



# metroPLUS

THE HINDU



**What goes into** the making of Chennai's viral summer dessert, One Day in Bangkok? **P3**

**ALL ABOUT PARVATHY'S ULLOZHUKKU** **P4**

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At the Madras Offroad Academy in Pudupakkam, a winch rope pulls out a vehicle stuck in mud, while Dr Rinku George, the instructor gives instructions over a walkie talkie. It's a sweltering Sunday afternoon, but off-roading enthusiasts are out braving the rising mercury. A group of novices and advanced off-roaders manoeuvre their 4x4s across the 25-acre property, which belongs to Rinku and has been painstakingly created as an obstacle course for off-roaders. It also has three small artificial water bodies used by intermediate and advanced drivers.

"There are 23 obstacles here. These include small and large table top, double hump, positive incline, steep ascent, steep descent...", says Rinku who started the Madras Offroad Academy last year.

A maxillofacial surgeon and professor at a dental college, Rinku started off-roading more than a decade ago. "We used to drive on the roads and beaches. There was no structured way to teach us theory. It was all practicals. We learnt on our own and made some very costly mistakes. My vehicle was damaged. I felt that if someone had taught me correctly, this would not have happened," says Rinku, adding that this pushed him to organise classes for newcomers.

Starting with around six students, his batches have now grown to include 20 students each. Classes usually begin with a two-hour theory session at 8am, followed by practicals on the driving course. The course ends by 1.30 pm with a multiple choice questionnaire. "It is a certified programme. We are perhaps the only ones in India to give written tests at the end of a session to see how much the students have learnt," says Rinku.

The courses also cover topics such as how to pull other vehicles, how to winch properly, how the engine works, difference between suspensions, how to get the vehicle back up if you roll over, what upgrades and modifications can be done to a vehicle...

"After basic classes, I take students on trail drives through forests, beaches, river beds and other off-road terrain. Ninety percent of the students stay and want to move to the next level," he says.

His students – men and women – are in the age group of 18 to 65. Those who don't have their own



## Mud, sweat, and gears

**From being used for relief work** to driving holidays, off-roading is being recognised as a future skill. Now, there are schools that teach you how to negotiate tough terrain

vehicles can start by driving one of the school's vehicles. He says that there have been cases where people who went off-roading, found it difficult and then joined classes. "Even those with experience on the tarmac will struggle when it comes to off-roading. It is a different concept and philosophy."

### To the rescue

From being used for relief work to recreation and driving holidays, off-roading is being recognised as a future skill; it is very relevant, says Arkaprava Dutta of Terra Tigers, one of the first groups to provide recreational off-roading in Chennai since 2006. "There is a huge interest in off-roading. Learning has increased by 60%," says Arkaprava, who has been training groups for driving expeditions to the mountains since 2014.

One of his students, Chittra Koman, recently completed an expedition to the North East. In February this year, Chittra and her group of friends set off on a road trip from Chennai to Tawang in



Arunachal Pradesh and then drove back.

To prepare, Chittra enrolled for offroading courses and trained with Madras Offroad Academy, Terra Tigers and Mahindra Adventure. While the drive to the North East was not as hardcore as an off-roading adventure, the classes helped, she says. "A decent amount of training proves useful in understanding the capabilities of

your vehicle, getting a fair idea of the techniques to manoeuvre through different terrain, being able to use a 4X4 vehicle effectively, navigating obstacles, recovery techniques and so forth," says Chittra.

Apart from hobbyists, a lot of volunteers and rescue workers have also learnt this skill over the years, says Arkaprava. During the Chennai flash floods in November 2021,

**Get off the road** Other than driving through obstacle courses, offroading schools also cover topics such as how to pull other vehicles, how engines work, the difference between suspensions, and how to get the vehicle back up, if you roll over.

MAHINDRA ADVENTURE AND TERRA TIGERS



Terra Tigers were part of the rescue efforts. "A 45-day-old child was stuck in his house at the end of a closed street (near SAF Games Village) and we had to get him out in our vehicle. In a built up area when you are pushing water it'll hit the wall and come back. It's called a bow wave. So when the wave comes under the vehicle, it'll slightly lift the vehicle. You have to understand the terrain, the limitation of the vehicle and what it can do. The child was successfully rescued but people who are not trained will end up getting stuck in such situations and also damage their cars," says Arkaprava.

### Many turfs

At Mahindra Adventure, they take terrain and the weather very seriously. Which is why, in addition to the all-year-round offroading courses, they also organise two season specific ones – Snow Survivor and Sand Survivor. The former takes place in Leh between January and March, on trails specially curated by experts. The

latter takes place between November and January, in the golden dunes of Jaisalmer, and includes an overnight drive.

In 1996, Mahindra Adventure started out by organising off-roading events across the country. The first official off-roading school came up in 2011 in Igatpuri, Maharashtra. They now have schools near Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu, within a 100-acre coffee plantation in Coorg, and the newest ones are in Gurgaon, in the foothills of the Aravallis, Leh, and Jaisalmer.

Ever since its inception in 2011, the academy has trained around 50,000 enthusiasts. "We have three aims: Engagement and advocacy; community building; and introduction to the sport of offroading," says Nalinikanth Gollagunta, CEO - Automotive Sector, Mahindra & Mahindra.

There are different courses to choose from. Getting Dirty is for beginners; Trail Survivor is a weekend course, and the advanced one is called Global Survivor, explains Nalinikanth. "We also have extreme expeditions, the duration for which is around 10-15 days. We organise four to five every year. We do Ladakh, Nepal, Bhutan and just finished one in Namibia."

They train people across demographics. "We also have institutional training programmes for the Army and Border Security Force. A lot more off-roading facilities are coming up," he observes. The reason for this he believes is, "More awareness about vehicles and their capabilities have grown. The road infrastructure has developed, giving access to locations. People see these places on social media, they want to experience them safely and therefore enrol for off-roading classes before setting out on the great escape."



## Photosynthesis party

**Travelling Plants, a trans-disciplinary project that intersects Nature with art is currently on show at Alliance Française of Madras**

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While it might not be nicknamed the Garden City of India, Chennai is home to its fair share of greenery.

The Goethe-Institut Chennai, in collaboration with the Alliance

Française of Madras and the Institut Français de Pondichéry (IFP) is hosting an exhibit titled Travelling Plants, which helps us think about plants, and how they have changed over the course of the country's history.

As you enter the Alliance Française of Madras through a canopy, you are first welcomed by the sight of a community project

commissioned to Chennai-based artist Parvathi Nayar – Rooted Perspectives: A Collective Response to Plant Blindness. Plant blindness is the tendency to overlook or undervalue plants in our environment. "If we don't notice the plants around us when they are there, how will we notice them when they start to disappear?" asks Parvathi who

**Rooted Perspectives: A Collective Response to Plant Blindness**

invited submissions of photos and stories of plants around neighbourhoods, which were also on display.

Travelling Plants is a trans-disciplinary project curated by independent art historian Lina Vincent. The exhibition showcases art created by five artists who were part of a residency centred around the herbarium at IFP in March this year. Karolina Grzywnowicz (Germany), Wendy Therméa (Reunion Island, France), Danushka Marasinghe (Sri Lanka), Waylon D'souza (India), and Rashmimala (India) – were picked to be part of the residency, and by extension, this exhibition.

"They were given a free hand to decide what they were interested in, and each artist has taken a different direction. Their medium is different and so are their languages," says Lina.

The exhibit by Waylon D'souza explores the geological, climatological and anthropological timeline of plant histories, while Rashmimala forges connections between the

legacies of colonialism, pressing environmental issues, and the enduring presence of plants. Wendy Therméa explores the unintended consequences of human intervention on ecosystems.

"I collected ground plants from the herbarium at IFP and took a print on the cyanotype paper, which produces a silhouette of the plant. Later, I filled in the details," says Rashmimala. The show will travel to Pune, Delhi, Bengaluru, and Kolkata, and then set sail for Colombo.

"In Kolkata, it is going to be showcased together with botanical drawings from the East India archive, giving it a completely different context," says Katharina Görgen, director, Goethe-Institut Chennai.

The exhibition in Chennai will also host panel discussions, Nature walks, botanical sketching and workshops including ones on terrariums, cyanotypes and how to make your own flower tiaras.

*The exhibition will be on display at the Alliance Française of Madras, Nungambakkam until June 29. For more information, log on to @afmadras on Instagram.*



### Take the stage

When Aparna Gopinath and her team of actors started working on their play *Stop, Look, But Proceed*, she says they envisioned taking it to schools and colleges across the country. "Many of us who read the play, either knew of someone or had gone through similar experiences," says the theatre artiste and actor. Based on the Pulitzer-winning American play *How I Learned to Drive* written by Paula Vogel, *Stop, Look, But Proceed* chronicles the story of a young girl who grew up in a complex, and sexually abusive relationship with her uncle. Starring Mrityika, Fawas Ameer Hamsa, Pragathi Jadavshankar, Seema, Sanjana Jothiprakasham and Aarushi Krishnan, the play makes its debut in Chennai this week. "This is a story that does not belong to any specific era. As long as there are human bodies, there is abuse," Aparna says. Staged in English with a few lines each in Tamil, Hindi and Malayalam, the play will also be performed in Puducherry, Bengaluru, and cities in Kerala.

Each show will be followed by a therapist-guided discussion. *Stop, Look, But Proceed* will be staged at Koothu-p-pattarai from June 20 to 22, and June 26 to 30 at 7pm. Entry is free. For details, contact 6385087557

**S Poorvaja**



Meet Team India that won silver at the Ultimate Frisbee finals held in Japan

# Winning on beach sands

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June 16 was a proud day for the Indian National Ultimate Frisbee mixed team as they won silver at the Asian Oceanic Ultimate Beach Championships (AOUBC) held at Shirahama, Japan. They competed against defending champions, the Philippines, who also won first place in the men's and women's categories. It is the number one team in Asia.

The win, at a competition which drew participants not just from Asia but also Australia and New Zealand, has been a big push for Ultimate Frisbee which is in its nascence

in India. In its 2019 edition, the team clinched the bronze medal. This year, with the exception of one player from Bengaluru, the rest of the 18-member team was from Chennai. The athletes were chosen based on national try-outs and a selection camp.

Though the sport is usually played both on the beach and grass, the former is more popular.

"The team prepared for nearly six months before the event; around six training camps were held in Chennai. It is a cause for celebration for the team and the sport in India," said Alex Sebastian,

chief executive officer, India Ultimate Players Association. On why the majority of the team is from Chennai, he added, "Perhaps due to Chennai having a beach, and access to it for the players. Our players do well on that surface."

The beach format has five players on each side. Like with basketball, the players are substituted so most of the team plays in a match. The grass format has seven players to a side.

Of the sport's increasing popularity over the past decade, Alex said, "People see the benefit of the sport, it is

physical activity. A lot of work is being done at the grassroots level to create an interest in it. Players pick up the game, say from college, turn passionate evangelists for the sport and take it back with them, creating a community of players. There are NGOs working on popularising the mixed gender format sport."

The sport is played in the men and women only format too; the Ultimate Frisbee Association from India, however sent the mixed format team for the championship.

Most frisbee-playing States in the country have State-level associations and State and regional Ultimate competitions taking place in the lead up to the annual National Ultimate

**A huddle** The Indian National Ultimate Frisbee team which won at Japan. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Championship.

Uday Kumar, the team's head coach recalls their journey over the last six months, one that was filled with hard work, extensive training, and even unexpected roadblocks as they focussed on one goal – to clinch the gold.

"While the result was disappointing, this is the best ever finish for India in any Ultimate tournament," he says. "Everyone in the team has a full time job, and in the run up to the tournament, had to balance training, their personal responsibilities, and also work on raising funds for some team members. As a coach, I felt that getting to go to the tournament in itself was a big achievement," he says.

While there is a bit of disappointment in not winning a gold, Sivaraman Venkatesan, one of the team's captains, says that there was also a lot to be elated about. "We worked hard – not just to train and prepare, but also to raise funds and campaigning for our participation in the tournament. Even when the team's morale took a hit during this, we bounced back with the support of the frisbee community and our family and friends. It took us a while to believe that we were actually going to Japan, but once we landed there and began playing, our spirits were high," he says.

The lead up to the tournament, and all the preparation it took has made them better human beings, Udaya says. "We will keep training hard, and win gold for the country someday," he affirms.



## THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13590

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### Across

- 1 Unwell (4)
- 3 Unable to think clearly (8)
- 9 Puffed up and vain (7)
- 10 Hair (5)
- 11 Foul in snooker (2-3)
- 12 Kind of bomb (6)
- 14 Spring bulb with blue flowers – cheating harpy (anag) (5,8)
- 17 One using hook, line and sinker? (6)
- 19 Indian statesman, d. 1964, father of Mrs Indira Gandhi (5)
- 22 Take (an exam) again (5)
- 23 Without weapons (7)
- 24 Precious stones (8)
- 25 Russian emperor (4)

### Down

- 1 Young trees (8)
- 2 Small group of musicians (5)
- 4 In a weak position (2,5,6)
- 5 Book size (5)
- 6 Part (7)
- 7 Sprint (4)
- 8 Thick cushion for sitting

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



- on (6)
- 13 Meat joint (8)
- 15 Memory loss (7)
- 16 Heavy sailcloth (6)
- 18 Housey-housey (5)
- 20 Organic matter in soil (5)
- 21 Jab – nudge (4)

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Solution No. 13589

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## A gossip session?

Do you crave a space to have honest conversations on everything from relationships to careers? Try Koffee and Kalavaram, a gossip roundtable event where women can support each other. The idea is to delve into real issues impacting real women — self-care, empowerment, socio-economic challenges, and romance. Hosted by Sruthakeerthi and Sindhu @Backyard, Adyar. June 22, 3.30pm to 5.30pm. Entry is ₹250 per person which includes snacks. For details, call 7358458117



# The pursuit of magic

Author Yuma Vasuki, who has won the Bal Sahitya Puraskar for his anthology, on the urgent need to pay attention to children and their world

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It is Thanvi's birthday and her parents wait by her bedside to wish her as soon as she wakes up. But they do not know that they have company in the form of a sparrow, a lion, an elephant calf, a puppy, and a rainbow, all gathered around to wish her. The heart-warming short story has plenty of magic, and highlights the steady disappearance of forests and our changing landscapes.

It is part of an anthology of Tamil stories for children titled *Thanviyin Piranthanal* (Thanvi's Birthday) by Books for Children, an imprint of Bharathi Puthakalayam that won the writer Yuma Vasuki the Bal Sahitya Puraskar for 2024. This is the author's second award from the Sahitya Akademi; he won earlier for his translation of Malayalam writer OV Vijayan's *Khasakkinte Itihasam* in 2017.

"Magic is important," says the Pattukottai-based writer, who is an Art teacher at a Government High School in Sendankadu village in Thanjavur district. Yuma Vasuki, who spent most of his life in Chennai, was previously with New Century Book House and Bharathi Puthakalayam, working on translation projects. He used to head *Dinamani*'s children's supplement, *Siruvur Mani*.

The 58-year-old has been writing poetry, novels, and short stories from the late 1980s, but has only recently forayed into children's literature. He has spent several years poring over books for children from across the world, and closer home from Kerala, as part of his translation projects. He eventually decided



**Endearing tales** Author Yuma Vasuki; cover of *Thanviyin Piranthanal*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

to write for children, inspired by the many detective novels and magazines he grew up reading.

Yuma Vasuki feels that the children's literature scene in Tamil is "weak" when compared to languages such as English, Russian, and Malayalam. "I've always been drawn to the writing style and narration of Malayalam children's writers," he says, adding that in Kerala, there is a collective consciousness to offer children quality literature, as well as an interest in helping them develop into wholesome beings.

"This is lacking in Tamil," he feels, "We don't pay attention to children and their world. With a 2,000-year-old tradition, Tamil should have been able to produce an excellent body of work for children. But that is not the case."

The writer says that observing children, their world, and their little gestures and movements is second nature to him. "This is something that is part of my soul," he says: "It happens spontaneously." As for Thanvi, she is his wife's niece who lives in Bahrain. "I wrote the story for her birthday," he says. Thanvi though, is not old enough to read it yet.



**Quest for home** (Left) A view of the display; (below) artists along with Aishwarya. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Kasimedu, photo walks through the Flower Bazaar in Parry's, and interaction with artistes with disabilities.

Nithil S Kumar's photography project, translated into a photo book as well, captures the people of Kasimedu in large, black-and-white portraits. "It was an eye-opening project. I usually spend a lot of time in Mylapore, where everyone is used to being photographed. Kasimedu is the opposite. People like to keep to themselves. So it took a lot of effort to get them to open up," says the artist whose learning from the project was the importance of being resourceful.

Ponni Ashok's textile installation that lights up in flashes of colour in a dark room, has prints inspired from the back of trucks, caught in moments of action like moving furniture. "I abstracted a lot of it. The collection is made from 62 upcycled sarees that were cut up, screen printed and done patch work on," she explains. Some of the iconography has been used to create fresh prints.

The students were left to choose whether they wanted to sell their work or retain it: priced between ₹5,000 to ₹50,000, a few of them have already seen takers.

For Aishwarya, the biggest takeaway from working with young artists for over 13 years, has been the realisation that with the access that social media provides, most young creatives are aware of what happens at the other end of the world, and not so much in the 'here and now'.

Local, is an attempt at bringing this attention back. And it does. The viewer is left with a sense of warmth that comes with relatability.

*Local '24 is on till June 20 at Lalit Kala Akademi, Egmore.*

# Local cross sections

Sixteen young artists between the ages of 13 and 23 interpret their surroundings through art at Lalit Kala Akademi's new show, Local '24

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From the centre of the colourful chaos, a bright red canvas invites a second glance.

A closer look reveals a familiar Chennai sight: a busy beeline outside a TASMAR store on a weekend night. Not far away hangs a curious, mangled web of fishing nets in shades of blue and rust orange, inspired by North Chennai's fishing hub, Kasimedu. On another surface, are blue circular discs that mimic the walls of Tamil Nadu, which often carry ripped posters and incomplete lettering, interpreting vandalism as a form of expression.

Lalit Kala Akademi today is home to myriad such clever interpretations of the city and its surroundings by student-artists from Maisha Studio, between



the ages of 13 and 23. Curated by artist and silambam practitioner Aishwarya Mannivannan, the show titled Local '24 displays over 100 works by 16 young artists.

As straightforward as the name is, Aishwarya says she usually sits with the theme for a while before introducing the students to it. "I have a very strong connection to the places I live and visit. That is the reason

we called it 'local', not Chennai. Where we are, and go to, we subconsciously forge a connection," says Aishwarya. The idea of developing a sense of rootedness is key. Taking the effort to connect with the people, environment, architecture and art are all part of this exercise.

The artists have been at work for the last four months with this show. This included field trips to





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If you are from this city of eternal summer and are privy to the odd phenomenon that is ‘Chennai Twitter’, it is likely that you may have chanced upon the words ‘One Day in Bangkok’ over the last week. Pictures of this mango-based dessert from Pastry Kadai, a cloud kitchen selling baked goods in Anna Nagar, have flooded the Internet. Sakthi KN Dharni, its founder who was never on X (formerly Twitter), joined just so she could catch up on the chatter about her dessert boxes. “I had no idea what was being said. Were they praising us or were they yelling? I just knew that we went from getting about 40 orders a day to about 110 – nearly triple our capacity. We have been sold out on a good number of days too. Growth is good. Everyone likes growth,” says this self-proclaimed CA dropout. What, though, has drawn Twitterati to these boxes and why have they promoted discourse on social classes? (References have been made to the dessert’s price point. It



# Tropic thunder

## We got our hands on One Day in Bangkok, a viral mango dessert from Pastry Kadai

costs ₹850 a box). A peek into their viral blue and white tin of four layers leads us to a light vanilla sponge soaked in pandan infused coconut milk and coconut cremeux (a smooth sauce). It is topped with thick mango compote (jam studded with pieces of fruit) over which aesthetic slices of mango are set. A steel spoon is required to neatly scoop out all the layers. It also requires stealth to ensure that one gets through the box quickly without having to share. Although a mouthful, One

Day in Bangkok is perfectly sweet, combining globally familiar flavours of mango and coconut, a tried-and-tested duo displaying the prowess of tropical fruits. “Bakers wait for mango season. Around this time,



Scan the QR code to watch a video on the making of this dessert.

everyone is itching to try something new. Last year, we worked with similar flavours for another layered dessert called the Summertime Flirt with a mango cheesecake and a soft coconut jelly. This time, we drew up a chart to see the various mango combinations. Coconut continued to catch our eye,” says Sakthi. Several taste tests with inputs from friends and strangers helped build the final product that this baker released in summer. Sakthi baked her first cake (a blueberry cream cheese cake) for her brother’s birthday in 2019. Her intention was to explore the world of baby food but this failed attempt eventually led to the establishment of a cloud kitchen. “I began the shop in 2021 after a lot of deliberation because I wanted to give in to my creative side. I was only an exam away from my Chartered Accountancy final. As someone who trusts their gut, this decision felt right. I introduced three tea cakes – all of which were hits. Over time, we’ve broadened the menu and increased staff. It has taken time to build,” she says. Summer will end soon and so will the supply of mangoes but Sakthi is resolute about keeping the momentum going. Over the last few years, Sakthi has been carrying a book and pen wherever she goes to make notes of flavour combinations and textures that tend to go well. This is because she is looking to venture into the world of viennoiseries. “Savouries are my forte. It is where I can play. This is an exciting time for me,” she says. Pastry Kadai is at 303, Ponni Colony Main Road, Anna Nagar. Orders can be placed at [thrivenow.in](https://thrivenow.in). A box costs ₹850-plus taxes.

# Takeaway brew

## From coconut cream lattes to espressos, Umber Speciality hopes to simplify coffee



Tall order An iced coffee from Umber. B THAMODHARAN

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Our delivery from Umber Speciality Coffee arrives neatly packed, in pleasant hues of pastel pink and light brown. The aesthetic packaging hints at where this coffee brand aims to position itself in Chennai’s coffee market. “I envisioned Umber as a grab-and-go option for people on their way to work or even heading outdoors on the weekend. An option that is convenient and affordable,” says Divya Minocha, Umber’s co-founder. “I wanted everyday coffees to be a lot more accessible and easily available, rather than as a part of a beverage menu in a cafe that serves food. I’m also not too fond of the ‘syrup culture’,” she says. Along with co-founders Aditya Bhutani and Vivek Vashishth, Umber Speciality Coffee currently functions out of a space at Sindur Plaza,

Egmore, where they make all their coffees for takeaway and delivery. Umber’s menu, has all the classics which includes hot and iced cappuccinos, a South Indian filter coffee and an iced americano alongside their innovations – which play around with coffee and a melange of ingredients ranging from spiced honey to coconut cream. We sip on a coconut creme

latte from their specials menu, made with espresso, brown sugar, coconut cream, milk and a sprinkling of candied coconut bits. The caffeine in this cold coffee is thankfully not too strong, and allows the coconut to shine through. Their other iced coffee special, the milo mocha is chocolatey with just a light hit of condensed milk. Sampling their classics, the iced americano though has a little too much sugar, and is missing a stronger hit of caffeine. While their cappuccino is strong and frothy, it makes you wonder if the taste will more than make up for the experience of savouring an artfully done cuppa, in a cafe. Umber, however, is slowly but surely finding its niche. Divya says they have been getting orders from workplaces in particular, for bulk coffee orders during the workday. Divya adds, “There is an InVi, an Indian filter coffee made Vietnamese-style with condensed milk, a spiced honey latte, and even a ‘gur’ java coffee that we are adding to our menu.” To order from Umber, contact 8217410398, or find them on Zomato. Coffees are priced ₹150 upwards.

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