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## Power comes at zero cost

Velachery resident Praveen Kumar P.A. invested in a rooftop solar unit in 2021; in the years that followed, the demand for power increased with the arrival of two electric vehicles. Still, the family enjoys a nil electricity bill; and the initial investment has been covered

LIFFY THOMAS

**P**raveen Kumar P.A.'s electricity bill is easy on his domestic budget. It is an almost nil power bill despite two electrical vehicles being in the picture. He has to thank the 8 kW solar roof unit he has installed on the terrace of his 13-

unit apartment complex for the heart-warming number on the power bill.

In 2021, when Praveen purchased a flat in Velachery, he convinced the other owners to allow him to use the terrace space to install solar panels. It is an elevated structure so that roof space is not



wasted and also helps neighbours to use the space under the panel as drying and leisure space.

Initially, the family went in for four kW, deciding they will increase the capacity when they invest in electric vehicles they added another four kW.

In November 2024, an electric scooter arrived, followed by an electric car in April 2025. With these arrivals, the solar unit was scaled up.

The 8 kW solar system generates 32 units a day (kilo watt hours) and every billing cycle (once in two months) it generates close to 2000 units.

"My car when fully charged supports me for 500 km and takes 70 units per charge," says the businessman who is in his early 30s.

"Our four-bedroom flat consumes 2,000 units on an average and going with the Government charge of ₹11 for anything above

Praveen Kumar P.A. says the solar rooftop unit has been placed in such a manner that there is no wastage of space.

1000 units I should be incurring a bi-monthly bill of ₹ 22,000," he explains.

Since 2023, he pays a minimum amount of ₹800 for using solar (as per the rule that for every 100 per kW)"That's a fixed bill," he says.

Praveen has more numbers to show that the ₹4 lakh investment he made in 2021 for the 8 kW solar plant is proving to be profitable.

"I covered the investment cost in three years. The best part of having a rooftop solar unit is that it has a life span of 25 years as there are no batteries to maintain and other components come with a warranty," he adds.

Over the years, inspired by Praveen, six other families in the community have invested in rooftop solar units.

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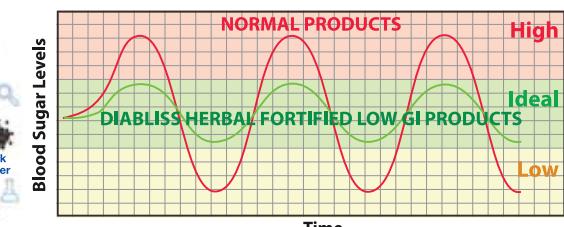
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# For the love of a public space

Project Thiruvanmiyur Mada Street seeks to improve two streets in the locality by engaging with their stakeholders



PRINCE FREDERICK

**W**hen an event kicks off, it often picks up momentum on its own, without any extraneous push. The best time to suss out an event is when it lies sprawled on the drawing board. Better still, when it is being hurriedly dressed up for the stage. The loose ends remain untied. And the organisers are so caught up in the last-minute scramble that they forget to turn on their charisma and those headline-making sentences remain unsaid. It is in that raw moment that the true strength of what is being done is on display; the real zeal of those powering the activity is evident.

The *Hindu Downtown* caught Project Thiruvanmiyur Mada Street in the inconvenient last hour before it was being presented in an event (a two-day event) to all the stakeholders of the mada streets around Marundeeswarar temple – the residents, shopkeepers, temple goers, the officials and even motorists. The Project seeks to rei-

magine the mada streets around the temple: for now, just two of them, East Mada Street and North Mada Street. A detailed deck on what these streets look like now and what they ought to look like at all times has been prepared.

The event and the project it launched more than passed muster, the effort evidently powered by a passionate love for this space, often held hostage by carelessness. A series of careless acts, often coming together in a deadly cocktail of chaos.

Carelessly parked vehicles. Cattle allowed to roam on the streets carelessly. Carelessly flung garbage, ignoring a row of bins at the corner of East Mada Street and North Mada Street.

The project receives motive power from residents and lovers of this piece of Thiruvanmiyur. This collective includes two architects and urban designers. Dhanya Rajagopal of The Thinking Cauldron lives at Legionowo in Mazowieckie, Poland. Whenever she returns to Chennai, she comes back home to Thiruvanmiyur, this part of Thiru-



▼  
Images clicked minutes before the two-day event introducing Project Thiruvanmiyur Mada Street was kickstarted, on November 14, 2025.  
PHOTOS: PRINCE FREDERICK

vanmiyur where she grew up. This personal reality drives Dhanya's motivation to make the space pleasant for every stakeholder by ensuring vehicles stay parked where they should be, and the streets are free of litter; and movement of motorists and pedestrians is not hampered. The other architect plus urban planner Pavithra Sriram of Design Co:Lab is also associated with the project in a personal capacity.

The bill of fare at the November 14-15 event – an archival photo exhibition, a history walk through Marundeeswarar temple, exploration of traditional games that date back to the time when the temple was established and live sketching programme – were as much by residents as it was for residents. The live sketching was organised by Chennai Weekend Artists and the history walk around the temple was led by historian Pradeep Chakravarthy and founder of Kreeda Games, Vinita Sidhartha.

And the archival photo exhibition was not born in the government archives department or any private archival facility, but was stitched together by residents, digging through their old albums. Check the archival photos (including the one of the plane belonging to the Madras Flying Club making an unplanned, emergency landing on the Thiruvanmiyur beach) at @projectthiruvanmiyurmada on Instagram.

The organisers were handing out postcards carrying pictures of this part of Thiruvanmiyur to shopkeepers. These postcards can be bought and the proceeds from their sale will be ploughed back into the resources required to support Project Thiruvanmiyur Mada Street. Four benches made from repurposed wood, two for East Mada Street and the other two for North Mada Street will be placed there after the event.

Dhanya knows this Project is in for the long haul, as it requires interactions and promises from a variety of diverse stakeholders: on the official and governmental side, the HR&CE Department and Greater Chennai Corporation; on the social side, residents, shopkeepers and visitors.

That would call for many conversations with different points of focus.

## FOMRRA initiative on SIR

**HARSHA KODA**

Exercising the right to vote is not just a privilege but a vital responsibility for every citizen. Over the past year, the Federation of OMR Resident Associations (FOMRRA) has been proactive in conducting Voter ID camps across OMR communities, helping residents secure valid voter identification cards. This grassroots initiative has corrected discrepancies in electoral data, empowering many residents to fulfill their democratic duty.

With the current Special Invitation Revision (SIR) under way, FOMRRA is revisiting voter registration processes in many areas to ensure that every resident has a valid voter ID and can participate in the next elections. To support this, FOMRRA, in collaboration with the team from Karmayogam who have been working with us on voter ID camps, has launched daily Google Meet calls from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. These video conferences serve as a platform to clarify doubts and assist residents with the voter ID process.

Join the conversation on <https://sir.fomrra.org>

FOMRRA's continued efforts demonstrate how community engagement can strengthen democracy. By making voter registration more accessible and providing direct support through daily virtual interactions, barriers to voting are reduced. Every vote shapes policies on education, healthcare, safety, and urban development. Neglecting to vote means forfeiting the power to hold leaders accountable to the people they serve.

Residents must recognise voting not only as a right but as a civic responsibility essential to ensuring that government truly represents and responds to its citizens. Stronger voter turnout today lays the foundation for a more inclusive, equitable, and responsive tomorrow. This is why participating in voter ID camps, staying informed during the SIR process, and utilising the daily Google Meet calls are critical steps for all OMR residents.]

*Harsha Koda is co-founder of FOMRRA*

## Open mic music night

**RAJIT NARAYAN**

On the evening of November 8, OMR's vibrant community came alive at the Open Mic Music Night, where residents from kids to elders showcased their talents through soulful singing, spirited instrumentals, and nostalgic melodies. The event, curated with support from FOMRRA and hosted at Kathucoda, a fast-growing music school run by the Stanley brothers, John and Christopher, saw the duo electrify the crowd with their rousing rendition of Bon Jovi's It's My Life, which quite literally brought the roof down. Performers presented a delightful mix of Tamil film hits, Bollywood classics, Sufi tunes and ghazals. Yet, it was the retro tracks that truly stole the show, as the audience lit up to timeless favourites from the golden era. The evening concluded on a high note with calls for many more such musical gatherings to keep OMR's community spirit alive and harmonious.

*Rajit Narayan is a resident of OMR*



## 'Install speed bumps at the IIT-M flyover exit'

**T.S. ATUL SWAMINATHAN**

Motorists have requested the State Highways Department to install speed bumps at the exit area of a flyover located across the Indian Institute of Technology - Madras on Sardar Patel Road.

At the Cancer Institute junction, Greater Chennai Traffic Police has implemented a diversion to ease congestion. According to the traffic plan, MTC bus drivers should take the flyover.

Additionally, as part of the diver-

sion, the CLRI bus stop below the overpass has been temporarily relocated and merged with the Kendriya Vidyalaya (KV) halt.

J. Raagini, a motorist, says bus drivers turn left to stop at the KV Halt without signalling. Recently, she had to slam on the brakes to avoid being hit by a bus.

There are no warning signs to alert motorists that buses will turn left and stop near the KV School. Vehicle users suggest that necessary measures should be taken as soon as possible.

**LIFFY THOMAS**

**A** gazette notification dated October 31, 2025 by the Housing and Urban Development Department of Tamil Nadu issuing amendments to the Tamil Nadu Combined Development and Building Rules, 2019 augurs well for electric vehicle charging infrastructure in the state, and certainly in Chennai, a burgeoning metropolis with a galloping growth in the housing sector.

In residential buildings, a charging point for electric vehicles needs to be provided in every car parking and two wheeler parking space. In buildings where the number of dwelling units exceeds 50, car and two-wheeler parking space earmarked for visitors shall be provided with fast charging points. However, buildings up to 14 m in height not exceeding eight dwelling units or 750 square meters of built-up area are exempt from this requirement.

Those working in the renewable energy space note that before apartment complexes start drawing up plans to provide EV infrastructure, it would help to first invest in solar panels and this would be a strategic move. The synergy between the two technologies can create a sustainable energy ecosystem along with huge savings on the electricity bill.

Already, Tamil Nadu Combined Development and Building Rules 2019 mandates that at least one third of terrace space be reserved for placement of solar photovoltaic panels to get a completion certifi-

## Let the sun shine on your EV moves

With Tamil Nadu expecting apartments of a certain size to integrate EV charging infrastructure into its workaday reality, communities would do well to tap into solar energy to make the bill palatable



File photo of solar panels installed at the Moore Market suburban station complex.

cate from CMDA.

Ashok Kumar, president, Tamil Nadu Solar Energy Developers Association, gives three reasons why

they are pushing for greater adoption of solar energy.

For domestic use, consumers can avail a subsidy under Prime Mi-

a solar power unit has come down by another 5%," says Ashok. "The excess energy generated is fed into the grid, so one can use solar energy 24x7 and that energy can be used to charge an EV vehicle."

**Residential vs commercial tariff**  
Krutivas Pushkar, managing director of Pushkar Properties and a member of Confederation of Real Estate Developers Associations of India (CREDAI), says today solar and EV infrastructure are sought-after amenities in residential projects, but some factors are hindering their progress. For instance, TNEB takes more than six months to get a solar unit installed on the rooftop connected to the grid.

"When you are coming up with a residential project with a solar unit on the rooftop, the common areas in the blocks (which include lifts/lights/landscaping/borewell motors) come under the commercial tariff, where the rates are much higher than what is charged under residential tariff," says Krutivas.

So even if a community has been harnessing the power of the sun, they do not get "unit to unit" deduction. "You produce whatever you want and give it to the grid, the TNEB gives you ₹3.80 per unit rebate, whereas for the commercial tariff, a charge of around ₹8 per unit is borne by the residents association. This is something CREDAI is fighting as we want the common areas in the residential block to be brought under residential tariff or it will not encourage people to switch to this renewable source of energy," says Krutivas.

# Japanese sparrowhawk sighted in Chennai

Breeding in East Asia and wintering in South East Asia, this bird is known to show up in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. A sighting of a Japanese sparrowhawk with photos from the Adyar Estuary on November 7 marks the first evidential documentation of the bird in mainland India

PRINCE FREDERICK

**T**ouch upon this topic about the Adyar Estuary, and one ends up in an ouroboric, cyclical reasoning. The conclusion takes one to the starting point which feeds back into the same conclusion. It is the chicken-and-egg conundrum in a birding contest.

The T20I strike rate Abishek Sharma currently enjoys among batters, the Adyar Estuary enjoys among birding patches in and around Chennai in terms of hyperticks (sightings of unexpected feathers). Every birder worth their pair of binoculars would have clocked in numerous hours at the Adyar Estuary. And that begets the conundrumical question: do birders flock to the Adyar Estuary in large numbers because it throws up avian surprises regularly or does the Adyar Estuary throw up avian surprises regularly because birders flock to it in large numbers?

Forget its overall rare bird stats. Over the last couple of months, the Adyar Estuary has hosted a Saunders's tern (in fact, two) for a while, supported what seems an Isabelline wheatear's day-trip to Chennai; and in the week that went by, it had a dalliance with a Japanese sparrowhawk.

No mistyping there; a Japanese sparrowhawk indeed. The lucky pair of eyes that peered through the binoculars belongs to Ramanan R.V., a Madras Naturalists Society (MNS) member and a birder.

The encounter with the Accipiter hawk happened in the liminal zone at the Adyar Estuary



where one breathes in the same air that caresses the broken bridge and the peripheral part of the compound wall enclosing the Theosophical Society campus. This part of the Estuary can be christened "unexpected birds check-in counter", given the enviable aggregate of such sightings it boasts.

Ramanan shares the details of the encounter with *The Hindu Downtown*: "On the morning of November 7, around 6.30 a.m., there was a commotion inside the TS campus. Drongos were shouting, chasing some bird and

## Recent rare avian sightings at Adyar Estuary

Saunders's tern: For around three weeks in September  
Isabelline wheatear: October 2  
Japanese sparrowhawk: November 7



The Japanese sparrowhawk photographed by Madras Naturalists Society member Ramanan R.V. at Adyar Estuary on November 7, 2025.

luminaries on raptors.

The Japanese sparrowhawk shuttles between its breeding home in East Asia, which includes China, Japan, Korea and Siberia and its wintering home in South-east Asia.

Ramanan elaborates, "Within the Indian subcontinent, its occurrence has been documented as a migrant and winter visitor primarily, if not exclusively, in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. This is the first photographic sight record of the species from mainland India. There are records from Walong and Namdapha in Arunachal Pradesh. Without documentation, these records are just claims. This is the first time we are documenting the sighting of a Japanese sparrowhawk in mainland India and then showing it."

then all of a sudden this bird came out and it started chasing a green bee-eater. It went on two sorties trying to catch the green bee-eater, but was unsuccessful in the attempt. Initially I was looking through the binoculars and I thought it was the usual Shikra. Then I noticed it was on the leaner side and slightly smaller than a Shikra. I then took my camera and captured a few shots of the raptor."

Ramanan went to the patch on two subsequent days, but the bird did not show up.

Ramanan notes that photos of the bird were "subsequently shared with 'ProjectRaptor-Watch' of the Madras Naturalists' Society (MNS) for assistance with identification. The initial impression, given the location, was that of a Eurasian sparrowhawk (Acci-

## Identification pointers

Here are selective points from the observations Gnanakanan Kesavabharathi made based on the photos of the Japanese sparrowhawk Ramanan R.V. shared with him. These are identification pointers that rule out "lookalikes".

Pointer one: "Lack of black-tipped outer primaries eliminates Chinese sparrowhawk."

Pointer two: "Based on the number of black-barring in the primaries (especially P8) and the number of primary fingers, we can eliminate Eurasian sparrowhawk. Also mesial stripe was not visible in all image angles. In initial review, I could not count

primaries right with available images and mistook the gap in outer primary as missing primary. Eurasian sparrowhawk in all ages have good protruding P5 finger."

Pointer three: "Based on the indistinct mesial stripe, the number of bands in P8 (less than six in Besra) and considering they are residents with not much of movements recorded, we can eliminate Besra as well."

Building up the the identification profile with these pointers, Gnanakanan Kesavabharathi concludes: "Leaving us the best contender as Japanese sparrowhawk, for which all these elimination pointers fit in."

# KIDS craft change

Around Children's Day, little nimble fingers demonstrated how art forms that use eco-friendly and even discarded materials can be part of everyday living as well as celebrations

SHARON JESSICA MICHAEL



## Undoing a knotty problem

Thirteen-year-old Keshavanath Shankar stumbled into macramé a year and a half ago, when idle hours at home and the absence of a television demanded a more creative diversion. Crochet proving difficult, he began experimenting with knots after noticing friends and online creators working with macramé. "It just felt comfortable," he says of the craft that has since become his daily practice.

Keshavanath works exclusively with sustainably sourced cotton

cords from Craft Affairs. "Even the cotton is eco-friendly," he notes, aligning his materials with the sustainability principles taught to him. He primarily makes pouches and keychains that are priced between ₹60 and ₹250 though larger pieces such as wall hangings and bottle holders demand considerably more time and effort.

His process is exacting. He begins by measuring and cutting cords before knotting them into their final form. "I enjoy almost every part, except the last bit where I

have to tie every single knot and cut it," he admits. Bigger customised orders come with challenges: "I pull the threads so many times that my skin starts shedding." Mistakes, however small, are never ignored. "I undo every knot until it is fixed."

For Keshavanath, sustainability is a responsibility. "My generation deserves a cleaner world," he says. His message to buyers is simple: choose products that are stylish and eco-friendly – creations that do not add to the planet's burden.



## Leafing through art

At ten years, P.S. Thara, from Kasturba Nagar, Adyar and a student at St. Patrick's High School (CISCE) is already carving a niche for herself in the world of sustainable craft. Her journey began at the age of nine during an Organic Farmers Market exhibition in Kasturba Na-

gar, where she was introduced to the art of palm-leaf crafting. "On the first day, we made fishes, headbands, bracelets and watches," she recalls. Thara has mastered a range of designs with palm leaves, including stars, squares, and diamonds. "The classic is one star and three

What if children are empowered to take on the mantle of teachers, and adults are at the receiving end of knowledge transfer. What if children school their elders in the grammar of conscious living. What if children are conversant with the idioms of sustainability, source discards and transform them into desirable, eco-friendly, everyday utilitarian objects and eye-catching decor. On

November 15, at the time of this article going to press, Kid's Kraft Carnival 2025 – Edition 2 (organised by Boutique Bougainvillea and The Kraft Faktor) was under way in Velachery, demonstrating that these what-ifs can be realities. Around a dozen children in the 10 to 15 age bracket were holding sessions on a variety of art-based practices defined by sustainable processes. The children showed the attendees how to make origami-based decor, quilled wall decor,

quilled jewellery, artwork on upcycled boards, clay-based art and palm-leaf decor. Various other art forms were also in attendance (crochet, macrame and decoupage among them) and all of them were viewed through the lens of sustainability and the eyes of the young ones that have mastered them through sustained practice. Some of these children have taken these skillsets beyond weekend sessions to build brands that fuse sustainability with art.

## Decoupage for the planet

With scraps of paper, old sheets, and dried flowers, 10-year-old Maya Ram, a Grade 5 student at Adyar Theosophical Society, turns everyday objects into decoupage creations. Decoupage, the craft of layering paper and fabric to decorate surfaces, allows her to repurpose discarded materials into functional décor.

Using torn tissue papers, old bedsheets, dried flowers, and leftover materials, Maya applies layers onto circular pots to create sustainable décor. "I have also decomposed tissue papers with leaves, flowers, floral designs, and other patterns," says Maya, a resident of Indira Nagar, Adyar. She can also personalise items: "If a customer wants something specific, like a dog design, I can try to find decomposed tissue paper or fabric for them, though it will cost a little more."

She carefully applies the papers to circular pots, a process that demands patience and attention. "The paper is rectangular, but the pot is circular, so it is hard to place it correctly without

bubbles," she says. Each piece takes between one and one-and-a-half hours, depending on size and design, and she finishes them with a sealant, choosing eco-friendly options wherever possible.

Maya began her practice at seven, creating items for charity with guidance from her mother. "My mother helped me with pricing since I did not know how to do it," she recalls. Now she is developing her own brand, Fuss-pots, with the tagline: "Be fussy, be eco-friendly" calculating prices based on materials and effort.

Beyond selling, Maya encourages environmental awareness, refurbishing old pots and showing how everyday items can have a second life. "I want buyers to see how sustainable products can also be décor," she says.

She also adapts her designs to meet personal requests, experimenting with shapes, patterns and customised themes. She points out that each project teaches her new skills in planning, pricing and sourcing responsibly.





