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THE HINDU



Do your pets need cooling down this summer?
Chennai now has swimming pools for dogs **P3**

PRITHVIRAJ BREAKS DOWN
HIS SURVIVAL DRAMA **P4**

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At 6am, when much of Chennai experiences its last few REM cycles, a handful of rowers at the Madras Boat Club (MBC) can be seen dragging their boats out of the dock and entering the Adyar river. In twos, fours, eights and sometimes the rare single scull, they can be seen splicing through the ripples of the once-sedate waterbody with a gentle ease and unwavering focus. Everything is quiet except for the bird calls and the slithering water underneath.

“When the boat cuts through the water, there is a beautiful, distinct sound. During such moments, when everyone is in sync and in the zone, it feels like we could all row forever – all the way to the mouth of the river near Broken bridge. It is poetry in motion,” says Sumana Narayanan.

Chennai often experiences a paradox. It is home to several ponds, lakes, rivers and the endless sea. However, only a handful experience the world of water sports. Sumana, the vice captain of boats at the MBC, says that once someone is

bitten by the rowing bug, it becomes hard to let go. “Senior members of the club, at 80, still take the boat for a spin between the Kotturpuram bridge and the Mandaveli railway overpass (about one kilometre),” she says. Sumana works at a non-profit organisation and comes from a legacy of female rowers in her family. On the walls of the 156-year-old club where she rows, one can see pictures of her mother and aunts, standing next to rowing boats and trophies.

Her senior, MR Ravindra, an advocate and captain of boats at the MBC also features prominently in rowing gear from four decades ago, on the walls at the entrance. He is no stranger to the Adyar and says that taking an interest in helping the sport grow has made a world of difference to his day-to-day life. “Rowing has a lot to do with the mind. It is said that rowers tend to have the strength of a weight lifter and the stamina of a marathoner. It isn’t easy to propel a boat, you know,” he says.

Rowing is a great way to centre oneself, says Sumana. It is probably why the two rowing institutions in Chennai – the MBC and the Sri Ramachandra Water Sports Centre – are focussing their efforts on enlisting young members. Although



Rowing is serious business

More than just exercise, the sport teaches rowers the transience of Nature and provides opportunities to represent India in sporting events

swimming is a prerequisite, Ravindra says that determination and focus are more than sufficient to ensure that those who learn reach great heights.

The sport is after all, accessible only to few in different parts of India due to geography and the existence of few rowing clubs. Even

doing reasonably well allows participants to shine, representing the country in several international competitions including a shot at the Olympics.

Even-keel
Manoj Joseph Kallarackal, captain of boats for SWSC and DForce

► **Of sculls and oars** Rowers from the (left) Madras Boat Club; (below) at Sri Ramachandra Water Sports Centre. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Rowing Cente, says that their rowing club started as a result of wanting to train for championships. Their 650-metre man-made lake within the campus of Sri Ramachandra University is a 24-hour set-up with four lanes, meant for attempting to produce the best rowers in the country. Besides great quality kits, the organisation also has machines that help correct and improve nuances like foot pressure. Since Pongal this year, Ramachandra has created its second course at Muttukadu, a stunning three-kilometre stretch along the backwaters, for the 28 professional rowers on its team.

“Since we are self-funded, we are only looking to ensure that serious rowers with aims to represent the institution take part. I understand that the sport is still inaccessible to many but we are happy to invite participants who wish to take this sport up seriously,” he says.

Ravindra says that though MBC has a group of people who row casually, the club often organises and takes part in popular regattas across the world. Since the club is first and foremost, a rowing club, the lion’s share of focus is on the sport. It hence has a coach,

equipment that simulates rowing on ground, callisthenics training and top-class boats, to ensure a good sailing experience. To encourage novices to take part in the sport, the club will be holding a summer camp starting April 15.

Sumana says that people often associate rowing with the need for great arm strength. “It has a lot more to do with the legs though. They are in constant motion while in a rowing boat. Next comes great core strength. The arms are but the last important factor,” she says.

She and Ravindra add that years of having been acquainted with the water has given them a knowledge of the city’s waterways, its behaviour during different seasons and the transient nature of the world around them.

“Thirty years ago, the river was far cleaner. Now, we have an invasion of plastic and weeds. There is also a lot of sewage that is let into the river, preventing the existence of fish. I used to encounter many water snakes before,” says Ravindra. Sumana adds that dredging the river would also help create longer stretches for sailing along the river.

“Some days, we inform the police about bodies or end up helping with rescue efforts during the floods. On other days, we see birds and new trees along the banks. We understand tides and changing seasons. We are the watchmen of the river,” she says.

The summer camp at MBC begins on April 15 at a cost of ₹3,000. Contact 9445395089. Those who wish to sign up at Sri Ramachandra Water Sports Centre can contact 8073419296.



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One might think that there are not many similarities between the subtle French, and vibrant Indian culture. A closer look can prove otherwise. Just as Indians take pride in their handicrafts and preserve the art of embroidery, so do the French.

Master embroiderer and founder of Vastrakala, Jean-François Lesage has teamed up with the Alliance Française of Madras to showcase the craftsmanship of Lesage interiors through a retrospective. The exhibition Threads of Time, is an artful presentation of handcrafted embroidery by the craftsmen and women of Chennai-based Vastrakala.

As two craftsmen sit on the floor and hand weave a new piece named Wings of a Dragonfly, the Consul-General of France in Puducherry and Chennai, Lise Talbot Barré declares the exhibition, open. “The mission of Alliance Française is to bridge cultures, and art is an amazing way to do so,” she says.

Vastrakala began creating embroidery for interior design and later expanded to include fashion embroidery by partnering with Lesage Paris, a renowned haute couture atelier. “Our principal partner, Lesage, comes from a celebrated



Stitching cultures

Explore the intersection of French and Indian culture through the art of embroidery at Vastrakala’s exhibit Threads of Time

house of embroidery in France; on one of his earliest travels to India, he chanced upon a tiny workshop in Benares. Seeing that embroidery was practised like this in his family ateliers in Paris, the first seeds of the idea germinated in his mind” says Malavika Shivakumar, founder partner-director at Vastrakala. Currently, Vastrakala employs over 300

local craftsmen and women. Threads of Time takes one on a journey through various styles of embroidery, starting from the classic to the more modern techniques. The largest piece at the exhibit, named Light and Gold, is a gold zari hand embroidered forest of bamboo which gives the illusion of different shades of metallic gold as they shine under the light. Photographs of French

designer Pierre Yovanovitch’s OOPS chairs made in 2018 are also on display. The chairs wear faces – one masculine and one feminine, and are named after French cinema icons, Catherine Deneuve and Gérard Depardieu.

“My company (Vastrakala) is over 30 years old, our company (Lesage Paris) is over 100 years old. Embroidery in India and France has been existing for over a thousand years. The idea was to show important moments of our journey to India, and our time in India to the younger generation,” says Lesage, adding that the bridge between India and France built on the craft of embroidery is one of the most important soft powers.

Speaking about the process of creating bespoke interior decor pieces, Lesage says, “I’m a craftsman.

► **Bridge to France** (Left to right) Making of Wings of a Dragonfly; The Embroiderer; Peacock. SANGITA RAJAN

People like to call me an artist or a designer, but I am a craftsman. When we do the embroidery for the Rashtrapati Bhavan state dining room, the Versailles Palace, my team and I enter the shoes of the client.”

The hook, needle, and thread piece named Chandigarh, made in 2022 , is a textured and woven object that conveys the strong evolution of embroidery over the last 75 years with the use of various techniques.

Photographs from another collaborative project with decorator duo Biehler-Graveleine titled Madame Cristal are also on display. The project is an imagination of the Tarot of Marseille, which is a traditional deck comprising 78 cards and follows the standard Italian-suited tarot pattern. The deck was widely popular in France during the 17th and 18th centuries. The great fortune-teller Madame Cristal’s salon, enveloped in a gigantic embroidery affixed to a blue folding screen and fainting couch, is a cosy space for secrets to flow freely and safely.

Threads of Time is on display at the Alliance Française of Madras until April 15 from 10am to 6pm.

Tales of paradise

Twinkle Khanna releases her collection of short stories in Chennai

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“I collect stories, and I’m curious about everything,” says author Twinkle Khanna at the Crossword bookstore in Chennai’s Express Avenue mall. She is in conversation with Rosella Stephen, Editor, *The Hindu* Magazine, on her latest book – *Welcome to Paradise* (published by Juggernaut Books).

Whenever anything funny or unique happens around Twinkle, she seems to go into writer mode. “I constantly take notes and there are always a bunch of stories in my folders. Some stories stay there for years on end,” she says, adding that there are often stories that are complete, but the layers are missing. It is what has led to the creation of her latest work, a collection of short stories that explores the depths of loneliness, heartbreak, and deception.

Discussing the overarching theme of *Welcome to Paradise*, Twinkle says that the stories were

not pre-planned and written accordingly, but the other way around. “They all came from me being at a particular point in life and seeing certain things. When I look at it now, I notice loneliness, but when I was writing, I did not realise that there was underlying pain.”

Stories that come from your subconscious can impact those stories a lot. Twinkle’s book, according to her, was influenced by what we went through as a society during the pandemic.

Research is key when writing a well-rounded, complicated character. “While I do not know what it is like to be a drug addict, I can research. I have the resources – articles, first person accounts, and I can even go to someone who has been through it and talk to them. As long as I have empathy for the character, it comes through,” she says.

When it comes to taking criticism about writing, Twinkle says, “You have to accept criticism openly. I’d rather they hate me when I say what I want to say. You just have to have a thick skin and that comes with time.”



Twinkle Khanna



► **Cool off** Neo dives into the swimming pool at Pets 101; pets at the pool in Top Dog Chennai. S SHIVA RAJ AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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Neo waits hesitantly by the edge of the swimming pool, eyeing the water. A few minutes later, when a small orange toy goes flying over his head, he knows not to wait any longer. A loud splash later, he is in the water, legs furiously propelling him forward.

With the searing heat and soaring temperatures on everyone’s mind at the moment, it is not just the humans who need a reprieve. “We are waiting to see more fur babies cool off in the water in the coming weeks,” says Subiksha Raman, franchise partner, Pets 101 in Anna Nagar, as her six-year-old golden retriever splashes around in the pool.

After a recent round of renovations, the pet store is ready to welcome dogs into their small swimming pool. “At around four feet depth, the PH level of the water is maintained at 6. We offer the pool at one hour slots for one pet at a time - we’ve seen dogs jump straight into the water and stay there for an hour, or just get in for five minutes and leave. We do not take multiple bookings on policy since some dogs might need support, and need to take their

How to beat the dog days

As summer creeps up, head to Chennai’s pet swimming pools to give your dogs a much-needed splash, followed by a blow dry

time in water,” says Subiksha. At present, they have about 10 furry regulars, and are ready to welcome more dogs. “While cooling off in the pool can help with heat, exhaustion and dehydration in the summer for pets, being in the water will also help with addressing, or even preventing hip dysplasia in larger breeds,” Subiksha adds. While pet owners mostly prefer to dry the dogs themselves after a pool session, the store also has blow drying and grooming options available post the swim.

There are a range of options available, from small inflatable kiddie pools, to simply cooling off in large tubs. The joy, however, of watching their dogs take a swim and spending some time in the pool is a fun activity for both humans and their



favourite companions. Enquiries have also been coming in rapidly at Top Dog in Uthandi. A short drive from the city, Top Dog, a pet boarding facility, has a bone-shaped swimming pool that has been welcoming pets since 2019.

“We carry out a mandatory verification of vaccination certificates for the pets following which the pool can be booked for a one- hour slot. While we prefer that pet parents themselves go into the pool with their dogs, we assist them if needed. Swimming is an enriching activity for dogs, and a great way for pet parents to bond with them since there is a lot more engagement here than going on a walk or a run,” says Charanya Khandhadai, manager.

Their pool starts shallow and gradually becomes deeper which Charanya says, makes it easier for dogs not used to water. “Hydrotherapy is immensely beneficial for dogs that have hip dysplasia or arthritis. Swimming helps build stronger muscles, and also helps with weight loss in dogs that are overweight,” she adds.

If you have enjoyed munching on some French fries after a pool session, Top Dog has a special treat of bone broth available for dogs after their swim.

A one hour slot at Pets 101, Anna Nagar is ₹800 with additional charges for blow-dry services. Call 8100005321. A one hour slot for a swim and bath at Top Dog Uthandi is ₹1,000. For details, call 9952024946.

renowned Malayalam music composer Rajamani, and arrived on the music scene in the early 2000s. From 2003 to 2009, Achu was busy as a keyboard player, working on multiple projects, before he landed a film of his own: the Malayalam film *Kurukshetra*.

Changing tracks He followed that up with *Ennai Theriyuma* and *Polladhavan’s* Telugu remake. “After that, I went blank. I didn’t know what to do. I desperately needed a break.” And so, he took a break from movies and music, and travelled down another track, quite literally. Achu pursued a career in car racing, winning many championships, but music never let him go. “Whenever I travelled for racing, I made music demos. I wanted a fresh start.”

That arrived in 2012 when director Narayanan Nagendra Rao came to him, armed with the script of *Maalai Pozhudin Mayakathile*. “I realised it had scope for all departments, including music. We conceptualised the soundtrack based on how the script progressed.”

This 2012 film is best known for its standout melody, ‘En Uyire’, which has three versions, sung by Karthik, Chitra and Bombay Jayashri, and the high-on-energy hit ‘Oh Baby Girl’. “We had a track titled ‘Kadalora Kariyila Kadala

Potaan’ for that place, but as an afterthought, we conceptualised ‘Oh Baby Girl’ that I thought would do well.” It did. “It was an album that we worked on stress free,” he recalls fondly about the Aari-starrer, after which he worked on multiple movie projects in many languages.

His most recent outing was the ‘Pondattee’ music video, which dropped a few months ago, which he not only composed but also starred in. This marks a drastic change in Achu’s personality, who is known to be a reticent musician. “My songs have been bumper hits, but no one knew me. I’m a private person who doesn’t like attention. But my mother, friends and many well-wishers kept chiding me for that.”

Achu sees the re-creation of the hit ‘Pondattee’ track, which featured earlier in *Goli Soda 2*, as some sort of course correction. “I’m attempting new things and trying to be more in the public space,” he says. His 50th project is now lined up, a biggie about which details are under wraps now, apart from fantasy-thriller *Gajaana* and action-thriller *Mazhai Pudikkadha Manidhan*.

► **Melodies to the fore** Achu Rajamani. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Pitch it up

City music composer Achu Rajamani’s latest track is a musical tribute to CSK legend MS Dhoni and the IPL

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Between the tense moments of a nail-biting IPL cricket match, the strains of the fast-paced Tamil track ‘Vaa Thala’ plays out. Often heard between overs during the Star Sports telecast, it features *kuthu* beats. It is not only a musical representation of the IPL, but also a tribute to MS Dhoni, fondly called Thala, for whom IPL 2024 might just be a final outing on the big cricketing stage.

The man behind the track is composer Achu Rajamani, well known among Tamil cinema music fans for his melodies like ‘En Uyire’ (*Maalai Pozhudin Mayakathile*) and ‘Siru Nadai’ (*Urumeen*).

“The last mass song I attempted was in 2014, and since then, I have deliberately not taken up any commercial films,” says Achu, “So, ‘Vaa Thala’ was like an explosion for me. The person for whom I’m making music should inspire me, and who

better than MS Dhoni? Despite all the pressure on him, he remains calm and yet, there’s a fire inside him. ‘Vaa Thala’ is an ode to that fire.”

Achu is the son of late



My songs were bumper hits but no one knew me. I’m a private person who doesn’t like attention. Now, I am trying to be more in the public space

ACHU RAJAMANI



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STEP OUT



Khadi for summer

Gandhigram, a social organisation promoting sustainable living and rural development, is organising a pop-up to showcase its latest line, Samhita, a collection of contemporary khadi clothing. The collections are 100% hand-spun and hand-woven. The Samhita range has been curated in collaboration with the Centre of Excellence for Khadi (COEK). The range includes tops, kurtas, dresses and jumpsuits for women, and shirts and kurtas for men, apart from Gandhigram saris, stoles, shawls, towels and dhotis. Gandhigram’s cottage industry products such as honey, shampoo, oil, soap, pickle, spice powder, ayurvedic medicine and more will also be sold at the venue. All proceeds of the sale go towards Gandhigram’s several developmental initiatives and causes.

@The CP Arts Centre, Alwarpet. April 12 and 13, 10am to 8pm. For details, call 9042384275

Celebrating Tamil cuisine

House of Idlies presents a traditional Tamizh puthandu virundhu, where you can enjoy an elaborate spread. The special meals will be served for three days, with a different menu each day. Pre-booking is recommended.

@House of Idlies, T Nagar. April 12 to 14 from 11am to 4pm. A meal is priced at ₹300 per person. For reservations, call 9551604056.



Art for all

Waves of Colors, the annual art exhibition by Indian Art Factory, will showcase the works of 85 talented artists from diverse backgrounds from across the country. The event will offer a perspective on contemporary art and a variety of mediums and styles.

@SK’s The Lines & Curves Art Gallery, Kolathur. April 12 to 14, 11am to 7pm.

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Alone in the desert

Prithviraj Sukumaran breaks down the making of his recent survival drama *Aadujeevitham*

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Prithviraj Sukumaran is not someone who rests on his laurels. Just a week after the release of *Aadujeevitham*, the actor is all set for the second schedule of *L2: Empuraan*. “I’m proud and happy about *Aadujeevitham* and couldn’t be happier with the way it’s being received. It’s a film I’ll cherish for life but nothing is going to change. The very next day of the film’s release, I was back at work to wrap up another film.”

But for now, he is happy to discuss his epic project, based on the real-life story of Najeeb, a man who ends up living in slave-like conditions in a goat farm in the middle of a desert. Excerpts from a conversation:

Question: What kept the team going, especially through the tough stretches during the pandemic?

Answer: I have to be very honest; the single reason that kept us going is director Blessy. The entire process never really shut down because of that one man’s conviction and focus. We started shooting only in 2018 though we set out to do this film in 2009... and that’s almost 10 years. During that decade, the whole world was telling me and Blessy to move on as this was not going to happen (*smiles*). I have asked Blessy multiple times if we can do something else and circle back to this script later.

Q: Staying in character is one thing, but showing the years of abuse and ill-treatment that transforms this character into someone who can’t talk or walk properly probably needed constant tweaking as the film progressed. How did you go about it?

A: Blessy and I decided to compartmentalise it into three phases. For convenience’s sake, we keep referring to it as the “three weeks, three months and three years” phases. The first one would be Najeeb’s first three weeks in the

desert. Then we see him three months later for an episode there. Then the narrative breaks, and we finally see him three years later.

I had specific body language additions and changes in mind for each phase, and they were designed as part of the story.

Q: Arguably the best sequence of the film is when Najeeb sheds his clothes, revealing how impoverished he has become over time, as he walks to the water tank and gets to wash his face. Can you walk us through the shot?

A: I kept telling Blessy to push that shot to the end because I knew I would continue my weight loss journey to that point. Unfortunately, when the pandemic struck and we got the news that the shoot might soon get shut down, Blessy wanted to get that shot out of the way and gave me a date on when we would shoot that scene. I got into this heavy fasting cycle where I was fasting for 72 hours at a stretch and towards the end, I had dehydrated myself for 48 hours.

I know there’s a shock value to it... but it’s not just that. The only instrument available to me to show what he has gone through over the last three years, was to show how he has transformed physically. The body is pretty much a screenplay instrument then. I’ll never claim it was easy and I’ll never advocate it to anyone else, not even to other actors.

Q: The film has opened to positive reviews but a section of the audience finds some portions, especially in the second half, a tad too long. How do you react to such criticism?

A: I respect all opinions and if someone feels the film didn’t resonate with them, I respect that. No film is perfect, neither is *Aadujeevitham*. The second half... once the escape starts, it almost feels like there’s no end to it. The helplessness Najeeb feels should start to set in, and make the audience think that his escape is a never-ending ordeal until he finally finds the road.

Role play
Prithviraj in a still from *Aadujeevitham*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



There are a couple of Tamil scripts I’ve said I’ll listen to. I would love to star in a Tamil outing again, as I have really fond memories of working in Kollywood and it has given me some special films

PRITHVIRAJ



Law and behold
Shivarajkumar’s look from Kannada film *Bhairathi Ranagal*, directed by Narthan, is out. The film is a prequel to the action drama *Mufti*, the 2017 blockbuster starring Srii Murali. Shivarajkumar is seen sporting the attire of a lawyer in the newly released poster. Rukmini Vasanth of *Sapta Sagaradaache Ello* fame plays the female lead in the movie while Bollywood actor Rahul Bose is set to essay the role of the antagonist. The film is set to release on August 15, clashing at the box office with Allu Arjun’s *Pushpa 2*.



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Head to the theatres

Missing big Tamil film releases this summer? Worry not. There are two big-ticket re-releases on the cards in the coming weeks. First up is the Karthi-Tamannaah starrer *Paiyaa* (2010), which is set for a grand re-release today. Tamannaah posted about this Lingusamy-directorial, “It feels extremely special to see that even after 14 years, the love for ‘Paiyaa’ still remains strong. I feel so good to see the affection and love the movie is still receiving after all this time.”

That’s not all. A week later, on April 20, Vijay-Trisha superhit *Ghilli* is re-releasing in theatres, two decades after its original release. To date, *Ghilli*, directed by Dharani, is widely considered by fans as one of the best films of Vijay and as one of the most re-watchable Tamil films ever.



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IN CINEMAS TODAY

PVR SATHYAM | ESCAPE | PALAZZO - Nexus Vijaya Mall | AERO HUB | SKYWALK MALL - Aminjakerai | VR MALL - Anna Nagar | GRAND GALADA MALL - Pallavaram | GALADA Mall - Velachery | ECR RSL MALL - Uthandi | SKLS GALAXY MALL - Redhills | VELOCITY - Ganhi Nagar | AVENUE MALL - Royapettah | SATHYAM - Royapettah | THE FORUM MALL - Vadapalani | SPECTRUM MALL - Perambur | S2- THEYAGARAJA - Tiruvamiyur | THE CINEMA - Brokefields Mall- Coimbatore | THE CINEMA - Providence Mall - Puducherry.

INOX CITY CENTRE - Mylapore | LUXE CINEMAS | NATIONAL CHANDRA METRO MALL - Virugambakkam | PROZONE MALL - Sathy Road | RELIANCE MALL - Salem | SELVAM SQUARE MALL - Vellore | THE MARINA MALL | VISHAL DE MALL - Madurai.

cinépolis BSR Mall - Thoraipakkam
FUN REPUBLIC - Coimbatore.

ANU EGA - Kilpauk.

agscinemas Maduravoyal | T Nagar | Villivakkam | OMR Navalur.

MAYAJAAL Kanattur.

BROADWAY CINEMAS - Coimbatore | DEVI COMPLEX - M.T.Road | D-MAX - Dharmapuri | EVP - CARNIVAL CINEMAS - Chembarambakkam | GRAND CINEMAS - Hosur | KASI TALKIES - Ashok Nagar | K.G.COMPLEX - Race Course Road | LA MARRIS - Trichy | MAHARAJA MULTIPLEX - Erode | PERISON - Tuticorin | PSS MULTIPLEX - Thirunelveli | RADIANCE - Madurai | SRI SAKTHI - Tirupur | SRK MIRAJ CINEMAS - Coimbatore | THE VIJAYA PARK MULTIPLEX - Injambakkam | VETRI - Madurai | AARTHY - Dindugal | ANNA - Erode | JANA THEATRE - Villupuram | MURUGAN COMPLEX - Ambattur | RAKKI COMPLEX - Ambattur | ROHINI - Koyembedu | SAKTHI CINEMAS - Gudiyatham | SAKTHI CINEMAS - Tiruvannamalai | SPR CINECASTLE - Salem | VIJAY - Vaniyambadi | **IMAX VERSION AT:** INOX - LUXE CINEMAS - Chennai | SPI PALAZZO - THE FORUM MALL - Vadapalani | BROADWAY CINEMAS - Coimbatore.

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