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A board game convention? Gamers come together to celebrate Indian launches **P3**

WHAT IS VIJAY'S FAMILY STAR ABOUT? **P4**

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Meet the Manjummel Boys

Chidambaram, Director

The response *Manjummel Boys* got from Tamil Nadu has been overwhelming; we were really not ready for this!

The writing process was tough; I had it in my mind that the film had to start with the Tamil song from Kamal Haasan's *Guna*. For the climax, as the situation was claustrophobic, the melody would help calm things down. The lines perfectly fell in place; I think that it was made for me 30 years ago.

When I first met the real-life Subash [the film is based on a real incident], I realised that the story is about an atheist becoming God. Because, someone who has almost seen death and come back is equal to God; from my first interaction with him, I decided to write my screenplay around this. I also decided to cast many directors as actors in the film — Soubin (*Parava*), Lal Jr. (*Driving License*) and Khalid Rahman (*Unda*), and that worked in my favour. They knew the value of time and understood what was going on.

In terms of business, the success of *Manjummel Boys* might eventually pave the way for bigger films in Malayalam cinema.

However, as writers for Malayalam films,



As writers of Malayalam cinema, we keep thinking of the budget when we pen our scenes. That's why we

weave in more drama. This limitation is our superpower

we usually do not dare write a big spectacle, because we know we will not get that kind of budget. So, we weave in more drama in the dialogues and focus on domestic interactions, and things that happen in a confined space. When we write, we keep thinking about the budget. That limitation, I believe, is our superpower.

Currently, even as we are thrilled about the love the film is receiving everywhere, we are releasing its Telugu and Hindi dubbed versions on April 6. Personally, I do not want it to release on any OTT platform soon!



To watch the interview of the *Manjummel Boys* team, scan QR code

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Once upon a time, a man fell into a pit and his friends helped him get out.

This seemingly simple storyline is the base around which recent Malayalam film *Manjummel Boys* revolves. But as with most of Malayalam cinema, which makes the ordinary charming and the everyday epic, *Manjummel Boys* too weaves in enough thrill and tension into its script, leading to much excitement in cinema halls.

In Tamil Nadu, where the film has been a blockbuster, the crucial climax featuring Soubin Shahir, Sreenath Bhasi and the rest of the actors — peppered with a song from Kamal Haasan's 1991 Tamil film *Guna* — met with rapturous applause, something largely reserved for the entry scenes of the superstar.

While the 'Kanmani Anbodu' melody made a comeback, *Manjummel Boys* made history, becoming the first Malayalam film to collect ₹200 crore at the global box office. The motley team behind this successful film discusses it all during a recent visit to *The Hindu* office in Chennai. Excerpts:



Abhiram Radhakrishnan, Actor

The entire shoot of *Manjummel Boys* was a lot of fun. We were so happy being there that we did not want to leave the set after the shoot; the director actually had to tell us that the film was over and that we could all go home!

The placement of the Ilaiyaraaja-Kamal Haasan 'Kanmani Anbodu' song is perfect. When we first saw the song during the spot-edit phase, we were all moved and started crying, which is why we didn't cry in the theatres. It is delightful that it is being sung so often these days, more than 30 years after its inception.

There were many other memorable moments. Like the tug of war sequence that featured in the beginning of the film. We were up against professionals and so all actors underwent training. I skipped that session and Chandu (Salimkumar) actually fainted!

Ajayan Challisery, Art director

Initially, I was told that *Manjummel Boys* was the story of a man who falls into a ditch. I had no idea what kind of a ditch it was. Later, I realised that the story was about Kodaikanal's Guna Caves. So, we went on a search for places that share a resemblance with the caves. But we all know how much of a beloved space this is for people in Tamil Nadu, so it was challenging to show a mere copy.

We realised that it was going to be difficult to shoot a 11-member core cast for 30 days in a space like this. When we went to the real location, it was difficult to even spot the ditch as it was covered in 16 years of soil and moss. Moreover, the 80-feet depth had to be taken into account.

In Kerala, there was no space of such scale where the cave could be recreated. After a long-drawn search, we



found an old, abandoned godown in Perumbavoor which was converted into the caves. It was 50-feet deep but the platform was designed in such a way that water seeps into it from every direction.

During the Kodai schedule, we studied the rocks and made their moulds, which were cast in Kochi for recreation. It took us two months to do this. Three five-floor-high ditches were stitched together to create the final cave [into which Subhash falls]. It was extremely dangerous to shoot the scenes inside because of the depth. We shot there for three months, thankfully without any injuries or unfortunate incidents.

An auto ride through Chennai

Asha The Auto-Driver is an ode to Chennai's hardworking women

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Many of us have come across an Asha in the city. A khaki shirt over her sari, her long hair in a braid, and a tired, but cheerful smile on her face, she navigates her auto through peak Chennai traffic. *Asha The Auto-Driver*, recently brought out by Tulika Publishers, is an ode to many such hard-working women in the city. "The story is inspired by the auto drivers I came across

in Chennai," says the author Aruna Shekar, who is based in Auckland, New Zealand.

As someone who lived in Chennai's Indira Nagar in the late 1980s, she has fond memories of auto rides through the city. The author completed her Master's at Madras University and eventually moved. Aruna visits her sister, who lives in Kilpauk, every year.

In her book, she takes readers through Asha's routine through the week. "She is proud of her auto, and is ever cheerful," says Aruna. The story

begins at the railway station, where Asha waits at an auto-stand with her auto that sports bright pink flowers. There is something else in her auto: a bag of jasmine buds she bought from the flower market in the morning. Asha strings the flowers as she waits for her passengers to arrive: when she

On the go Sandhya Prabhat, the illustrator, brings alive the essence of the city. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

is not riding, she is stringing flowers.

Sandhya Prabhat, the illustrator, brings alive the essence of Chennai and its people: the beach with its carousel and shoot-the-balloon games; the lighthouse and football grounds, and the cows that amble through our streets.

Asha The Auto-Driver is available in nine languages, and is Aruna's first book with a traditional publisher. She previously self-published three

children's books, *Guess Whose Tail This is*, *One of a Kind* and *Pet Pals*. "I'm now working on a story about an ostrich and a camel, that takes place in Rajasthan," she says, adding that there is another title about mangoes in the pipeline, also for children.

Asha The Auto-Driver is available at tulikabooks.com



Weaving a French connection

Hours of skilled labour and technique hide behind the sequins and stitches of Vastrakala's elaborate Paris Fashion Week repertoire. This Indo-French company based in Chennai, has collaborated with the likes of Lesage, a storied Paris-based haute couture firm, to bring alive aesthetic hand-embroidered pieces. The Alliance Française of Madras invites participants to view Threads of Time, A Franco-Indian legacy, a retrospective focussing on Lesage interiors by Vastrakala. At *Alliance Française of Madras*, 24, College Road, Nungambakkam. From April 6 to 15 from 10am to 6pm. Entry is free.



Elavenil Valarivan,
*The Hindu Excellence
in Sports Award*

Elavenil Valarivan's eyes light up when asked about her talent for marksmanship. "As a child though, I was interested in all other sports except shooting. I initially even found it boring, but the challenges the sport gave me, made it interesting and kept me on my toes," she says, of her early foray into the sport when she was 13 years old. While she was born in Cuddalore and raised in Ahmedabad, the 24-year-old shooter has been training out of Chennai for the last six years. "At one point of time, I was the youngest in senior national championships. There are now around 8,000 participants in the nationals, and the sport is growing by leaps and bounds. It is on the right path, and in the right hands for the future," she says. Elavenil's achievements include multiple gold medals at the ISSF Junior World Cups, and more recently, a gold medal at the 2023

Sun of my smile

The Hindu World of Women 2024 awards sought to spotlight the achievements of 13 women who continue to impact the lives of many. We profile three awardees

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World cup in Rio. In 2022, the rifle shooter was conferred the Arjuna Award for her excellence in sports. For her, being a woman has been her superpower. "Sport has evolved in such a way that people are looking to explore so many more sports apart from cricket, and women are taking the world by storm," says the promising young athlete.

Malathi Krishnamurthy Holla, *The Hindu Achievement in Surpassing Disability Award*

Paralympian Malathi Karishnamurthy Holla says she refrains from stating that she has been 'affected' by polio. "I tell people this is God's gift to me," she smiles. When she was 14 months old, polio left Malathi paralysed in her lower limbs. What followed was spending the next 15 years in a healthcare centre in Chennai, entailing multiple surgeries before she moved back to Bengaluru. "Back then, when I started to get interested in athletics, there was little to no awareness about sports for persons with disabilities. Times have changed for the better now, and para-athletes are celebrated by the Government, the media and society," she says, and acknowledges the strong foundation that many athletes like her have laid as they found their way. She has participated in multiple Paralympic Games, World Championships, and Commonwealth Games, and has won around 400 medals as a celebrated champion in athletics. She calls herself a mother to 53 children with disabilities she supports through her trust, Mathru Foundation, established in 2004. "Even if I am physically not too strong, I have always been proud of my mental strength and confidence. I want to give all these children a fulfilling childhood, something that I was unable to enjoy," she adds. Malathi is quick to say that she is not dedicating her life to this cause. "Dedication is a big word. I am simply living my life," she says.

R Roja, The Hindu Contribution to Society Award

"When someone dies, their families come together and send them off with song and dance. What about those who have no one?" asks R Roja. It is this question that prompted her to help with a dignified burial for an abandoned corpse she saw at a burial ground in the city over two decades ago. This 39-year-old resident of Mylapore has



ensured dignified burials for thousands of people over the years. "I work alone. The police usually reach out to me if there are bodies in mortuaries across the city, that are unclaimed for over 40 days," she says. Roja works at a binding unit as part of a press, and says that she takes time off work to make arrangements for the burials. "In a month, I help with at least 20 burials in the city," she says. While the authorities have coordinated, and been helpful to her in carrying out her service to society, her friends pitch in with small financial donations. "While I consider myself their mother and help with the burial, I always pray that no one else should be alone in death," she says.

THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13579

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Across

- 1 Withdraw (6)
- 4 Preparatory exercising (4-2)
- 9 With no exceptions (3,4)
- 10 Feeling of resentment (5)
- 11 Waive (5)
- 12 Bank employees (7)
- 13 Satisfaction (11)
- 18 Enclosed drain under road or railway track (7)
- 20 Out of sorts (5)
- 22 Bare (5)
- 23 Eight-sided figure (7)
- 24 Miscellaneous (6)
- 25 Worshipped (6)

Down

- 1 Cold-shoulder (6)
- 2 Person responsible for looking after another (5)
- 3 Cease to participate (4,3)
- 5 Horrify (5)

- 6 Fashion designer Alexander — film star Steve (7)
- 7 Give satisfaction (6)
- 8 Journey's end (11)
- 14 Waterproof cloth (7)
- 15 On horseback (7)
- 16 Fragrances (6)
- 17 Made amends (6)
- 19 Church official (5)
- 21 Plantation product (5)

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Let's get together

This weekend, join the group for an evening filled with music, poetry, literature and satire. Conducted by Sutta Vada, the event aims to find hope in a broken world. The event brings together like-minded individuals who wish to express themselves without fear; and if you want a grain of hope to hold onto, then this event is for you. @April 7, 4.30pm to 6.30pm. Venue will be disclosed to those who register. To register, bit.ly/3PlvxWT

Somewhere between Tamil Country and Blues

Singer Vijaynarain has experimented with composing over the last decade. Now, he is ready for his solo show

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Less than a week ago, singer Vijaynarain Rangarajan found himself serenading travellers on a metro coupe in Chennai — playing new songs he has either written or composed. "People need a little bit of art thrown at them. The hassle of a nine (am) to six (pm) job can become a bit much," he says. When he began singing, a crowd gathered, capturing him on their phones. A passenger complimented the lyrics of his single 'Korangu', he recalls.

However, when videos of this performance began gaining traction on social media, Vijaynarain was asked to take it down. Although the Chennai Metro Rail Limited (CMRL) did not have any explicit instructions against busking, the concept was unfamiliar in the city's serpentine tunnels.

Traces of this event have been wiped off social media's fickle memory. It has, however, allowed for more chatter about this Tamil singer and his series of intriguing, whimsical and mostly merry compositions — many of which he will be playing on April 6 at Barracuda Brew. The singer of the popular song 'Ei Suzhali' from Dhanush-starrer *Kodi*, will be performing unreleased independent songs alongside a mix of his film numbers at the event. Saturday's show includes Naveen Napier on the bass, Vikram Vivekanand on guitar, Akshay Yashodharan on guitar, Siddharth Kumar on keys and Lawrence Ramesh on drums.

A live show feels like a way to put a name to the face of this musician who has been



part of the Tamil music scene for 15 years now, singing for composers such as AR Rahman, Santosh Narayan and Ilaiyaraaja.

When one thinks of Vijaynarain, it is impossible not to remember his performances from the famed TV show *Super Singer* from 2009, including a surprising rendition of 'Summer of '69. "Despite 'Ei Suzhali' and 'Maya Visai' (from *Irudhi Suttru*) being popular, people do not tend to associate my name with the songs. It is the bane of being far removed from here geographically," says the singer.

Eight years of living in Australia however, has allowed the singer to experiment. His compositions about love, heartbreak and the everyday mundanity of existence have formed a solid base of songs that he will be releasing independently through the year. Some of these songs, like his 'Kaikku Ettinadhu', have been in his head for 12 years now, he says.

Vijaynarain says that the treatment of much of his music is acoustic — shoved somewhere between the Tamil Country and Blues space. The singer is clear that he is not composing music with an Instagram audience in mind. He does not want to generate 30-second hooks and drops unless the song warrants it. Mostly though, he wants to ensure that his listeners are happy. "I want to put a smile on their face and ensure that they are in a good zone," he says.

He is also planning a show with CMRL as they are keen to collaborate with performers and have access to small venues at their station.

Looks like breaking a rule or two has its occasional perks.

Vijaynarain Live on April 6 curated by Quiriosity will be at Barracuda Brew, Nungambakkam. Tickets priced at ₹799 are available on insider.in.

Hymn for the weekend Vijaynarain.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Seoulful sizzle

Dive into a culinary adventure at Auroville's Nowana, where Korean flavours meet Indian hospitality

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A restaurant with outdoor seating and no air conditioning is rarely the first choice on a sweltering summer afternoon. Yet, here I was, at Nowana's verdant outdoor space in Auroville. Brushing up on my chopstick skills, and sipping on an ice-cold kombucha keeps me distracted from Puducherry's rising heat and humidity.

Following an unmarked turn by the Auroville bakery and navigating unpaved roads, a beacon appears: a bowl of ramen on a signboard. Nestled amidst the greenery stands a charming restaurant with a lush canopy, run by Koreans who now call the experimental township of Auroville, home.

Established in 2021, Nowana specialises in Korean cuisine, offering dishes straight out of your favourite K-dramas. "This space belongs to Auroville and

been as a community kitchen before evolving into a restaurant," explains Gumsoon An, who manages the kitchen at Nowana.

Driven by the desire for cultural exchange, the core team at Nowana briefly offered basic Korean conversational classes. "We are not really an institute, but this is a good space for people to meet, and so we started teaching conversational Korean which included how to order in a restaurant," she says, adding

that they had to stop due to the seasonal inflow of tourists.

"I would really like to start taking cooking classes soon," says Gumsoon, placing a colourful plate of gimbap in front of us. The Korean seaweed roll filled with vegetables, sticky rice and meat or cheese according to choice, is served with a salty and spicy dipping sauce of soy sauce and wasabi. The crunchy vegetables, well seasoned rice makes the bite-sized gimbap, soaked in the dipping sauce, the perfect start



Korea in a bowl (Left) Outdoor seating at Nowana; (bottom) gimbap (Korean seaweed roll). SANGITA RAJAN

to the meal.

Next, a steaming bowl of japchae arrives. The sweet potato glass noodles are stir-fried in a vibrant sesame-chilli oil with vegetables, offering a balance of sweet and spicy flavours. "We prioritise organic produce. The vegetables, eggs, and poultry mostly come from farms in Auroville," she says.

Other dishes on the menu range from the famous ramen (served in a chicken broth and topped with vegetables, egg and spicy Korean chilli paste), to nem, which is a deep-fried rice paper roll stuffed with vermicelli noodles, different kinds of meat and vegetables, and served with a soy dipping sauce. The bibimbap is a popular choice due to its endless possibility for customisation. Also available is bossam — tender boiled slices of pork belly served with a variety of vegetables and kimchi.

"We get some ingredients such as glass noodles, gochujang, soy sauce and gim seaweed from South Korea, or from Korean speciality stores in Chennai," she says.

The chefs at Nowana have kept the authenticity of the Korean cuisine intact, while also adapting the food for the Indian palate. "People are looking for spicy food, so I have adapted and introduced a spicy japchae. Korean cuisine is quite flexible," she says. Almost every dish on the menu can be customised and made vegetarian or even vegan on request.

"When I meet people who say that they are here to try Korean food for the first time, I really appreciate it because they are open-minded," she says, adding that food is a great way to start opening yourself up to the world around you.

Nowana is at Auroville. A meal for two costs ₹1,100.



Get, set,

roll

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P ick your boat. Bid for your oarsmen. Bet on rival boats. We are in the backwaters of Kerala's Alappuzha, rowing vicariously through meticulously marked and beautifully-illustrated race courses, in boats made of cardboard. Vallamkali, a light strategy board game inspired by the famed boat races of Kerala, has us – a group of five – hooked. We loudly bid and chant, with bated breath, as the race begins. Easily the loudest table there, we were later told. Spread out on adjoining tables are other board games, most of which are made by Indian companies, each with a distinctive design, inviting keen players as they walk into TTOX Chennai, the city's first-ever board game convention, that wrapped last week. Here, you find games that follow the local spirits of Ladakh; the architecture and design of the Taj Mahal, or the business strategy of a tea stall with a

Chennai's first-ever board game convention saw a passionate community of players, designers and publishers come together for hours of continuous gameplay

steady flow of customers, apart from battles fought that make history as we know it today. An attempt to bring the already-thriving community of Chennai board gamers, publishers and designers together, the event saw a footfall of almost 400 gamers, designers and enthusiasts. “The fact that there are more than 10 board game cafes in Chennai is testament to the

strength of the community here,” says Phalgun Polepalli of Bengaluru-based Mozaic Games, who brought this novel format of a convention to Chennai. Apart from playtest tables (categorised into light-medium games and medium-heavy games) where anyone can try a game even if that entails hours of continuous gameplay, there is a library with 700 games mostly donated by volunteers and cafes,

It's playtime Children trying out a board game at the convention; (below) a playtest session with seasoned players. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



a games shop, and a table solely dedicated to Dungeons and Dragons. “D&D is a favorite among the Gen-Z and Gen-Alpha because they watch shows like *Stranger Things*. The dungeon master, Arvindh Sundar, one of the best in the country, ended up doing three sessions!” Phalgun says. “This is a catalyst and will accelerate a culture where people are free to choose any game they want and sit with it, in no rush.” About 50% of the participant crowd has arrived from outside Chennai, travelling from Lucknow, Chandigarh, Kanpur and Bengaluru to experience the convention. Here, one can spot eager participants playing games



This is a catalyst and will accelerate a culture where people are free to choose any game they want and sit with it, in no rush

PHALGUN POLEPALLI
Mozaic Games

like Ankh: Gods of Ancient Egypt (where you can be an ancient God from Egypt) and Chai Garam (where you can be the owner of a *tapri* in the heart of a mela) well after hours, adds Phalgun. Chennai as a market is picking up fast, which is why conventions of this scale play a major role. The number of board game cafes in the city and their growing collection often only create players, and not buyers. Girin Nayak of the two-year-old Chennai-based Xotoxo Games says, “I was playtesting the game Masala Lab based on the book by author Krish Ashok here, and the response has been good. Food and heritage often get people's attention. For a beginner, the novelty lies in seeing familiar themes, and for the seasoned player, it lies in how well the theme has been integrated into the gameplay.” The biggest takeaway from the event has been how supportive the board game cafe ecosystem of Chennai is, adds Phalgun. “It is truly a community driven by a passionate love for games.”

Kutch on a plate Chef Poonam Dedhia has curated the best of Kutchi cuisine, famed for its rich culinary heritage, aromatic spices and flavours, as part of the Gujarati Food Festival presented by Kailash Parbat. For welcome drinks, there are jamun shots and gudh ka sharbat (a summer drink made using raw mango, mint and fennel). Pick from methi na gota, bajra na chamchamiya, surti pyaz ke samose, stuffed tomato bhujiya and more, for starters. The main course menu features panchkutyu shaak, bhinda sambariya, aakhi dungri lasan nu shaak, Gujarati vadha nu daal, Gujarati kadhi, and green moong dal khichdi. There will be live counters as well. Sweets and desserts from the region such as finiya, choorma laddoo and moong dal barfi will be available. The Gujarati thali is priced at ₹349. @Kailash Parbat, all outlets in Chennai. The thali is available from April 5 to 14 for lunch and dinner. For details, call 9150016049.



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Foraging in the hills

Taste the Western Ghats with Kodai buddha bowls and more at a pop-up by The Kodai Chronicle Trust and Chennai's Amethyst

Chitradeepa Anantharam
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W hen you try the Nilgiris trifle pudding at Amethyst's Wild Garden Cafe, you can also update yourself on the challenges of the Western Ghats. In association with The Kodai Chronicle Trust and Wild Garden Cafe, Amethyst, food historian Rakesh Raghunathan has curated a two-week food festival showcasing the produce of the Western Ghats. The Kodai Chronicle (TKC), an eco-publication based in the Western Ghats, is an independent, community-driven monthly publication that aims to showcase the biodiversity of the landscape it is set in, explore the challenges it faces and encourage community stewardship. “We are all set to launch *The Sky Island*, a publication which will focus on climate change and its impact on the Western Ghats,” says Rajni George, editor-in-chief, *The Kodai Chronicle*. A food festival can be a powerful way to illustrate the riches of the region. The Nilgiris and Palani Hills grow fruits such as oranges, bananas, plums, avocados and tree tomatoes; vegetables like carrots,



Kodai Connect The food festival will present produce from the Western Ghats through innovative dishes. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

cauliflowers and beetroot; tea; coffee; and spices like cardamom and pepper. Promoting the produce from this region is an effective way to support cultural traditions and sustainable agriculture. Describing how he put together the menu, Rakesh says, “I have used tree tomatoes, smoked hill garlic, bamboo rice, millets and certain varieties of roots and tubers from the region. I have also recreated the Kodai molaga bajji.” Highlighting local ingredients, there is potato and cheddar cheese soup, Nilagiri mutton soup and a soup made using fresh turmeric with chicken dumplings. All major ingredients are sourced

from the region which lends every dish a distinctive aroma and flavour. Stuffed mushroom casserole made using mushrooms sourced from the forests of Kodai, buddha bowls, and potato and peas gratin, served for mains, makes diners reminisce their time in the hill station. For the non vegetarians, there is a herbed chicken and bamboo rice bake. The meal ends with the Nilgiris trifle pudding, masala chai tres leches and Kodai banana churros.

At The Wild Garden Cafe, Amethyst, Royapettah. Available till April 19, lunch and dinner. For bookings, call 9382713370.



The Defective Detectives, directed by Paritosh Painter. The programme is in aid of charity for Radhatri Nethralaya Eye Care Hospital and TANKER (Tamilnad Kidney Research) Foundation for dialysis patients. @PVR SPI Escape, EA Mall, Royapettah, April 7, 6.30pm. For tickets, call 9840442104.

Movie for a cause Punjab Women's Association, a non-profit organisation presents a fundraiser show of award-winning flm,



Art and ideas Backyard is hosting a night pop-up market with over 30 brands. The event aims to promote the power of an idea, and the love that is handmade. This night-themed makers' market provides a platform for artists, creators, small business owners, passionate side-hustlers and happy dreamers. Entry to this event is free. @Backyard, Adyar. April 6, 5pm to 10.30pm. For details, call 7358458117.

SATHYAM | ESCAPE | INOX | DEVI | SANGAM | WOODLANDS | EGA | PVR - AMPA | PALAZZO | KAMALA TNAGAR AGS | UDHAYAM | S2 PERAMBUR | SAIDAI RAJ | MAHALAXMI | KRISHNAVENI | GOPI KRISHNA | KASI TALKIES INOX LUX | PVR GRAND - VELACHERY | PVR GALADA - PALAVARAM | PVR ICON VR MALL | REDHILLS PVR | ECR - PVR INOX NATIONAL | INOX MARINA | S2 THIYAGARAJA | ECR - MAYAJAAL | MAMANDUR - C3 CINEMAS | OMR - CINEPOLIS EVP CINEMAS | AMBATHUR - RAKI & MURUGAN | VILLIVAKAM - AGS | OMR AGS | MADURAVAYAL - AGS | PORUR - GK KOYAMBEDU - ROHINI | CHORMPET - VETRI | KOLATHUR - GANGA | PADI - SIVA SAKTHI & GREEN CINEMAS | S2 THIYAGARAJA REDHILLS - RADHA MOVIE PARK | PONNAMALLE - SUNDHAR | CHENGALPET - SRK & LATHA | THIRUNINRAVUR - VELA CINEMAS KANCHIPURAM - BABU & ARUNA | ANAKAPUTHUR - GANESH & VELCO | THIRUVALLUR - RAKI | TIRUTHANI - DURGA & GOLDEN MAPPEDU - AVK

FROM TOMORROW

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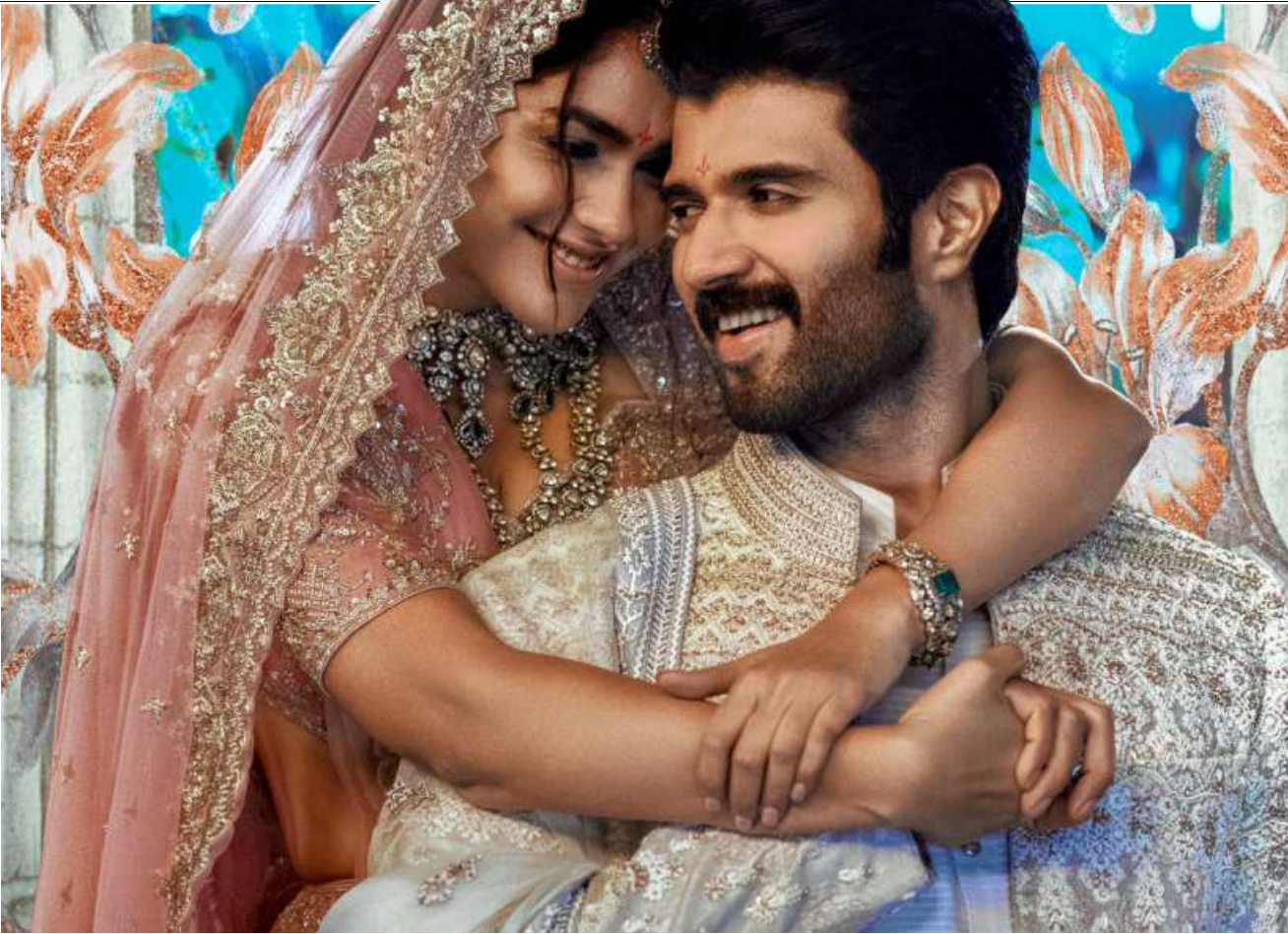
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Double Tucker

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY M² MEERA MAHADHI

A VIDYA SAGAR MUSICAL

DEVELOPER OF THE FILM: SAATHAM RAJENDRAN FILM EDITOR: VETTRIVEL A.S. ART: SURESHKANYA SURESH COSTUME DESIGNER: DEVIKOTHEE RANJAN MUSIC: DINESH MUSIC CINEMAS SOUND MIX: A.M. RAHMATHULLA SCREENPLAY: LESLAVATHI KUMAR, SANTHOSH B. MANOJAN P. G. KUPPUSWAMY STORY: DANGER MANI COSTUME: NARAYANA SKILLS BALAJI VFX: A. KISHORE SYMSKODE TECHNOLOGIES IN BAYWOOD VIRTUAL FX: COLONY KARTHEK V PRODUCTION DESIGNER: RETROTYLERYARTY, SRIN FX PRODUCTION DESIGNER: PRABHAKARAN ME AND NIBEL NARAYAN PRODUCTION: NAVIN RAJASEKAR PRODUCTION EXECUTIVE: CHELLADURAI B. EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: S. SETHURAMALINGAM CO-WRITTEN & CO-PRODUCED BY CHANDRU



Living his dream Vijay Deverakonda and Mrunal Thakur in *Family Star*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Star of the show

Actor Vijay Deverakonda discusses the middle-class setting of his latest film *Family Star*

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On a balmy summer afternoon, with barely three days to go before the release of his new Telugu film *Family Star*, Vijay Deverakonda is a picture of calm. The actor reveals that at least 50 people known to the producer, the director and his own family members have watched the film, and there is an air of cheer and confidence. One of the first video promos of *Family Star* summed up the essence of Vijay's character, a combination of a family man and a star who flexes his muscles. The initial title in consideration, however, was different. "The original title was the hero's name, Govardhan. In real life, this is my father's name. In the film,

the grandfather passes on this name to my character and believes that the boy can shoulder the family responsibilities," says Vijay. Once the film went on floors, the team wanted a title representing someone in each family who makes everyone feel secure. "Every family has a star. We wanted a title that would resonate with everyone through that characterisation." *Family Star*, in which he shares the screen with Mrunal Thakur, is his second collaboration with director Parasuram Petla after *Geetha Govindam* (2018). "When I take a flight to travel, I most often interact with people; at almost every airport I come across people who tell me that they loved *Geetha Govindam* (GG) and ask me when I will do such a film again. This time, we went all out to try and ensure that the audience has a blast," says Vijay.

A lot has changed since the times of GG. "Back then, we had nothing to lose," Vijay recalls. "I was just winging it; I was a young boy happy that I was getting to live my dream of acting in films. I loved going to the sets and acting and did not think further. It took me a week to understand Parasuram's style of

working. Now, I vibe with him instantly; when a director knows that an actor understands what he wants, he has a blast. Our craft has improved; we understand a film's structure and performance much better. There is also an added sense of responsibility."

Middle class memories
Family Star is billed as a film set in a middle-class milieu. Having grown up in a middle-class setting, did Vijay rely on his muscle memory of real-life observations to play the character with added familiarity and authenticity? "Certainly. Bujji (Parasuram) and I know how boys from middle-class families



The next few years are going to be physically challenging, with films in different time periods. I will sport different looks and speak different accents

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Two friends with stardust in their eyes travel from Kerala to Madras, the Mecca of filmmaking in the Seventies. Malayalam film *Varshangalkku Shesham*, written and directed by Vineeth Sreenivasan, trails the two as they travel from Kozhikode to Madras, hoping to make a mark in cinema. Reaching theatres on April 11, the film is about their struggle and success as they follow their heart. *Varshangalkku Shesham* zooms into Kodambakkam through the lives of Venu and Murali, essayed by Dhyan Sreenivasan and Pranav Mohanlal respectively. "One dreams of making it big in cinema while the other has his own plans. Murali motivates Venu to go to Madras. What happens to those friends is the story of *Varshangalkku Shesham*. Covering five decades, the film throws light on cinema by charting the lives of the two," says Vineeth. Since Vineeth's father, actor-writer-director Sreenivasan, had made the same journey from Kerala in the Seventies, the question follows whether it is based on his tryst with cinema. "Not completely. I have listened to his stories about his early life in Madras and also the experiences of many of his contemporaries in cinema. During my school days, I used to be an ardent reader of popular Malayalam film magazines such as *Nana*, *Vellinakshatram* and *Chithrabhumi* which carried articles and interviews of those working in cinema. It was a different world and most of the news on cinema was shared only through



CINEMA IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Malayalam film *Varshangalkku Shesham*, directed by Vineeth Sreenivasan, revolves around two friends wanting to make it big in films

these magazines and not through television or social media. Those inspired me." He recalls how during stage shows, actors like Mukesh and the late Innocent used to regale the team with stories of life in Madras and cinema. Vineeth was able to get a ringside view of filmmaking and the action while Sreenivasan was shooting for Priyadarshan's *Chandralekha*, starring Sreenivasan and Mohanlal. "Before I became a resident of the city, it was a place that had always fascinated me. I had stayed for short

periods in Kodambakkam, Ashok Nagar and so on... I believe that *Varshangalkku Shesham* has captured that mood of tinsel town in the Seventies and Eighties." Starring many of the actors he worked with in his previous film, *Hridayam*, *Varshangalkku Shesham* has a huge star cast, including Nivin Pauly, Aju Varghese, Basil Joseph and Kalyani Priyadarshan, among others. Shot in 40 days on sets in Kerala, Coimbatore and Pollachi, the movie recreates the Kodambakkam and studios of Chennai at Aroor, Kochi.

behave in certain situations. In college, if I liked a girl, I would appear cool and confident and not disclose that I didn't have enough money. But ultimately, my budget will restrict me." Vijay points out that the film is not a close-to-reality depiction of a middle-class man's journey. "This is a mainstream Telugu holiday entertainer. The way my character reacts to a conflict point is over the top and extreme, yet, it reflects how middle-class people can get upset. Govardhan's extreme reaction makes the film entertaining."

Business and choices
In the days following the release of *Arjun Reddy*, Vijay had told this reporter that he hopes that even a decade down the line, he can retain the freedom to choose films without the restrictions of image. Ask him if he still has that freedom or have business constraints come in with his stardom, and he says it is a mix of both. "I am open to working with any director or producer and any genre except horror, which I do not enjoy watching. But I want to do films that will be watched by a large section of the audience. I cannot do a niche film if I cannot control the budget and the cycle of business."

He explains that some of his films that were made on small budgets were sold for high prices, leading to disappointment. "I want everyone who buys the film to be in a safe zone. If I can control the budget and how the film is sold, I can do a small film. For instance, the way Aamir Khan worked on *Taare Zameen Par*." Vijay cites an example of how he wanted to co-produce and do a brief part in director Shree Karthick's *Oke Oka Jeevitham*. "I loved the script. I offered to play a small part, produce it and market it such that I disclose that I liked the story so much that I produced it. But the producer felt that the strategy would not work and I took a step back. I was sure it should not be marketed as my film." Vijay's line up includes a film with director Gowtam Tinnanuri, one with Rahul Sankrityan and another that is yet to be announced, in diverse genres. "I'm excited about all of them."

A trip to the past Vineeth Sreenivasan; (below) Pranav Mohanlal and Dhyan Sreenivasan. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Some of the old-time studio scenes were shot in Coimbatore and Pollachi. "A lot of hard work and planning has gone into this shooting. Art director Nimesh Thanur reimagined Madras for us at Aroor." Does Vineeth, with his impeccable track record at the marquee, get butterflies in his stomach as his movie reaches cinemas? "One gets that feeling about four to five days before the release. Till then I am engrossed in its making," he says with a laugh. "There is a sense of relief when a project reaches its destination, from an idea to a visual story. That feeling is undeniable. There is the satisfaction of realising that one has been able to complete it in a way one had visualised it." Vineeth wears many hats – writer, actor, director, lyricist, singer and composer – all with elan. He has also brought in several newbies who are now making waves in movies. This time, he introduces musician Amrit Ramnath, who makes his debut as a music director. "He is in his twenties and I felt his perspective would be interesting and enhance the film." Vineeth admits that his decisions to choose a teammate are largely based on intuition. "Usually, I narrate stories that are in my comfort space. *Varshangalkku Shesham* is a completely different film. It is a movie about cinema. I like working with newcomers as they bring in fresh perspectives and ideas."

Laughter, the best medicine

Meet Chennai-based cardiovascular surgeon Dheeraj, also the hero of upcoming Tamil film *Double Tuckerr*



Operation theatre Dheeraj in *Double Tuckerr*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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Dheeraj has just finished a bypass surgery when we call him. "The patient is fine," he tells me cheerily. The 42-year-old popular cardiovascular surgeon has a busy week: apart from attending to his patients, he is also completing last-minute formalities for the release of his Tamil film that hits screens on April 5.

Titled *Double Tuckerr*, the film features Dr Dheeraj in the lead role, along with two angels, named 'left' and 'right', brought to the big screen thanks to animation. Directed by Meera Mahadhi and also starring actors like Smruthi Venkat, Kovai Sarala and MS Baskar, it promises to be a fun-filled tale about life after death. "After all, laughter is the best medicine," says Dheeraj.

The journey of *Double Tuckerr* started with a narration that was supposed to be for five minutes, but ended up lasting an hour. "Throughout the narration, I just couldn't control my laughter," he recalls. The initial storyline featured Yama and Chitragupta, with the idea of casting Yogi Babu and Munishkanth, but that was vetoed as Yogi Babu had already done a character on similar lines in another project. That was when the concept of angels popped up. At each step, I kept asking the question: why should people watch this film?

This helped fine-tune the storyline. Children are our target audience." Music director Vidyasagar's tunes will be a big asset for *Double Tuckerr*, says Dheeraj. "I know him personally, and even before assembling this project, I used to tell him that he would be its composer. He has created magic with the music and background score." Although Dheeraj always wanted to be a doctor, he also secretly nursed a passion for acting. "My mother was clear that I should become a doctor," he revealed. But after that goal was achieved – he studied for 11 years to complete his medical education, which included an MBBS, MS and MCH – Dheeraj considered his other passion, acting. A few short films followed, one of which was a feel-good film titled *Dheergayushmman Bhava*. It was his role in 2019's *Bodhai Yeri Buddhi Maari* that opened the floodgates for Dheeraj. "I kept thinking that people's reaction would be, 'Why should a doctor be attempting this?' But I was pleasantly surprised to hear several positive comments about my performance." It egged him on to balance both his pursuits, and has resulted in *Double Tuckerr*, releasing this week. "I want to register myself as an actor who can perform any character on screen," he says, "I hope to do this till the time I can balance my medical profession and cinema."

