, CEOs and CFOs who have taken time off for this charitable event, while continuing to work remotely. "I will be joining the board meeting on my way to Vellore now," says Katrina. Rachel adds, "Most of us are bikers and accustomed to endurance training. We trained for just three hours to drive an auto rickshaw, and we're excited for the challenge." They have been issued temporary licenses exclusively for this rally.

The rally was flagged off at the Sir & Lady Mutha Venkatasubba Rao Matriculation School, West



Going on auto pilot

Fifty-four entrepreneurs from the UK go on a rickshaw expedition from Chennai to Goa

Tambaram, with 18 auto rickshaws, each carrying three participants. "While one of us drives, the other navigates and the third can either focus on work or play music to keep us entertained," says Katrina.

The Sisterhood Group (founded in 2006) is a collective of over 150 women from the UK who push boundaries to raise funds for women's and children's charities worldwide.

Since their founding, the Sisterhood Group has been on a mission to create meaningful change. Through extreme challenges, including dragon boating across the English Channel, participating in the Amazon raft race, and running the Marathon des Sables, they have raised over £1 million for charitable causes.

Emma Sayle, founder of the Sisterhood Group emphasises,

"Our mission goes beyond adventure – it's about empowering women, building networks, and creating a better future for children. We aim to cover 1,000 kilometers in six days."

Poornima Subramanian, chairperson of LC7, points out, "We believe in the power of women supporting women. This initiative is a testament to the strength of collaboration and shared vision."

The 18 auto rickshaws will set out by 6am everyday, and take breaks every three hours to rest the vehicle. By 6pm, the group checks into a hotel to rest and plan the next leg of their journey. A support vehicle with assistants and mechanics follows the rally to ensure a smooth ride until they reach their final destination. Funds raised through this initiative will be directed towards MMRT42 and MMLC7's ongoing projects, including anaemia prevention, women's skill training for financial independence, and educational programmes in tailoring, home nursing, and palliative care.

Follow their journey on Instagram @thesisterhoodgroup.

Riding for empowerment UK's Sisterhood Group navigates Indian roads to support women's and children's initiatives. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Time for a celebration

Vidyasagar marks 40 years with a carnival for children, fun activities and inclusive games



Fest ready Children at Vidyasagar making gifts to be distributed at the upcoming carnival. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

S Poorvaja

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As Vidyasagar turns 40 this year, it is time for the party poppers to go off. The NGO, which empowers individuals with disabilities through comprehensive services, education, therapy and vocational training is hosting their annual carnival VS Fest 2025 on March 15 with a host of events at their campus in Kotturpuram, as well as at the grounds of Madras School of Economics next door.

Besides stalls, food, face painting, balloon sculptures, pottery and performances, the highlight this year will be nearly 15 adapted games, for all children to participate and play.

"We have always wanted to be as inclusive as possible and have opened up our building to theatre groups and other like-minded individuals. The school should be a space for the community at large and not just a building for persons with disabilities, and we hope that with these inclusive celebrations, more people partake in these festivities," says Poonam Natarajan, founder, Vidyasagar.

At Vidyasagar, the inauguration of the carnival will be followed by a ventriloquism session, storytelling

sessions, and a mime performance by the students of Vidyasagar who have been trained by the theatre group Crea Shakthi.

"At the MSSW grounds alongside the adapted games, we will be having a host of performances by Poochus Productions, an interactive African drumming session, the Vidyasagar music band, stand up comedy, as well as a showcase of different folk art forms from Tamil Nadu," says Simy TA, head of the Physiotherapy department.

This year, Vidyasagar hopes to see wider participation, and encourages neighbours and friends of their students as well as other children to come in and participate.

"We usually have children from other NGOs as well as children from the locality participate in our annual carnivals. We aim at creating more awareness about the importance of adaptations, and how it can be a life changing experience," says Kalpana Rao, principal, Vidyasagar. "Adaptations are not expensive and people just need a little patience and time to see how this can be done to include all children," she says.

VS Fest 2025 will be held from 2pm to 7pm on March 15. Entry is free. For more details, contact 9840700612 or email director@vidyasagar.co.in.

Advertisement

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR KIDNEY HEALTH WITH EXPERT CARE AT ASIAN INSTITUTE OF NEPHROLOGY AND UROLOGY



Dr. Arun Kumar Balakrishnan,
M.Ch(Urology) F.R.C.S(Edin) F.R.C.S(Gen.Surgery)
Managing Director, Chief Consultant Urologist,
Robotic surgeon and Uro-Oncologist

On March 13, 2025, World Kidney Day is observed internationally, with the theme "Are Your Kidneys OK? Detect Early. Protect Kidney Health." This annual event aims to raise kidney health awareness, emphasising the importance of early detection and prevention.

In India, the Asian Institute of Nephrology & Urology (AINU) continues to lead the charge in kidney health awareness and advanced treatment. As India's largest single-specialty Urology & Nephrology hospital network, AINU is dedicated to providing cutting-edge treatments, patient education, and comprehensive renal care.

With a strong presence across four states and five cities—Hyderabad, Secunderabad, Chennai, Visakhapatnam, and Siliguri—AINU remains at the forefront of excellence in nephrology and urology. Their commitment to innovation and patient-centric care continues to transform lives across the country.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR KIDNEYS: THE UNSUNG HEROES OF HEALTH

The kidneys are among the body's most vital organs, performing essential functions that keep us healthy. They filter toxins and excess fluids from the blood, regulate blood pressure, produce red blood cells, and maintain bone health. Despite their importance, kidney health is often overlooked until serious problems arise. Protecting kidneys is crucial for overall well-being and longevity.

THE SILENT THREAT: CHRONIC KIDNEY DISEASE IN INDIA

Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) is a



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growing public health concern in India, affecting an estimated 17.2% of the adult population. The disease often shows no symptoms until it reaches advanced stages. Without timely intervention, CKD can lead to kidney failure, leading to severe complications and premature mortality. Awareness about early detection and preventive measures is vital in combating this silent epidemic.

ARE YOU AT RISK?

Several factors contribute to kidney disease, including diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and a family history of kidney disorders. Heart diseases, the excessive use of painkillers, and recurrent kidney stones further increase the risk.

EARLY DETECTION: THE KEY TO KIDNEY HEALTH

Regular screenings can help detect kidney disease before it becomes life-threatening. Simple, non-invasive, and

cost-effective tests such as urine tests for protein levels (albuminuria), blood tests for serum creatinine, and blood pressure monitoring can provide crucial insights into kidney function. AINU emphasises the importance of early diagnosis, ensuring patients receive timely treatment and lifestyle guidance.

ADVANCEMENTS IN KIDNEY CARE AT AINU

AINU is at the forefront of innovation, offering advanced dialysis technologies such as Hemodialfiltration (HDF), which provides superior blood purification. The institute employs a double RO water treatment system and a loop water distribution system. The customised dialysis prescriptions are tailored to each patient's needs. Nephrologists oversee every dialysis session, ensuring the highest standards of care.

As a leader in kidney transplantation, AINU provides specialised facilities and a dedicated team for complex transplant cases, including procedures for elderly

patients. Comprehensive pre and post-transplant care is ensured.

The institute also offers cutting-edge treatments such as plasmapheresis for autoimmune kidney diseases, critical care nephrology for acute kidney injuries, home dialysis options like Continuous Ambulatory Peritoneal Dialysis (CAPD), and specialised evaluation and treatment for resistant hypertension.

RISING KIDNEY STONE CASES IN YOUNG INDIANS

The prevalence of kidney stones is increasing among young adults, particularly those aged 15 to 35 years. Poor dietary habits, high salt intake, dehydration, and sedentary lifestyles contribute to this surge. Certain regions, such as North India's "stone belt," report a kidney stone incidence as high as 15% in the general population. AINU addresses this growing concern with specialised treatments and preventive guidance.

DIETARY HABITS TO PROTECT KIDNEY HEALTH

Maintaining a kidney-friendly diet is essential for long-term health.

- Reduce Sodium intake to less than 5 grams per day
- Avoid excessive protein as it can strain your kidneys. Choose lean meat and plant-based proteins like beans and lentils over red meat
- Opt for whole grains
- Reduce sugary foods and sugary drinks, which increase the risk of diabetes and obesity and therefore increase the risk of kidney diseases
- Consume foods rich in antioxidants and omega-3 fatty acids, such as blueberries and walnuts

TAKE ACTION THIS WORLD KIDNEY DAY

This World Kidney Day, AINU urges everyone to prioritise kidney health. Getting regular screenings, spreading awareness through hashtags like #ShowYourKidneys and #WorldKidneyDay, and adopting a healthy lifestyle.



Dr. Navinath M
MD (Med) (AIIMS), DM (Nephro), MNAMS
Consultant Nephrologist and
Renal Transplant Physician



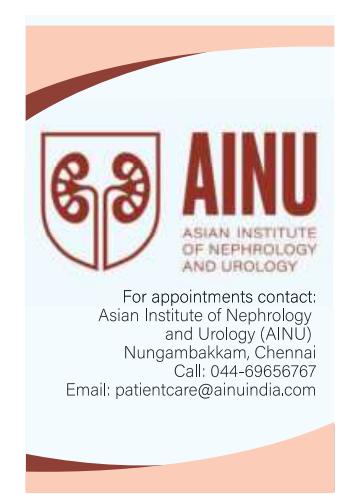
Dr. Krishna Chaitanya Gunda
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Consultant Nephrologist and
Renal Transplant Physician

habits can make a significant difference. Staying hydrated, maintaining a balanced diet, exercising regularly, and avoiding smoking are all crucial steps in preventing kidney disease.

YOUR KIDNEYS, YOUR LIFE: CHOOSE AINU

AINU is committed to transforming kidney care in India by offering cutting-edge treatments and promoting early detection. This World Kidney Day, take charge of your kidney health—because prevention and timely intervention can save lives. Are your kidneys OK? Let AINU help you find out and ensure a healthier future.

Don't wait for symptoms. Protect your kidneys today with AINU—your trusted partner in kidney health.



For appointments contact:
Asian Institute of Nephrology and Urology (AINU)
Nungambakkam, Chennai
Call: 044-69656767
Email: patientcare@ainuindia.com

**Zaraa Catering**

Syed Suhail, who launched Zaraa Catering a decade ago, has set up an exclusive Hyderabadi Iftar Mela, with

his team of cooks. "As I had the infrastructure and staff, I decided to organise an iftar bazaar for the first time. Though I initially planned to run the mela from 4pm to 2am, due to the overwhelming crowd, we end up closing by 10pm. We are unable to handle the surge of over 4,000 customers per day, despite preparing more than 200 kilograms of biryani and 50 kilograms of haleem," says Syed.

The mela features a fixed menu that includes Hyderabadi dum

biryani, mutton murg, pathar ka gosht, chicken and mutton haleem (₹120 for 100 grams), shadiwala dum chicken, chicken tikka, and desserts.

Due to space constraints for dining and parking, Syed plans to shift the venue to a larger location next year.

@Open grounds on GP Road, opposite EA Mall, Royapettah. On till March 31, 4pm till stocks last. Take-away only. For booking, call 9840178366.

The laden table

This year, iftar in Chennai includes local delicacies, Hyderabadi feasts and Middle Eastern spreads. We try meal boxes, buffets and street-style snacks

Chitradeepa Anantharam

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Buhari Mount Road

Due to popular demand, Buhari on Mount Road has introduced an iftar buffet at its restaurant, The Mughal, on the first floor. Afzal Ahmed of Buhari says they will be serving an elaborate buffet from 6pm to 8.30pm. "As our seating capacity is limited to 70, we prefer pre-booking. Popular items include prawn 65, spring rolls, mutton samosas, and chicken kebabs. The buffet will also feature mutton biryani and parottas. Pastries, ice creams, and Persian cakes are among the crowd favourites. Apart from the buffet, we also offer iftar meal boxes containing mutton biryani, mutton haleem, mutton samosa, chicken 65 roll, fruit salad, phirni, juice, water, and dates," says Afzal.

To book your iftar buffet and for iftar take-away boxes (₹550), call 7299901951. Take-away boxes will be available from 4pm onwards. Buffet will be served from 6pm to 8.30pm.

**Hatimys**

This 10-year-old brand has become one of the most happening hubs during Ramzan. While numerous eateries set up stalls on the pavement to sell non-vegetarian snacks, it was Mohammed Mustansir who pioneered the concept of offering a wide range of food at pocket-friendly prices. "We are primarily wedding caterers. I introduced this street food culture by selling freshly-made kebabs placed on tables just outside our restaurant. Soon, everyone followed suit, transforming Mannady's food scene," says Mohammed. "Our snacks are Bohri and Arabian-inspired, with slight tweaks to suit the South Indian palate. Prices start at ₹30. Every evening, we sell a wide range of items, including chicken goli kebab, chicken safari, mutton cheese balls, chicken cheese sandwiches, and Irani kaju rolls." This year they have introduced coconut mango pudding and Lotus biscoff pudding.

@Hatimys, George Town. Sales of snacks begins by 3.30pm and goes on till stocks last. For details, call 9790952531

**Abid's**

Abid Zahid, the proprietor of Abid's, has made elaborate arrangements for iftar and salah (prayer) this Ramzan. The buffet features flavours from Hyderabad, West Asia and Kerala, offering a variety of snacks, kebabs, biryani, mandi, nombu kanji, and an assortment of desserts. New additions to this year's menu include fried chicken, bun kebabs, and bun shawarma subs. "This year, I have introduced North Malabar iftar delicacies such as chatti pathiri, kaipola, unnakkai, undaputtu, and tender coconut pudding. Apart from this, we have a selection of themed iftar boxes," says Abid. The Ramzan food festival offers a diverse menu: Shaan-E-Hyderabad features traditional dishes from the Nizami heritage. Aroma of Arabia brings the flavours of West Asia with dishes like fattoush (a tangy salad) and Moroccan chicken kofta.

The iftar buffet is available from 6.20pm to 7.50pm for ₹800 with pre-booking. For reservations, call 9841284703. Abid's mutton haleem will be available from March 13 at the Marina Mall food court on OMR. A counter will offer snacks from 4pm onwards.

PICK YOUR BOX**Junior Kuppanna**

Junior Kuppanna offers three types of iftar boxes this year: mini, special, and family priced at ₹299, ₹499, and ₹1,099, respectively. The mini box includes dates, water, cut fruits, juice, Korean wings, chicken roll, boiled eggs, and mutton haleem. The special box, designed for two, additionally contains chicken 65, plain biryani, parotta with gravy, and bread halwa. The family box, meant for three, includes the same items as the special box but in larger portions. Available across all outlets. To pre-book, call 7540077749.

Samco

Founded in 1962, Samco is known for its mutton samosas, mutton haleem and nombu kanji, which are especially popular during Ramzan. Priced at ₹575, the iftar box includes mandi, shawarma, parotta with chicken curry, BBQ chicken, haleem, mutton samosa, kanji, gulab jamun, juice, water, dates, and fruits. Available at all outlets. To pre-book, call 8056249966.

Sahibs

Every year, Sahibs offers a South Indian-style family iftar kit for nine days with different combinations. The kits come in sealed boxes suitable for either two people (₹1,500) or five people (₹3,000). Each box includes blue pea tea, cold coffee, cut fruits, nombu kanji with thovayal, idli with chicken kulambu, vadai, mutton samosa, juice, and ande ka meeta for dessert. The menu changes on a weekly basis. Pre-booking is required at least one day in advance. To order, call 8999266662.

Palm Shore

They have curated an elaborate Middle Eastern iftar meal box suitable for two. In addition to mutton haleem, kanji, and samosa, the box includes a chicken wrap, chicken lubnani, idiyappam, chicken biryani, yakhni biryani, dip, mayo, cut fruits, dates, and a sweet. Priced at ₹599, these boxes are available at all Palm Shore outlets.

**Zaitoon Signature**

Zaitoon Signature's Ramadan Nights is an ideal place to enjoy a range of iftar snacks. "We offer over 40 types of snacks, during the fasting days with prices starting at ₹20 onwards. We specialise in Kerala snacks such as chatti pathiri, kaipola, unna kai, thari kanji and thread chicken. In our live counters, we will be showcasing bhuna ghost pav, chicken roast with nei pathiri, manakish lamb and fried chicken with mac and cheese pasta. We also have mutton haleem, samosa, shammi kebabs and varieties of tea. Our kunafa, mango kulfi, shahi tukda and kala jamun are best sellers," says Shameer Hameedali, marketing head. Customers are handed trays as they arrive and can go around the various counters and choose. *The iftar snacks stall is open from 4pm till midnight until March 31 at Zaitoon Signature, Nungambakkam. Zaitoon iftar boxes are priced at ₹590. To book your slot, call 7092322223.*

any art can be policed and still be alive."

"Blake made up his own mythology, as a kind of map of the self, with the character 'Urizen' representing the inner controller that keeps us in line, in the form of the fears, preconceptions and prejudices that we carry. Against that deadening presence, the creative spirit he calls 'Los' struggles endlessly," she adds

The musicians felt that the best way to perform would be to pair the songs with recitations of other Blake poems while creating visuals from Blake's visionary paintings and engravings.

This time, poet Jeet Thayil, who has always loved Blake, came in for a collaboration. "I was 13 when I found 'The Sick Rose' in an anthology in my father's library," recalls Jeet. "The poem sets itself in opposition to the watery yearnings of the Romantic tradition. It's a rebel yell, irresistible to the young reader. Well, here I am, 50 years later, and it still thrills. It thrills to hear Susheela's electric human version, and to be a part of it."

Susheela reiterates that the event is definitely not going to be a genteel poetry evening. "It's closer to an alternative rock kind of energy," she says.

"The show is theatrical but raw and direct because it is simple. It's just voices and a guitar but that works because the words have so many layers and it leaves them space to resonate. Less is more, as they say," says Susheela. The musicians are also working on translations of the texts into Indian languages including Tamil and Malayalam and will start performing them next year. "This is a 'Golden String' we can keep following."

A Golden String will be performed on March 29 and 30 at The Spot, Puducherry. Tickets can be purchased from urbanaut.app



Bow of burning gold

William Blake's poetry and art come to Puducherry in this unique, theatrical marriage of spoken word and music

Gowri S

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Like a lot of people, musician Susheela Raman was introduced to William Blake with the poem *The Tyger*. When she was older, and moved to the UK from Australia, she would hear the song 'Jerusalem' everywhere: at weddings, funerals, public events...

"People hardly sing hymns in England any more but everybody there knows 'Jerusalem'. Once I began to discover Blake for myself, I soon found out that his influence is everywhere and so many things refer to him," she recalls. Soon, she began to discover the somewhat latent world of Blake's visual art. "He has a very unique position as

not only one of the most important figures in poetry but also in visual art, and his work has had a really global impact, on literature, poetry, music, film and visual arts especially animation. Anything where the imagination is paramount."

So, it is no surprise that William Blake is the muse and medium for a unique project that marries music and spoken word titled, *A Golden String*, set to take the stage on March 29 and 30, in Puducherry. For this project that has been in the making for a few years, Susheela and Sam Mills, her partner in music and life, have collaborated with poet Jeet Thayil. "In 2018, I made a record in Indonesia called 'Ghost Gamelan' and for that I recorded a version of Blake's poem *The Sick Rose*. That project finished early because

Muse and medium (Clockwise from left) William Blake's artwork; Susheela Raman; Sam Mills and Jeet Thayil. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



of the pandemic and Sam Mills, my husband and musical partner, and I were locked down in London and really began to drill deeper into Blake's poems and also found that the words went well with the music we were writing. It felt organic and natural to pursue," she says. For the duo who has done a lot of music around spiritual traditions, in India and elsewhere, like Sufi Qawali, Tamil Tevaram, and Syrian Christian chants, Blake's words sat right in with their sound's psychical intensity.

Susheela adds, "He was also against convention and orthodoxy, always his own person, and I felt some affinity with that. In music, I have always tried to make my own version of things and not conform to anybody else's rules, or serve anyone's agenda. I'm not sure that

Finger on the buzzer

The QFI-Purple Riband Challenge Quiz, on women-themed general knowledge, will be held this weekend

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There exists in Chennai a club that meets in the precincts of an old school in Mylapore twice a month. It solely exists to have its members, all of whom are gladiators of general knowledge, quiz each other and coax lazy quizzers out of their Sunday slumber. The Quiz Foundation of India (QFI), a non-profit, was founded in 1987 by well-known quizmaster Dr Navin Jayakumar, an ophthalmologist, and avid quizzers such as his mother Saranya Jayakumar, Gopal Kidao, and others. Saranya, as the senior-most member, is its founding president. Since then, QFI has garnered online members in the thousands; 40 members show up every fortnight at PS Secondary School.

Says Dr Navin, the well-known host of the August 15 Landmark, now Zifo Open Quiz. "For the first time, QFI has decided to host the Purple Riband Challenge Quiz, a women-themed general knowledge quiz for all. The quiz open to two-member teams (both women or mixed) will be hosted by three eminent quizzers who began their quizzing journey in Madras – Saranya Jayakumar, Jayashree Mohanka and Nirupama Venkatasubramanian."

Saranya has been quizzing since her graduation days at Queen Mary's. When marriage and family took her to Calcutta, the mecca of quizzing, she founded Motley Crew, the famous quiz team of the 1980s. Later, when the family returned to Chennai, she teamed up with her sons and won the local rounds and the nationals of the North Star Quiz, considered one of the holy grails of quizzing. This, at a time when knowledge was garnered by extensive reading. And in the case of Saranya, squirrelling away that information in notebooks. "I have heaps of them," she says

The right word Avinash Mudaliar, Dr Navin and Saranya Jayakumar at QFesta 2012. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

of the books sectioned into mythology, history, geography and current affairs that she flips through before quizzes. Saranya was among the few women who participated in Mastermind India; Rudyard Kipling and the Roaring 1920s were her subjects.

Joining her on stage will be Jayashree Mohanka, an old girl of KV-IIT, Women's Christian College and Indian Institute of Management - Calcutta. Jayashree's interest in quizzing began when the family gathered around to discuss current affairs in the evenings while growing up in Thiruvananthapuram. "Back then, we read a lot; when you read, you tend to recall better. The charm is in working out the answer and I hope more women find the quiz interesting," says Jayashree, a member of the quiz team, Hammer and Tongs. She is also a winner of the Maquaquer solo quiz, National Brand Equity quiz, and a semi-finalist on Mastermind India.

Nirupama Venkatasubramanian is a copy and content writer who has been quizzing on and off since her schooling at Rosary Matriculation. "I did take a break for 15 years in between," says Nirupama. "It's great to get back. It's like muscle memory. And, this quiz is going to be fun and accessible for all," she says.

The Purple Riband Challenge Quiz is on March 16, 3pm at The Folly, Amethyst, Royapettah. Prior registration is mandatory for both participants and the audience. For details, look up quizfoundation.com





Click pens

Harsh Gagwani, the third generation entrepreneur behind Click Pens, a legacy pen company headquartered in Indore, says that there is a reason why their pens have remained popular despite the advent of ball point pens. "We make traditional pens made of ebonite. The pens have a nice finish and lining. It's why our return customer rate is between 95% and 98%," he says. Aadya Arvind, a nine-year-old school student who bought her first ink pen from Click, says that she wanted an affordable pen in blue. This is the brand's USP. "We also repair as we are the manufacturers too. Just send us pens that need fixing and we'll get it done," says Harsh.

Priced between ₹100 and ₹5,000. Available on clickpens.in and at Hindustan Trading Company, Makoba and Penhouse in Chennai.



Alchemy's Mocha Mousse Delight

Among Endless Stationery's most prized creations is Alchemy, a range of premium ink, known for its high pigmentation and variety in shades. Earlier this year, when Pantone, the global colour authority,

stated that Mocha Mousse would be the colour of the year, Dheeraj Nanduri and Aditya Bhansali, founders of this Chennai-based brand, tipped their hat and created a coffee ink that smelt just as good as it looked. "I drink several cups of coffee a day and can't do without it. That is why we decided to add a scent to it," says Dheeraj. He adds that the ink comes in a bottle inspired by a spinning top or a *pambaram*. His mechanical engineering background came handy because he was inspired to add a weighted bulb to a conical flask structure. The result is a spinning ink bottle that is aesthetic enough to leave on a writing table while also playing around with it.

Priced at ₹950. Visit madebyendless.com or visit Hindustan Trading Company.

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Dheeraj Nanduri, founder of stationery company Endless, and organiser of the Chennai Pen Show, says that the day after the Chennai Pen Show weekend has been unusually quiet. He was, after all, surrounded by some 20,000-odd people between March 7 and 9 at Fika, Adyar. There was a point on

Saturday evening when things got intense. "Not many could stand on the first floor. Most visitors were surprised that so many people still use fountain pens. Random folks talked to each other over the counter and became sudden friends. It was all very wholesome. We want such communities to be built," he says.

The world's largest pen show may be over but we have scoured through the stalls and created a list of must-haves to enhance your stationery collection.



Kanwrite's music nib

Kanwrite began in 1986 at Kanpur. Apoorv and Tarun Awasthi, behind the product, have decided to switch things up. At the Chennai Pen Show, they launched a music nib, earlier used to make music notations on paper. Since most music is now printed on sheets and people rarely make music notes on paper anymore, the product is a novelty item for collectors, says Apoorv. The nib has been made with 14 carat gold and comes with a Japanese ebonite casing. The line width of this pen ranges from 0.5mm to 3mm with flexing the pen. The company also has a variety of zoom and flex nibs that provide a similar range, vastly different from the standard 'extra fine', 'fine' and 'bold' varieties available by other sellers.

Prices range between ₹150 to ₹1,000 for the nibs. They can be found on kanpurwriters.com.



Arclayer's Chennai Central Pen

It has only been a year since Arclayer's founder Yash Jain began 3D printing pens but the company is leading some design-based innovations in India today. Here, you can customise the case and even the cartridge to have ink flow in swirls and other unique patterns.

The 21-year-old founder says that he created a special pen for the Chennai Pen Show modelled on Chennai Central. "The pen is made of resin and has a nib that is hand-engraved modelled on a locomotive engine. It's very pretty," he says. Although this is their most expensive product priced at ₹34,000 as it is a collector's item, other pens with customisation are affordable yet hip and fly. "I came with just 30-40 pens last year. This time, we had 150 pens on display," he says.

Priced between ₹2,200 and ₹4,000. They can be found on arclayerstudio.com and @arclayer on Instagram.



Sulekha Ink Co.'s KC Janardhan Purple Ink

Sulekha Ink Company has a history that dates back to the Swadeshi movement, an important step in India's struggle for freedom. Ever since, they have launched several pens and inks to commemorate famous individuals. The latest ink launched by veteran journalist Jennifer Arul at the Chennai Pen Show was the KC Janardhan ink in the shade of deep violet. Janardhan who has donned many hats is best known in the pen community for beautiful lettering and calligraphy. He has also fought epilepsy and has been vocal about the need for more awareness about the nerve condition. "I was teaching 10 courses as an adjunct faculty in several Bengaluru colleges. I noticed that the handwriting impaired many of them. I decided to make a change and began advocating for better writing. It's been quite the journey since. I'm thrilled that I'm the first living person to have an ink named after me by Sulekha," he says.

Priced at ₹1,408, the ink is available at sulekha.co.in.

Pedalling to 10

As Ciclo Café completes a decade in Chennai, a new location is now on its menu; a 100-year-old French-style bungalow in the heart of Puducherry



Quaint corners A view of the cafe; Mediterranean bowl, and Aman and Ashish Thadani. S POORVAJ

reservations. Spread across two floors, the café in Puducherry can seat 80.

Ashish credits Arun Alagappan of TI cycles as having seeded the idea of a pioneering concept café themed on cycling in 2015. While this changed over the years and Ciclo's focus turned more to food, they remain keen on promoting cycling culture. "Even here in Puducherry, we are



planning to have cycles that people can simply pick up to ride around these streets," Ashish says.

As we bite into shami kebabs and cheesy garlic bread, Aman

Thadani, director, operations in Puducherry says the new café will have all of the favourites from the Chennai menu – pizza, pasta, steak, sandwiches, salad, warm bowls, and their range of baked goods and artisanal ice cream. Alcohol will soon be included on the menu at the Puducherry cafe.

We sidestep the usual favourites like the butter chicken fries and go in for Ciclo's newer warm bowls. The Mediterranean bowl has crunchy pita chips, fresh vegetables and fluffy quinoa, but the weather also warrants a bowl of coconut soup with a fiery red chutney as accompaniment.

Over half-and-half pizza, with pepperoni and mushroom toppings, Chef Sethupathi, a familiar presence at Ciclo's Chennai outlets tells us he is excited to experiment with Puducherry-themed dishes for the menu.

"This feels like homecoming for me. I can't wait to play around with the abundance of seafood available here," he says.

In Puducherry, their vision seems straightforward as well. "People come to Pondy to have a good time. We're here to facilitate just that," says Aman, summing it all up.

Ciclo Café is in Puducherry at 23, Rue Romain Rolland Street, White Town. A meal for two costs ₹1,000 without alcohol.

THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13633

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Across

- 1 Choose (6)
- 4 Lumberjack (6)
- 9 Fork-tailed bird (7)
- 10 Entangle (5)
- 11 Florida city (5)
- 12 Express eager enjoyment (7)
- 13 Elementary swimming stroke (5-6)
- 18 A risk-free risk? (4,3)
- 20 More rum? (5)
- 22 Twice (5)
- 23 Toy bears (7)
- 24 Bookkeeper's book (6)
- 25 Expression of surprise? (6)

Down

- 2 South American beast of burden (5)
- 3 Vocation (7)
- 5 Commencement (5)
- 6 Step by step (7)
- 7 Painter's tool (6)
- 8 Edible tropical tuber (5,6)
- 14 Offensively nonchalant (7)
- 15 Elementary swimming stroke (5-6)
- 18 A risk-free risk? (4,3)
- 20 More rum? (5)
- 22 Twice (5)
- 23 Toy bears (7)
- 24 Bookkeeper's book (6)
- 25 Expression of surprise? (6)

Down

- 1 'Open ____' (Ali Baba) (6)



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

P	A	C	K	E	D	P	I	P	E
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B	A	Z	A	R	W	L	R	U	S
C	T	M	D	V					
C	O	D	E	A	Q	A	R	I	U
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K	N	U	C	K	L	E	D	O	W
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Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated March 20, 2025.
Solution No. 13632



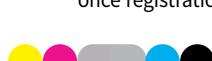
Get ready to run

Chennai Runners is back with its latest edition of the CR Couch to 5K programme, a free initiative open to everyone aged 15 and above, who is looking to learn the art of running. The programme is structured over eight weeks, and begins on April 1. There will be one in-person morning session at over 20 locations in the city for three days a week. Select the venue closest to you from the list and get started. All training sessions will be conducted on-site, not virtually. The programme concludes with a timed 5K event, which requires a participation fee. All the details pertaining to participants training schedule and timings will be announced once registration is completed. Register at: <https://bit.ly/cr-c25k>.



Move, explore, inspire

March Dance, the annual festival of contemporary dance in Chennai, presented by Basement 21 in partnership with the Goethe-Institut Chennai and the Alliance Française of Madras, will see wonderful performances exploring contemporary dance. The festival aims to redefine the many ways in which contemporary dance can be perceived. This year's edition brings a diverse range of performances, film screenings, choreographic labs, talks, and discussions to Chennai, showcasing artistes. The events will take place across two venues, the Alliance Française of Madras and the Goethe-Institut Chennai. Over the course of two weeks, starting from March 14 to 23. Audiences can engage with thought-provoking performances and dynamic artistic conversations, making this festival a vibrant celebration of contemporary dance. For details, call 28331314.



Southern sojourn

Filmmaker Anurag Kashyap on his decision to leave Mumbai and why he feels that the Hindi film industry has become too toxic



Looking ahead
Anurag Kashyap.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Anurag Kashyap, if nothing else, is a man of his word. The filmmaker expressed his resolve a couple of months ago of relocating to Southern India. Turns out, he wasn't talking off the cuff, and that transition is now complete. "I've left Mumbai," he says, grinning, adding that he recently paid the first rent of his new house. He

"I want to stay away from film people. The industry has become too toxic. Everyone is chasing unrealistic targets, trying to make the next ₹500 and ₹800 crore film.

would not disclose which State or city he's moved to (a source tells us it's likely Bangalore). Kashyap's reasons stand as before: disillusionment with a myopic Hindi film industry, risk-aversion among producers and platforms, insecure actors favouring lavish lifestyles over challenging and exciting work.

The creative atmosphere is gone."

His southward drift coincides, with a sad irony, with the recent Hindi release of *Footage*, a 2024 Malayalam film starring Manju Warrier, that he presented. The film, an experimental found-footage thriller set during the pandemic, marks the directorial debut of editor Saju Sreedharan (*Kumbalangi Nights*, *Maheshinte Prathikaram*). "The Hema Committee report had come out around the time of *Footage*'s release. The 2024 Wayanad

Up next

Anurag Kashyap is set to make his Kannada debut. He will soon star in a sports drama titled *&*. "The film is about football. It's about second chances. I am glad someone saw beyond the 'psychopath' in me," said the director-actor, at the launch of the movie.

landslides had also happened. With everything going on in the Malayalam film industry, we decided to hold off for the right time," he explains.

He also wanted the film to be dubbed properly. The director whose *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012) was dubbed in Italian, French and Spanish concedes that Hindi dubs of southern films are frequently atrocious. "The reason I can't watch *Maharaja* (starring Kashyap and Vijay Sethupathi, streaming on Netflix) is because it is so badly dubbed."

Besides *Footage*, Anurag is also presenting the Kannada film *Vaghachipani* (*Tiger's Pond*), which screened at the Berlin Film Festival, and the Tamil coming-of-age drama *Bad Girl*. He has acting jobs in *Delulu* (Malayalam) and *Dacoit* (Telugu-Hindi). Meanwhile, four of his directorials – including cop noir *Kennedy* – are awaiting release this year. "*Kennedy* is locked and has been cleared by the censors. But ZEE has lost a lot of money on the recent films they released."

Anurag's affinity and evangelism



for Malayalam cinema is well known. Last year, he made his Malayalam acting debut in *Rifle Club*, directed by Aashiq Abu. Kashyap says he had written a film for Malayalam star Mohanlal, and wanted Rajeev Ravi, his longtime cinematographer, to direct it. But the project didn't take off, and Anurag ended up refurbishing the story for *Kennedy*. The film's title, meanwhile, is inspired by the real name of Tamil actor Vikram – a thrillingly strange genealogy for a film yet to release.

"The central character of *Kennedy*, an undercover cop named Uday Shetty, has stayed with me for a long time. In fact, I have a sequel web series in mind where the character survives the events of *Kennedy*."

His grumble with the current state of Hindi cinema is multipronged. Global streaming platforms have such a corner on the market that it has created a power imbalance. "All films until and unless acquired by OTT cannot go ahead," he says. "So they get to dictate the content. It is why everything looks the same."

Despite such an evident sense of doom, Kashyap says he is in a good space. Having quit active producing, he feels less 'burdened', working silently on his own projects, reading and concentrating on his health. "My stress is much less." He is directing a Malayalam-Hindi film and a Tamil film soon.

He will keep returning to Mumbai for work, but that is the extent of it. "My video library will be divided up," he confides. He says he is not the first to relocate, and that several working directors before him have left. "The biggest exodus is to West Asia, especially Dubai. Others have fled to Portugal, London, Germany, US. These are mainstream filmmakers I am talking about."



The road not taken

PVR INOX has announced a special film festival, Aamir Khan: Cinema Ka Jadugar, to celebrate Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan's contribution to Indian cinema. The festival, to be hosted across PVR INOX theatres nationwide, is set to commence on March 14, Aamir's birthday, and will continue until March 27.

The festival was announced with a trailer at an event in Mumbai, which saw veteran screenwriter and lyricist Javed Akhtar and PVR founder Ajay Bijli join Aamir for an insightful conversation.

While speaking about Aamir, Javed Akhtar said, "Aamir was born in 1965; I started in Bollywood in 1965. Aamir's first film was written by me. I was writing the film *Faryaz* in Panchgani for Nassir Hussain. He saw Aamir and immediately told Nassir that he was a star and that he should start with a romantic film. My son's first film was with Aamir."

"Only Aamir could have believed in these characters and stories. Aamir did a film with Ashutosh, with whom he had a flop before. A new director, Farhan, came to you with a three-hero film, and you did it. Who would have done *Dangal* in their right mind? You take chances no other can," added Javed.

Mover and Shekhar

Popular music composer Shekhar Ravjiani of the Vishal-Shekhar duo has launched 'Paiya Paiya', his first independent Tamil track

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Shekhar Ravjiani lost his voice a couple of years ago.

In what came as a rude shock, the musician-singer of the popular Vishal-Shekhar duo shuddered when his doctors told him that he was suffering from left vocal paresis, a condition that almost paralyses your vocal chords. "It was an infection in the nerve from the heart to the left vocal chord. A lot of doctors said that I might not be able to sing again. I was heartbroken," he recalls.

Apt medical help from San Diego-based Dr Erin Walsh and a strong will helped him recover. After a year, Shekhar mustered

the courage to share his story, spurred on after watching the documentary, *I Am: Celine Dion* on a flight. "After I shared my story, atleast 50 singers reached out, saying that they had been experiencing similar issues since the pandemic."



To watch video interview,
scan QR code

He is singing better now, at concerts and at studio recordings. Not only that; Shekhar is also helping the younger breed of singers make a mark. His latest independent effort, 'Paiya Paiya', has been sung by 17-year-old Aarathana Senthilraja, a young musical talent nurtured through the Global Schools-Shekhar Ravjiani School of Music. "I don't know why, but when I composed this tune, I felt it should be a Tamil song because I love the sound of the language. It was great jamming together with a young singer. It was an impromptu, beautiful collaboration."

Shekhar has put together many such musical collaborations through his independent label, Garuudaa Music, floated in 2023. With

Vishal-Shekhar are one of the most popular music composers of the Hindi film industry, right from *Pyar Mein Kabhi Kabhi* (1999) till *Fighter* (2024). "Over the last 25 years, I have seen a lot of stages in the music and film industry. Even a few years back, we used to celebrate eight songs in a film, because there were an integral part of the screenplay, and now, we see only two songs that are primarily used for marketing the film. I'm waiting for a time where there will be seven-eight songs in a film, like in say, *Om Shanti Om*."

Shekhar might have to wait for a while for such a thing to happen regularly, with increased emphasis on trending hooklines and decreasing audience attention spans, but the emergence of independent artistes marks good times, he says. "I'm seeing a transition towards independent music. The love is unreal. Even producers are searching for those acts to do music for their projects."

There will be more on that front from him. "2025 is looking fantastic. The next single will be out soon. We hope to launch another new singer in the process," he says, "We've done a few workshops in Japan, Dubai and Nagpur. We are trying to find new voices, nurture them and put them on the right path."

Even as his music journey continues, Shekhar is also putting together one of his dream projects: a shelter for abandoned dogs. "It's on my bucket list and I will do it soon," he promises. Looks like Shekhar Ravjiani has found his voice, yet again.



Wait for Maa

Kajol is set to feature in the upcoming mythological horror film *Maa*.

While Vishal Furia, known for *Lapachhapi*, *Criminal Justice* and *Chhorii*, has directed the movie, Saivyn Quadras has written it. It is slated to be released in cinemas on June 27. According to a press release, the film "explores the timeless battle between good and evil, delivering spine-chilling suspense and intense drama." Presented by Jio Studios and Devgn Films, *Maa* will be released in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, and Bengali.

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