

TAMBARAM

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Thiruneermalai Main Road: too high for comfort now

T.S. ATUL SWAMINATHAN

A month ago when the State Highways Department started relaying the Pammal and Anakaputhur sections of Thiruneermalai Main Road, many residents were looking forward to it. Their joy was short-lived as the road was relaid at a greater height.

As these pictures show, motorists and pedestrians should be careful while navigating it.

N. Haricharan, a Pammal resident, says as the road is not at the same level as the sidewalk, some motorists park their vehicles on the road, thereby making it narrow.

At intersections such as Mariyadhaian Street, and Rajalakshmi Street in Pammal, and Marian Street and Nesamani Street in Anakaputhur, the difference in height between the road and the sidewalk is stark.



▼ A section of Thiruneermalai Main Road.



Relocated bus stop on GST Road comes without a shelter



When the Greater Chennai Traffic Police implemented traffic diversion on GST Road and Thiruneermalai Road a month ago, a bus stop with seating arrangement was shifted a few meters away. The facility in question is the one below Ponds flyover-cum-

grade separator. Commuters are not happy with the current location of the stop and want it to be relocated to a point before GST Road and Thiruneermalai Road. Not only with the loca, commuters are also unimpressed with the fact that the relocated stop lacks a shelter. *Text by T.S. Atul Swaminathan*

Date extended for bus pass renewal

The Metropolitan Transport Corporation has extended the date for renewal of the monthly, 'Travel As You Please' and student concessional passes till January 23.

Under the schemes, the pass holders can travel between January 1 and 22; January 16 and February 15; and January 11 and February 10.

The monthly and student concession passes are issued every month between the dates 1 and the 13. The 'Travel As You Please' cards are issued between the seventh and 22nd of every month.

The students and the pass holders can renew their monthly passes at counters located on the premises of the terminuses and near halting points.

A bumpy ride



▼ This section of Chitlapakkam Main Road in Mahalakshmi Nagar is yet to be mended. The stretch facilitates connectivity to Hasthinapuram, Sembakkam, Chitlapakkam and Tambaram Sanatorium, but the pitted carriageway poses a risk to the safety of motorists. *Photo and text by T.S. Atul Swaminathan*

Muthulakshmi Nagar association elects new office bearers

The Chitlapakkam Muthulakshmi Nagar Welfare Association recently conducted its 33rd annual general body meeting and elected new office bearers.

The new committee include L. Sundararaman, president; V. Ra-

majeyam and S. Sekar, vice presidents; D. R. Shivakumar, secretary; V. Yoganand and J. Prasanna, joint secretaries; R. M. Easwaran, treasurer; S Venkatesan, assistant treasurer; and K. Venkatraman, auditor.

A resolution was passed at the

meeting urging the Tambaram City Municipal Corporation to collect trash from homes daily. Making provision for drinking water connections and widening the Viswamittr Street stormwater drain network were among the other demands.

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THE ORDEAL OF NAVIGATING THE HOME STRETCH

Residents of gated communities and neighbourhoods off Global Hospital Road always find the going tough, thanks to the condition of the thoroughfare **P2**



AN OLD STRYCHNINE TREE

The State Highways Department has placed it within a ring of protection based on a directive from the District Green Committee **P4**

New FOB draws murmurs of discontent

It was only in April last year that the foot overbridge in Tambaram (West) was opened for the public but it is already invited drawing murmurs of discontent from them.

The escalators at the FOB that connect to the FOB at Tambaram railway station are not functioning. The escalators are located along the western lane of GST Road and commuters have to take a long walk to access them.

Given the number of people using the FOB, the escalators should run day after day without any breakdown, says S. Sundar, a suburban train commuter.

R. Rajasekaran, a suburban train commuter, says, "Recently, the maintenance staff attended to the technical glitch at the facility and set it right, but in two days they stopped functioning again."

Damaged overhead ceilings in the Tambaram subway also need attention.

Text and photos: T.S. Atul Swaminathan



Damaged roof at the facility.
PHOTO : SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



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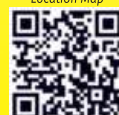
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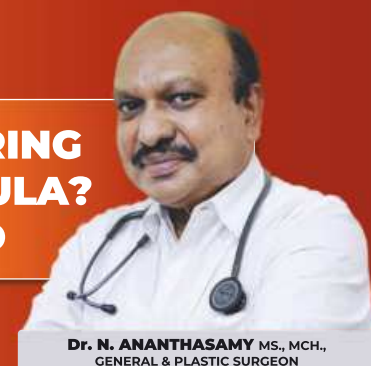


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The ordeal of navigating the home stretch

Residents of gated communities and neighbourhoods off Global Hospital Road always find the going tough, thanks to the condition of the thoroughfare

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Following Michaung, Embassy Residency Road was topped up with brick debris to deal with depressions and holes the road had developed in addition to what it already sported. The road had been filled up in this manner far too generously for road users' liking. In the days that followed, residents had to deal with swirls of red dust and it was not uncommon for pedestrians to hold up their noses. And motorcyclists with a knack for operating their machines with one hand or both off the handle bar instinctively took the same evasive action.

Embassy Residency Road branches off Global Hospital Road, which is more widely known. Both roads ail from the same disease: a stubborn reluctance to bring complete and meaningful healing to them through a proper road-laying exercise.

"Brick and other construction debris or a load of small blue metal stones is poured into the potholes whenever the road has deteriorated. After a couple of weeks, the potholes reappear and the process is repeated. It is a painfully cyclical process that hardly addresses the issue. The debris poured into the potholes causes swirls of dust to rise, causing air pollution. Global Hospital Road and Embassy Residency Road together account for three schools – NPS International, Sri Chaitanya School and Casagrand International School. A massive number of school-children take these roads and are affected by the pollution. These roads lead to a number of gated communities. Given the volume of vehicles, including heavy vehicles that head to a construction site inside, these quick-fixes hardly help," says M. Vignesh, a member of the managing committee of the owners' association at Glo Dugar, a gated community in the region.

On January 4, 7 and 8 – thanks to unexpected showers – there was respite from the dust storm. By the agency of the rain, the dust particles had been restrained and arm-twisted into staying on the ground.

But the filling material having been washed off, the cycle was repeated.

The potholes have been filled with small blue metal stones and other fillers, and the dust is swirling again. Says Vignesh: "There is no substitute for relaying these roads."



Global Hospital Road and (below) Embassy Residency Road in Perumbakkam on January 20, 2024. PHOTOS: PRINCE FREDERICK

Inspiring children to be champions of the planet

The ninth edition of Wings to Fly is under way; eight students from Chennai Schools will go on an all-expenses-paid trip to the Netherlands

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Students of Greater Chennai Corporation run-schools must be dreaming about who will get selected as 'Chennaiyin Climate Change Champions'. Eight students have won the

right to go on a study tour to the Netherlands, a country with an impressive score on the Climate Change Performance Index.

The Ninth edition of the 'Wings to Fly' programme initiated by Rotary Club of Madras East got under way with 34,500 students from 211 Chennai Schools (from Classes VI to IX) en-

rolling for Phase I. Based on a simple test, 471 students qualified to be part of a workshop in early January, which covered the basics of what climate change is and why we need to wake up now.

"This was a practical workshop, so we kept watching them to shortlist 64 students from middle and high

school," says rotarian Sujitha Arvind, chairperson, Wings to Fly.

Phase 2 of this project kicks off on January 20 with the shortlisted students going on a field trip to Pallikarai marshland, Perungudi bio-mining plant and the Guindy reserve forest.

The students then make a video illustrating how they can address climate change-related issues in the city. From the 64 students, 32 will be shortlisted. Later, in mid-February, they would attend another workshop

where they present a PPT of their idea and eight students would be selected by a panel for a trip to the Netherlands. Sujitha says this year's edition has got bigger as middle school students have also been roped in. "The structure of the programme has remained the same over these years except for a new theme every year. Once it was on entrepreneurship and the final eight got to fly to Dubai. In another year, a trip to NASA was organised for them," says Sujitha.

Climate change in the classroom

While the subject has entered the education framework, it is still far from communicating the urgency of the situation to students

LIFFY THOMAS

While climate change education is increasingly seen as an essential part of schooling, is it helping students cultivate a culture of mindfulness, ownership and commitment around the climate crisis? *The Hindu Downtown* spoke to a cross section of teachers to understand the syllabus and the changes school boards are making to prepare young people for climate change.

In 2018, Cambridge IGCSE curriculum introduced 'Global Perspective' for students from primary section onwards. "Previously, this was a subject only for high school students," says Sudha Mahesh, head of school, Campus K in Sholinganalur.

The module promoted research skills and critical thinking in children. Among others, it presented the topics of migration of birds and environmental changes affecting nesting of Olive Ridley turtles.

"Students are required to identify a problem in their city or state and design projects to address it," says Sudha.

Similarly, subject Earth Science for middle-school students was hugely revamped in recent years, making students look at their surroundings more critically and explore the 'why' and 'how' of things.

"Only if you have lessons cultivating empathy will children think of caring for the earth," says Sudha.

A policy?

Studies, however, say a lot more needs to be done to make climate education more relevant and engaging.

A 2021 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report by UNESCO found that climate change is not yet sufficiently integrated into the education framework. It says only 50% of the countries in the world emphasise the subject in their national-



A rally on climate change at Besant Nagar. FILE PHOTO: KARUNAKARAN M

level laws, policies or teaching plans.

In 2020, 16-year-old Aman Sharma launched a petition on Change.org, a petition platform, asking the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) to include climate change in its curriculum, emphasising that it be introduced to children in their early stages of schooling.

The comprehensive curriculum must include how human beings contribute to ecological degradation, information of The Paris Agreement, The Indian Wildlife

Protection Act, and about eco sensitive zones and Ramsar sites, says the petition.

Though many environment-related topics are discussed in books published for the ICSE and CBSE Boards, there is no learning continuum or progressive gradation of relevant climate change specific content, say school heads.

Vibha Roy, editor, textbook author and teacher, agrees there's nothing full-fledged in the textbooks to influence children to be climate change ambassadors.

"Our syllabus in higher classes are so vast that teachers have little time in hand to initiate discussions to get children to think deeper about certain environment topics that concern them," says Vibha, adding that primary classes must go for it.

Revise the syllabus

M. Uma, a social science teacher with Thiru-Vi-Ka Higher Secondary School, says though there is no dedicated curriculum on climate change in state board schools, the Samacheer Kalvi textbooks touches upon many of these topics and they are presented colourfully.

Talking about social science, she says, the book was last revised six years ago. "Revising the textbook is a big exercise we know, but we want the School Education Department to add certain relevant topics every academic year. For example, changing weather conditions in Chennai and other districts or Cyclone Michaung must have a mention in next year's book," says Uma.

Teaching and learning about climate change that address students' understanding will lead to positive actions, says Uma.

Vibha says for climate change to be effective in the classroom teachers need to adapt their teaching methods. Workshops must be conducted for them to brush up on their knowledge and understanding.

Climate change must not be confined to science classes as it is interdisciplinary and must be taught in every subject and grade. "An essay on a relevant environment-related topic can be given in English to test the knowledge of students," says Vibha.

Sudha says textbook knowledge must be backed with continuous, on-ground sustainability initiatives.

During the current academic year, Campus K had a *dupatta* collection drive initiated by students, where they refurbished them to make products such as jewellery, mats and coasters. This was later put up for sale in the school.

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An old strychnine tree on ECR saved by the bell

The State Highways Department has placed it within a ring of protection based on a directive from the District Green Committee

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

On East Coast Road in Injambakkam, a strychnine tree stands with attention-grabbing branches, a few of them gnarled and all of them peculiarly stretched out in diverse directions. The branches seem to be desperately reaching out for help. In hindsight, that imagery matches its life situation. This tree needed help which it found in the nick of time. The help came from the corridors of power.

The strychnine tree – Etti Maram in Tamil – is found within the compound walls of a temple, Ponni Amman Koil in Injambakkam. Located within scraping distance of a compound wall that is parallel to ECR, this tree was found in the course of the road-widening exercise.

And it was saved by the bell. When the State Highways department presented a picture of how the expansion would affect the trees on East Coast Road (trees that can be transplanted and those that

cannot be) to the Chennai District Green Committee, this tree came up for a discussion.

Marine biologist and a key member of NGOs Nizhal and SPARK, T.D. Babu is a member of the green committee. He underlined this individual tree's significance, explaining what he believes to be its place in Chennai. Babu says it is the only known and documented Etti Maram living now in Chennai. The strychnine tree (strychnos nuxvomica) is native to India.

Babu notes the question of transplanting the tree was ruled out, as it is well advanced in years – he estimates it at around 200 years – and would succumb to the stress of the exercise. Realising the tree is in its second childhood and had to be handled with kid gloves, the green committee voted in favour of leaving it entirely undisturbed.

A member of Nizhal, Babu reveals this Etti Maram would be having company in Chennai if only the other known tree of this species in the city had not perished, as it did a few years ago.

Babu says he and his associates



▼ The strychnine tree on East Coast Road in Injambakkam. PHOTOS: PRINCE FREDERICK

at Nizhal got to learn about a dying strychnine tree at Semmozhi Poon-ga in Teynampet. The creation of a parking lot at the public space had been the last nail in the coffin,

As it is far advanced in years, the tree cannot be transplanted. It has to be protected by retaining it where it stands

claims Babu. Babu says the tree was well down the path of no return by the time Nizhal was aware of it and its plight.

Babu emphasises Chennai has to hold on to this tree in Injambakkam. Long-time residents of areas close to the temple are instinctively aware of its significance. In his sixties, one resident calls it “a tree without a name”, a notion probably fuelled by the fact that this is



the lone tree of its species in the region and references to it in everyday conversations are few and far between.

In alignment with the green committee's verdict and its commitment to protecting the strychnine tree, the State Highways department has brought it under a ring of protection.

The road expansion exercise at ECR will skirt around this tree.

Workshops to enhance creativity

Listening and reading

India in English – An interactive session that provides practical exercises for aspiring translators and editors. It will be conducted by Mini Krishnan on January 26 from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Age group: Above 18 years.

Registration fees: ₹799 (inclusive of GST) – only 20 slots for the workshop.

This workshop is about what happens when our Indian languages encounter English. An author-translator team will offer a bilingual chat. Mini Krishnan is Translations Editor, Tamil Nadu Textbook And Educational Services Corporation and Oxford University Press (retd).

Beyond social media

A creative workshop for young adults by Vibha Batra on January 26; 2:30 p.m. to 04:30 p.m.; age group: 15-17 years. Registration fee: ₹. 799 (inclusive of GST) – only 20

slots for the workshop.

Contrary to popular opinion, Gen Z is not all about smartphones, streaming and social media. Many love the written word, some are closet writers, others would like to write, but do not know how or where to start. That is where this workshop comes in. Vibha Batra is an award-winning and bestselling author, graphic novelist, advertising consultant, poet, lyricist, translator, playwright, script writer, travel writer, columnist, speaker and mentor.

Smartphone photography

A workshop to master mobile photography by Gayathri Nair. Date: January 27; 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Age group: Above 18 years.

Registration fees: ₹ 799 (inclusive of GST) – only 20 slots for the workshop.

Unlock the potential of your smartphone camera in this two-hour workshop. From camera bas-

ics to composition, lighting and editing, discover the secrets to captivating smartphone photography. Chennai-based Gayatri Nair is an arts manager and educator. As one of the co-founders of the Chennai Photo Biennale Foundation, a non-profit arts organisation, she spearheads CPB Prism, the foundation's educational division.

From verse to canvas

A creativity-boosting exercise that helps you visualise poetry on paper through watercolours and oil pastels.

Date: January 27; 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. for those aged above 15.

Only 30 slots are for available for the workshop. People should pay ₹ 799 (includes materials and GST) to attend the workshop. Nivedha Leoni heads Curriculum Design at RainbowFish studio. She is an artist who works across various mediums, though her favourite is pen and ink.



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Crochet enthusiasts' gesture towards cancer survivors

LIFFY THOMAS

Thanks to its record-breaking ways, Mother India's Crochet Queens (MICQ) is widely known. On February 4 at SRM University campus in Potheri, this all-women group of crochet enthusiasts would likely add one more record to its name. The group is expected to go down in the chronicles of Guinness World Records as having knit the maximum number of crochet scarves for cancer survivors. With that feat, MICQ's tally of records would swell to five. Having lost her husband to blood cancer last year, MICQ founder Subhashri Natarajan has a compelling reason to support this cause.

In addition to her husband, Subhashri also lost her mother who died of age-related complications. "For these reasons, we could not plan the event in 2023 and prior to that we had to take a break due to the pandemic," says 52-year-old Subhashri, who is vice-president of a private firm.

In 2016, MICQ first entered the Guinness World Records by knitting the world's largest crochet blanket, one measuring 3,377 sq. metres and made by 2000 crochet enthusiasts. They followed it up with a creation of similar proportions every year for the next four years, the pieces being distributed to various charities.

"We are still getting the scarves from our members in India and abroad and by January 25 I should get the final count," she says adding that a minimum of 1000 scarves should be presented before the adjudicators for MICQ to enter the record book.

Only cotton thread has been used to knit the scarves to make sure it is safe for those undergoing treatment for cancer.

Once the event is over, the plan is to distribute the scarves through hospitals and

On February 4 at SRM University, Mother India's Crochet Queens will attempt a feat to enter the Guinness World Records for the fifth time

those caring for cancer patients. Close to 300 members are expected to attend the event, including representatives of 10 countries.

The feat

This year the number of participants who are sending the scarves are less than the previous editions but the core team has nothing to complain about. Four schools are making an entry – two government schools from Mumbai and Mysore, and two private institutions from Coimbatore and Mysore.

"Thanks to our captains (each state is headed by a captain and there are 16 such in India) these schools initiated crochet and got children to make scarves," she says.

While a student is required to make a minimum of 10 scarves, women have a higher target to aim for – 25 each, the size of each scarf being 8x60.

"These are a few schools that would have made at least 100, a big push to promote crocheting as a skill and empower children and women," she says.

'Return with thanks to Indian Brave Brothers' is a signature project of MICQ to provide caps and cowls to soldiers in the borders. "Every year, we send more than 1000 pieces to those patrolling our borders," she says.

For updates on the event, visit the Facebook page of MICQ.



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Traditional games conducted

Games including traditional ones marked Pongal celebration at TVS Emerald Green Acres, a gated community in Kolapakkam near Vandalur. The events included Uriyadi, sugarcane-breaking, slow cycling race, ball-picking and 100m running race, says a press release.

School celebrates Samathuva Pongal

Traditional games marked Samathuva Pongal celebration at Montfort Matric Higher Secondary School in Perungudi. According to a press release, students' parents and transperson artists were invited. On the occasion, there was an awareness session on hazards of using plastic products.

Road safety rules demonstrated

In commemoration of National Road Safety Week, Rotary International District 3232 organized a road safety awareness campaign at Phoenix mall in Velachery, Jeeva Park in T Nagar, and CMBT bus terminus in Koyambedu. The events included demonstration of road safety rules and regulations through one-minute play, flash mob dance

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