



# metroPLUS

THE HINDU



**In this seaside city** of ours, immerse yourself in an exhibit on ocean conservation **P3**

**WHAT SOORI OFFERS WITH FAMILY DRAMA MAAMAN** **P4**



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A squirrel has scooped out a tiny hole in an Imam Pasand mango that farmer K Baskar has set aside. “I had left the box outside just a few minutes ago!” he chuckles. Animals and birds make away with a lot of the produce at his 40-acre organic farm that borders Dindigul district. But he works his way around this, given that his farm at Andipatti in Tiruppur district also abuts the Anamalai Tiger Reserve. Baskar grows Alphonso, Imam Pasand, Neelam, and Malgoa

varieties on his 800 mango trees. Farm hands are harvesting fruits from this orchard one summer afternoon using a long pole bearing a scissors-like contraption that snips the mango from the branch. It falls into a small net right beneath, and the fruit is transferred to a waiting basket below. Every mango is dealt with care – after all, Baskar has waited a year for this moment. “This year, I’m seeing only 30% of yield,” says the 48-year-old, adding that he lost over 500 kilograms of mangoes a few days ago due to an unexpected gust of heavy winds. But he is keeping his chin up, packing off mangoes to customers across India. “Mangoes are extremely sensitive to rains,” he says, as we make our way through prickly undergrowth towards a tree laden with Alphonso mangoes. “If there is too much rain, the fruit might not hold much sugar content.” The Alphonsoes are a mix of dark and light green, with a few showing smudges of orange. The smell – a heady combination of earth and rain with sweetish undertones – is an indicator that the fruits are ready to be harvested. According to the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University’s AgriTech Portal, India ranks first in the world among mango producing countries. In Tamil Nadu, major mango growing districts are Dindigul, Theni, Dharmapuri, Krishnagiri,

## The season’s sweetest

**Now that peak mango season** has arrived, farmers across Tamil Nadu give us a lowdown on varieties to look out for, sharing stories of survival against the odds

Vellore, and Thiruvallur. Salem, known for its Gundu variety, is yet another mango hub. Farmers report that the season has been in its peak over the past 15 days in the region. According to Sathish Ramasamy, who owns 35 acres in Magudanchavadi, Salem, they initially faced issues with quality. Right now though, their fruits are in great form. Sathish, who runs the company Salemmango, sells online and has customers across India. “I do not use chemicals since our farm is in a rain-fed area,” he says, adding that mango farmers from near and far visit his farm to understand how it is possible to grow mangoes organically.

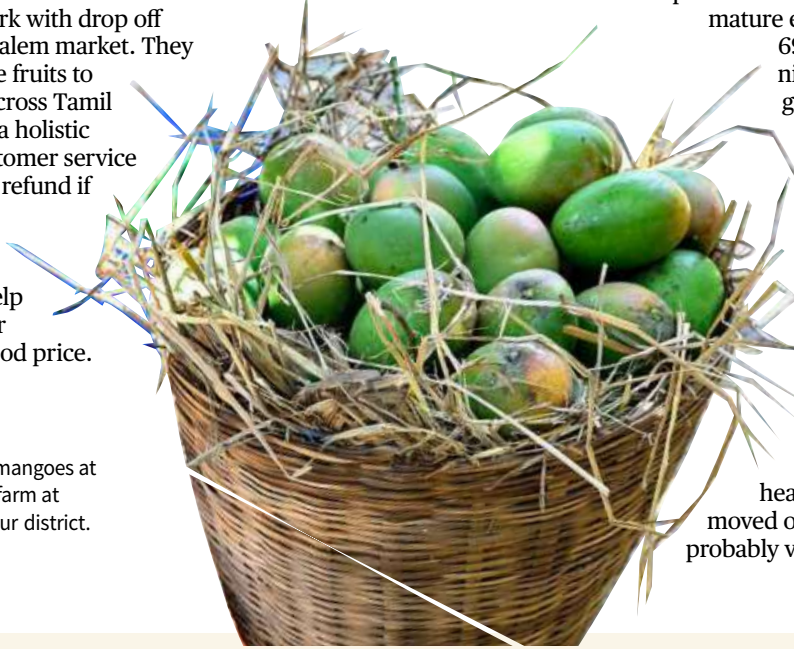
**Farm to table** Friends and software professionals Shyam Sembagounder and Siva Sankar, who hail from Salem and work in the US, help Salem mango farmers find customers through their online venture Namkalam. “We route customers directly to farmers,” explains Shyam. He adds that farmers they work with drop off produce at the Salem market. They then package the fruits to ship to people across Tamil Nadu, and offer a holistic approach to customer service complete with a refund if there are issues. The idea, Shyam explains, is to help farmers sell their produce for a good price.

**Nature’s bounty** Freshly-harvested mangoes at K Baskar’s 40-acre farm at Andipatti in Tiruppur district. PERIASAMY M

Climate change is making things difficult for farmers by springing up unseasonal rains. Those following organic methods find it even more challenging. But they are dealing with the problem with techniques such as biological sprays. Ajay Kuruvila, a farmer based in Dindigul, curates mangoes from organic farmers from the district, supplying to organic stores in Chennai, Coimbatore, and Madurai. Ajay explains that once the mangoes are harvested with their stalks intact, they are set upside down to let the sap flow, washed in alum, and then packed. “This is so that the fruit does not develop black blemishes once it ripens,” he says. Apart from Sappattai, Malgoa, and Imam Pasand, farmers in the region are also harvesting Karunkurangu, a large, sweet variety, according to Ajay. “In two weeks, Mallika and Neelam will start arriving, followed by Kasalattu towards the end of the season in

June,” he says. This spacing-out of varieties is Nature’s way of letting us try a little bit of everything. However, climate change is shaking up this cycle as well. In Rajapalayam district, known for Sappattai, KS Jaganatha Raja, who owns 12 acres by the foothills of the Western Ghats, says that fruits have been rendered with black spots due to rains. “This has affected their pricing,” says Jaganatha. He says that some people do resort to spraying ethylene gas to ripen fruits since they are harvested ahead of time fearing rains and winds, but they do not do so. Jaganatha has revived several rare varieties of mangoes at his farm, selling saplings that he propagates through the grafting technique at his nursery. Among such varieties is Mohandas, of which he has just one tree in his orchard. Jaganatha grew excited when the lone tree bore over 2,500 fruits last year. “I went to see it every day, thinking I will pluck the mangoes once they are mature enough,” recalls the 69-year-old. But then one night, most of them were gone.

“A herd of elephants ate them up,” he says. They had left some at the high reaches behind, that Jaganatha hoped to save. “But they came back two days later to finish them too,” he says. “They shook the entire tree to empty it of fruits.” As much as he is heartbroken, Jaganatha has moved on. He says, “They were probably very hungry.”



### The Organic Shandy, Mylapore

Native mango varieties reign this year says organic farmer and co-founder of Organic Shandy, PB Murali. He adds that the mango season in Tamil Nadu has been quite the disaster so far, with farmers managing only about 20% of the expected yield. However, as they are all discovering, the heritage varieties are more resilient. At his farm in Madhuranthakam, near Chennai, the harvest from over 5,000 trees spread across 60 acres, was hit due to unexpected, unseasonal rains and thunderstorms two weeks ago. Despite the poor yield in the state, Murali’s store stocks several types of mango, including Banganapalli, Imam Pasand, Malgoa, Alphonso, Mallika, Pathiri, and Panchavarnam, the native variety from Rajapalayam. “This year one of our farmers harvested a local variety called Yaanathalai (translating to elephant head), which is a huge fruit weighing over a kilogram,” he says. This pivot to finding, sourcing and cultivating native varieties has been observed across the state. Murali also points out that supply is abundant from neighbouring states. “Prices have hence, come down this year,” says Murali. While you are shopping, also pick up their mango jam, pulp and milk shakes. *Orders can be placed over the phone, with home delivery available across the city. The shop is open from 10am to 8pm, and is closed on Sundays. Phone: 7708612348.*

## By the kilo

**For the third consecutive year, the mango season across Tamil Nadu has been severely affected by unseasonal rains due to climate change. Worry not though, as sweet, organic native varieties come to the rescue**

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### reStore Organic Store, Kottivakkam

At reStore, which sources mangoes from across Tamil Nadu, a wide range of varieties are currently available. These include Malgoa, Mallika, Kesar, Rasalu, Senthuram, Dasherri, Imam Pasand, Alphonso, Javari and Banganapalli are now available. Some farmers are yet to complete their harvest, so the mango season is likely to extend till August,” R Karthik, manager of the store, says. He is also looking forward to the arrival of native varieties such as Peether and Pathiri from Kanchipuram district. *You can book your mangoes and get them home delivered. 10am to 7pm. Phone: 9840571842.*



### Cholayil Farm to Table, Anna Nagar

Susmera Cholayil, co-founder, Cholayil Farm to Table store, is left with over two tonnes of raw mangoes, that are not suitable for sales. “The 85 acre, Cholayil mango grove at Vengal village in Tiruvallur, with around 900 trees and nearly 45 varieties of mango, has produced just 30% of its expected yield,” she says. She adds, “We hope to harvest remaining fruits by the end of May.” In the meantime, she is exploring ways to process the raw mangoes into pickles and solar-dried products. “We are expecting an extended season this year, and gradually, all varieties at our farm will be harvested by next month and available for sale,” she says. Currently, they have stocked Banganapalli, Bengalura, Alphonso and more varieties such as Kalapadi, Swarnarekha, Neelam, Malgoa, Pathiri and Rasalu, will be stocked as and when it is harvested. *The store is open from 10 am to 7 pm. To pre-book your mangoes, call 7550155005.*



### Organic Farmers Market, Adyar

Despite the challenges this year, some native varieties appear to be more resilient to climate conditions. “We have hence stocked a variety called Karunkurangu, which has a dark green and very thick skin, sourced from Dindigul, and we are trying to source more native varieties,” says Anantha Sayanan, co-founder, Organic Farmers Market (OFM). He notes that the Salem region, which usually has good yield, has also been affected by unseasonal rains. “Salem, Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri, which are major mango-producing regions in the state, were the worst hit this year, due to unexpected rainfall during the flowering season. The season had a late start, and now we are dealing with significantly less yields,” he says. At OFM, they have Imam Pasand, Banganapali, Malgoa, Alphonso, Senthuram and small quantities of Kalapadi. As their mission is to support the farmers they work with, they keep margins low, making the produce affordable. *OFM is open from 10am to 6pm. They also have additional stores in various locations within Chennai, apart from Adyar. To place your order, call 6380169943.*

particularly sweet, and I am looking forward to the arrival of native varieties such as Kalapadi, Nadusalai, and Sakkarakatti in a few weeks,” says Gopi. He observes that the mango season has been relatively good in the neighbouring southern states. At Safe Foods, the current stock includes Banganapalli, Imam Pasand, Senthuram, Malgoa, Alphonso, Javari, and Mallika. More varieties are expected to arrive in June. *Mangoes can be prebooked between 11am to 8pm. Phone: 9790900887.*



Himalayan Haat, Uttarakhand

In 2014, after her father, Ronnie Chowfin's demise, Divya Chowfin Diederichs and her mother inherited his legacy: a forest farm in Pauri, Garhwal. "My mother, Indira, a retired teacher, and I, started making preserves from the farm's harvest in our home kitchen. These creations were initially shared with friends and colleagues in Delhi," she says. Their catalogue comprises small-batch syrups and concentrates made with the hand-pressed juice of local mountain produce (both cultivated and foraged) like Malta oranges, strawberries, plums, peaches and rhododendron flowers. "We use organic *khand* (raw cane sugar) and lemon juice as natural preservatives. These are handcrafted in small batches on the farm and shipped pan-India directly from here," adds Divya. The process begins with gathering tree-ripened mountain fruits or fresh flowers, that are then cooked and pureed in small batches with natural preservatives. "These flowers bloom for only a few weeks in spring. Our climbers carefully pick the blossoms high in the trees, bringing them back to our centre."

Concentrates are priced upwards of ₹445.  
@himalayanhaatfarm on Instagram



The sherbet soiree

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With temperatures soaring, swap store-bought sodas with sherbets and squashes crafted by these small businesses across the country.

Yummy Bakes, Chennai

Nandhini Poobalan kickstarted Yummy Bakes as a small venture from her Neelankarai home nine years ago. She started off by retailing cupcakes, cakes, and cookies, and soon after, included fruit concentrates on the menu.

Today, her rose, sarsaparilla (nannari), and strawberry concentrates are popular at organic shandies in the city. "The rose variant is prepared by sourcing country roses, cleaning them thoroughly and extracting the essence from a cold pressed machine to preserve the goodness. Raw sugar is added to the extract and boiled until the desired consistency is reached. Finally, cold pressed beetroot extract is added to give it the pink hue of roses," she says. The nannari concentrate's process involves cleaning nannari roots, soaking them for 24 hours, straining, and boiling.

As for the strawberry concentrate, it is seasonal and finds its use as cake toppings, ice cream sundaes, etc.

Concentrates are priced upwards of ₹300. For details, call 9791632262.



Homegrown brands across India are turning sarsaparilla, rose, orange, wood-apple, and more, into summer-friendly sherbets and squashes

Boovenhully, Coorg

After having lived in a coffee plantation in Coorg for several years, Sajini Joseph noticed that a lot of fruit was going to waste. Since selling them was not a viable option as local buyers offered very low prices, she started making squashes and sharing them with people. "I began with just eight bottles of passion fruit squash. Today, we have seven different flavours and sell over 1,000 bottles a month," she says. Over time, she expanded her catalogue to include jams and pickles; all recipes came from her grandmother. With flavours such as pineapple and chilli, lime and chilli, orange and bilimbi (tree sorrel), passion fruit, among others, the squashes are made from fruits grown in the orchard. "Our most popular flavours are passion fruit and mint and lime because they suit all age groups. Our chilli and lime, made with bird's eye chilli, is a great cocktail mixer," says Sajini, who enjoys experimenting. "One of my best creations is bilimbi and orange. The former is usually very sour and not widely used, but blending it with orange made it an amazing drink," she says.

The team's biggest challenge, says Sajini, is harvesting fruits during the monsoon season and storing them in deep freezers until needed. "We don't make products in bulk because we don't use preservatives. Instead, we prepare them fresh, based on orders."

The squashes are priced at ₹400.  
@boovenhullys on Instagram



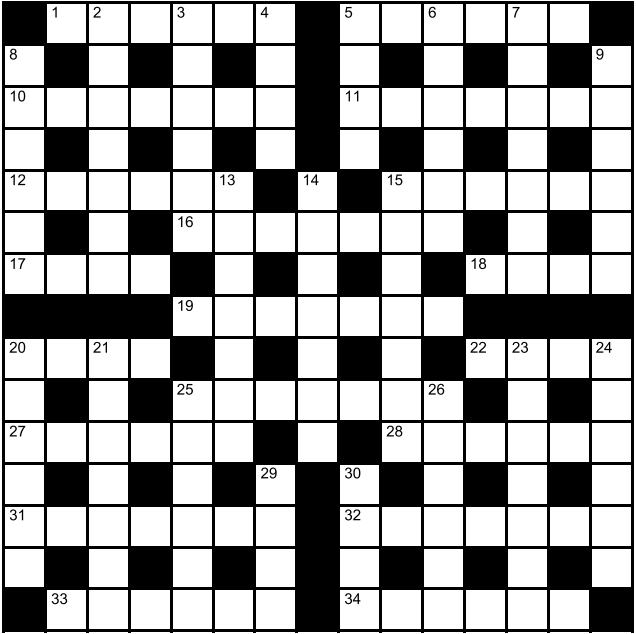
BaKaHu, Mysore

At BaKaHu aka Bale Kai Hudi, meaning raw banana powder, fruit squashes are more than just a refreshing drink. "It's a story of sustainability, innovation, and community," says founder Naveen Kumar HM, who has set up Abhay Natural Food Processing at Rathanapuri in Mysore district. Alongside this, he runs a Banana Incubation Centre within Mysore's Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI) campus wherein he trains budding agri entrepreneurs. Today, the primarily women-led team, crafts variants such as mango, gooseberry (amla), wood-apple, java plum (jamun), star fruit, among others.

Naveen explains that before the processing begins, the fruits are thoroughly washed using ozonated water technology, which removes dirt and pesticides. "Sorting is a critical step, and only the best fruits make the cut. Damaged or overripe fruits are set aside for composting, ensuring zero waste. For pulpy fruits like mango and guava, we use mechanical pulpers to extract flavour, and citrus fruits like oranges and lemons are juiced using specialised extractors. The juice is then strained and filtered to remove fibres, leaving behind a smooth, velvety liquid," says Naveen.

Upwards of ₹300 at bakahu.co.in

METROPLUS QUICK CROSSWORD#3  
(Set by Doppelganger)



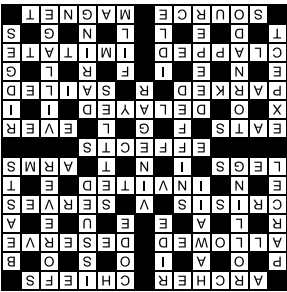
- Across**
- 1 Legendary Swiss or bowler (6)
  - 5 Men like Dwivedi, Tripathi and AP Singh (6)
  - 10 Am I \_\_\_\_\_ to eat my food here? (7)
  - 11 Worthy of merit (7)
  - 12 A sudden pathological change for better or worse (6)
  - 15 This restaurant \_\_\_\_\_ only nonveg food (6)
  - 16 You are if you are 10A to attend! (7)
  - 17 Some have 2, some 4 and some even 8! (4)
  - 18 Soldiers bear these (4)
  - 19 Lighting, sounds etc that accompany a stage production (7)
  - 20 They are a part of elevesens (4)
  - 22 To a great extent or degree (4)
  - 25 Justice \_\_\_\_\_ is justice denied (7)
  - 27 Placed in geosynchronous orbit (6)
  - 28 Began a journey by the Titanic (6)
  - 31 Came together with a sharp sound (7)
  - 32 What parrots do by rote (7)
  - 33 Obtain from another business for manufacture (6)
  - 34 It has two poles (6)
- Down**
- 2 Such stones gather no moss (7)
  - 3 An island state that is also an archipelago in the Tropics (6)
  - 4 You will find one of these in an amusement park (4)
  - 5 Part of a computer program (4)

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



- 6 To have as a consequence or result (6)
- 7 A seemingly very long time (7)
- 8 Working overtime is part and \_\_\_\_\_ of a professional (6)
- 9 Contemptible people (6)
- 13 Regarded something in a contemptuous manner (7)
- 14 Irritable speech and American vitality (7)
- 15 Pays one's bills (7)
- 20 Look forward to the appearance of (6)
- 21 An American twister (7)
- 23 A dense group of Prairie dogs (7)
- 24 Narrow upper sections of waves (6)
- 25 More than 3000 fathoms below water (6)
- 26 Willing to seek out risks (6)
- 29 To run at slow speed (4)
- 30 Photographic negative (4)

Solution #3



Creating a cardboard kingdom

Karthic Rathinam and his team at Out of the Box, craft DIY furniture, sculptures, and decor with cardboard

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When Karthic Rathinam – then a third-year product design student in Pune – moved out of his hostel into an unfurnished studio apartment, he decided to build his own furniture. "I experimented with wood, and steel, but with little money left after spending on basic living expenses, I couldn't afford to build things with those materials," he says, adding how cardboard boxes that held his belongings took his fancy. "That's when it hit me. Why not try building with cardboard? I built a bed, table, chair, and shelves out of cardboard and ended up using them for six months."

This got Karthic studying cardboard's structure, limitations, and possibilities. In 2021, Karthic designed a cardboard-based sanitizer stand that went viral on WhatsApp. "I sold over 80,000 units initially that were deployed at Metro stations in Delhi," says the designer, who went on to set up his firm, Out of the Box, the same year. Now based in Chennai, Karthic began with eight products including a table, table lamp, stool, laptop stand, tablet desk organiser, shelving options. Today, the 26-year-old and his team have branched into packaging and sculptures.



He explains how they use high-strength corrugated cardboard sourced from specific partners. "It's not the same cardboard that you will find in your regular parcel boxes," he clarifies, "They are triple-layered, very strong corrugated boards. Our furniture is designed to be lightweight yet structurally strong, and entirely adhesive-free. All pieces are DIY and use the interlocking technique," says Karthic, adding how the material's versatile nature makes it ideal for temporary installations such as movie sets, exhibition stalls, etc.

Their stool, for instance, can hold a weight of 300 kilograms. "How do we know this? We made six people stand atop it," he shares. "It's not waterproof, but definitely water-resistant. Also, we are not claiming it will last you a lifetime. It will last for a good two years, and maybe more if maintained better," affirms Karthic. "The products are fully recyclable. You can give them to your paper mart vendors."

As for limitations with cardboard products that he aims at addressing, the designer says working on making them fire-resistant is on priority. "I am also building a cardboard house where I can stay, and I am hopeful that this project will be an example for others to create cost-effective temporary structures such as security cabins, makeshift homes on construction sites, etc," he concludes.

Details on outofthebox.sale



Going steady Karthic Rathinam. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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In her debut book *Money Doesn't Grow On Trees*, Lavanya Mohan makes a tongue-in-cheek comparison in the first chapter. "Money is a lot like high school mathematics, in that, perfectly intelligent people who are fully capable of mastering the subject are convinced that they will just not get it," she writes.

This might sound all too familiar to many of us, whether we are millennials or Gen Z. For Lavanya too, the book, she says, is a handy personal finance guide she probably needed when she was in her twenties. "This is a very conversational guide for beginners who are trying to get their personal finances in order. There are no lectures, jargon, and most importantly, there is no condescension either. This book holds your hand and helps you understand money better," she explains.

In a world that is teeming with finance bros and influencers talking in crores, Lavanya's book sets its sights a lot simpler. At 200 pages, the book tackles a range of topics – from mutual funds, types of insurance policies, ESOPs, and investing in gold, to name a few. Lavanya also goes beyond merely explaining the brass tacks of personal finance, and delves into our evolving relationship with money – whether in a marriage, when planning for children, and ultimately, for retirement.

"I think the book is unique in how it acknowledges how money makes you feel, and not just how you should be managing it," she says. "All of us have grown up with different values with money and different experiences. This book acknowledges that, and it also gives you the tools to recognise when you are being emotional with money and



Money talks

For millennials and Gen Z drowning in complex jargon and resigned ignorance, Lavanya Mohan attempts to simplify all things finance in her debut book *Money Doesn't Grow On Trees*

how to handle it in a more practical way," she says.

**A penny for your thoughts** Through her blog pennmoney, and on her Instagram, Lavanya has been an advocate for simplifying personal finance for women in particular. This is

**At 200 pages, the book tackles a range of topics from mutual funds, types of insurance policies, ESOPs, and investing in gold, to name a few.**

an important part of her book as well.

"I realised a few years ago how unapproachable we have made the world of finance for women and the boys club it has become. We hear so many stories of domestic abuse, and of women who stay in bad marriages and realise the impact money can have on their lives. Understanding finance and figuring out what to do with their pay checks will go a long way in making women deal with money better," she says.

Early on in the book,

▶ **Decoding bills** Author Lavanya Mohan. S SHIVA RAJ

Lavanya candidly describes millennials as a generation that is 'woke', but unfortunately terrible at managing money. Every year when tax season comes around, jokes are aplenty on the internet as to how knowing all about what the mitochondria is, or what parallelograms are, has proven to be hardly useful in the real world where a large part of 'adulting' involves budgeting, filing for taxes and exploring investments.

She adds that conversing with children in a systematic way from early primary school about this topic will help.

Lavanya acknowledges that while finance influencers are important when it comes to awareness, many people are holding back from seeking professional help when it comes to their finances. "People should remember that for influencers, it is more of a content game and that they are focussed on catching your attention versus trying to do right by you. I constantly emphasise on the importance of professional guidance in my videos," she adds.

Lavanya says that it is important to not just look at money from the lens of investments, savings and the likes, but also from relationships and big life decisions that one is going to take.

"Be curious, instead of dismissing personal finance as a topic you don't understand. Do not hold yourself back about any questions you might have. It all comes down to being open and losing your inhibitions when it comes to learning about all things money," she says.

Published by Simon & Schuster, Money Doesn't Grow On Trees is available for orders online.





**From the trenches** (Left) An exhibit titled Aazhi – The Deep Sea; (inset) a visitor taking a look. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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A few weeks ago, Chennai saw the season’s hatch of Olive Ridley baby turtles. The hatchlings slowly made their way into the sea, as people gathered to watch them. Turtle walks are recorded along the East Coast each year.

Under natural conditions, the eggs laid by the mother in nests on the beach would hatch on their own, and the little turtles would crawl to the sea without interference. But with growing threats from predators, fishing activity, and habitat loss, the Forest Department now collects and protects the eggs, releasing them into the ocean, once they are born. Despite these measures, more than 1,100 turtles were found dead along the shore this year. The effects of climate change and environmental apathy are becoming evident.

To mark the urgency of ocean conservation, the Alliance Française of Madras is hosting an exhibition titled We Are The Ocean until May 25. It brings together artists, researchers, and the public, through a range of visual and immersive experiences. The show explores the changing relationship between humans and the sea, using art and technology to spark dialogue. “In June, we will have the United Nations Ocean Conference in Nice, France. The idea is to raise awareness about the ocean and work towards sustainability,” says director, Alliance Francaise Madras, Patricia Thery-Hart.

# Deep sea dialogue

**The We Are The Ocean exhibition at the Alliance Française of Madras invites visitors to explore the urgent realities of ocean conservation**



**In June, we will have the United Nations Ocean Conference in Nice, France. The idea is to raise awareness about the ocean and work towards sustainability.**

**PATRICIA THERY-HART**  
Director, Alliance Francaise Madras

Spread across multiple spaces, the exhibition features a diverse mix of mediums. These include immersive installations, textile-based storytelling, augmented reality, virtual reality experiences, and sound art. In the passageway leading into the main exhibition, two photo-based exhibits frame the human and ecological dimensions of ocean life.

Faces of the Ocean, presented by the French Development Agency, features portraits of individuals across India’s fisheries sector – from boat mechanics to fish vendors – offering a glimpse into communities that depend on the sea. On the opposite wall, is Antoine Bertin’s Phytoplanktonic Conversations which presents a series of images developed from a sound project. It documents a phytoplankton bloom in the South Atlantic, drawing attention to these vital, oxygen-producing organisms that often go unnoticed.

One of the highlights include

an installation made with textile waste. Aazhi - The Deep Sea traces the life and loss of coral reefs. The installation depicts stages of deterioration of coral reefs due to change in ocean temperature. The phenomenon, known as coral bleaching, strips the colours off the reefs, leaving them white. “This depicts a healthy ocean, and then slowly, you can see how it changes colour. All of this is made from tailoring waste. We cut them into strips, spin the yarn and then knit, weave, crochet and use other techniques to make this,” says Kalyani Pramod, a multidisciplinary artist, textile designer, and director of Common threads, a Chennai-based fibre art studio.

Other installations pick up similar threads of ecological storytelling. Tidal Echoes by Milkorva uses abstract visuals and field recordings to evoke the changing rhythms of the ocean, while Villes Flottantes, an augmented reality work, explores coral reproduction, mangrove restoration, and plastic reuse. Viewers can download an app to scan the artwork in specific sections, which activates animations and additional layers of information – turning the viewing experience into an interactive one. Other zones include a VR experience simulating deep-sea ecosystems; and a reading corner for children, set up in collaboration with Karadi Tales, offers younger visitors a quieter way to engage with the ocean.

*We Are The Ocean is on view at Alliance Française of Madras until May 25.*



**Gyozas in skirts** At the recently renovated Soy Soi. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



mushrooms in the gyoza.

The star of the meal is the grilled eggplant miso served with a roasted sesame dressing. It is grilled to perfection and coats your tongue in a nutty, savoury dressing. The crispy avocado sushi crusted with tanuki (tempura flakes) and stuffed with jalapeño, leaves no room for innovation. The flavours are familiar. We also try the Malaysian Karipap, which is a curry puff filled with curried vegetables and served with a Malay potato curry. It is aromatic, but heavy on the palette. The lamb dengaku is a special addition to the menu. “This is not traditionally made with lamb, but we are a lamb loving city, so I have customised it to go with this sauce,” says chef Rajat.

For the main course, the spicy Vietnamese pho with thinly sliced meat or vegetables and a flavourful broth is a wholesome option. The Malaysian curry in both vegetarian and non-vegetarian forms is served with fresh jasmine rice. We end the meal with the signature fluffy Japanese cheesecake served with yuzu sauce, coconut crumble and macerated plum.

Even ahead of the formal re-opening of the restaurant, every table is occupied. Some finishing touches remain. Paying no heed to the unfinished parts, Chennai embraces Soy Soi like an old friend.

*Soy Soi is at 2/10, Gandhi Mandapam Road, Chitra Nagar, Kotturpuram. A meal for two costs ₹2,400. For reservations, call 7397774857.*

# Off the beaten plate

**After years of bringing the streets of Southeast Asia to Chennai’s tables, Soy Soi returns with a menu refresh, and some surprises**

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In 2017, Chef Te Yuan Peter Tseng and his team went on a 21-day journey across Southeast Asia with one goal in mind. To eat. “We went to five countries and ate only street food. By the end, we had documented around 300 dishes,” he says, fondly remembering the trip. “We came back and started building a solid menu. We mixed influences, took some difficult decisions and narrowed it down to 120 dishes.” And thus, Soy Soi was born.

A restaurant that looked to serve Asian street-style food in an elevated dining space, Soy Soi bridged a gap in the culinary landscape, and

introduced the city to many new and interesting cuisines. In March 2025, they closed doors, took a break, and spent almost two months to change things up.

“We have added some dishes that we only see in fine dining restaurants and incorporated different flavours and textures to make something innovative,” says brand chef Rajat Gurung, as he serves an amuse-bouche – a Persian cucumber roll, stuffed with tofu, asparagus and carrot, plated in a pool of sesame sauce and chilli oil. The first course is the avocado carpaccio. The smoky, buttery slices of avocado are served in ginger ponzu, chilli oil and topped with a pineapple salsa, jalapeño relish, herb oil, and

rice crispies.

The mushroom gyoza with a crispy skirt might seem like something we have seen before, but there is a new addition to the dipping sauces. Along with the classic chilli crisp and scallion oil, a bright, and pungent karashi honey mustard, is served. This combination, while not conventional, brings out the umami notes of the mixed



## Sailing strong

The ongoing UNIFI Capital Offshore Regatta 2025, held from May 12 -16, features nine teams, each comprising six members. The event is organised under the aegis of the Yachting Association of India (YAI) and the Royal Madras Yacht Club (RMYC). Participants will first race between Chennai Port and Mamallapuram, covering a distance of 50 kilometres each way. This will be followed by a race between Chennai Port and Kamarajar Port, which spans 20 kilometres during each leg.

According to Captain Vivek Shanbag, Secretary, Royal Madras Yacht Club, this is the fourth year of the event. Participation has grown significantly, he says. The regatta features two fleets: gold and silver. The gold fleet consists of sailors with international experience, while the silver fleet includes capable sailors participating in the event for the first time. From next year, current silver fleet participants will move to the gold fleet, making way for a new group of first-time sailors. The oldest participant is Colonel Goutam Das, aged 77, who sails in the silver fleet. The youngest is 14-year-old Ragav R, who is also the skipper of his team. The event features the popular J/80 class sailboats. All the boats are equipped with satellite trackers, allowing the public to follow the race live on the website: the [www.trackanything.in](http://www.trackanything.in).



## When heritage meets community

Dakshinachitra, the open air heritage museum, is celebrating Museum Day starting May 17. They plan to host a celebration of South Indian heritage, creativity, and community. This year’s theme is Museums and Communities. A host of events that explore culture through talks, walks, and workshops have been planned. The event’s schedule is as follows: a talk by architect Yogesh Chandrachud (May 17, 10am to 2pm); heritage walk through Sathanur House (May 18, 10am to 2pm); objects and stories workshop with Praveena Shivaram (May 24 and 25, 11am to 12.30pm); and outdoor air painting session on June 1. @Dakshinachitra Museum, Muttukadu, ECR. Between May 17 and June 1. For registration and details, call 8220791932.

## Culture on a canvas

A steaming stream of filter coffee poured into the davara, a crisp dosa plated with its trusty accompaniments, the red and white chutneys; a surreal representation of a fishing village in Tamil Nadu – Mimi Pang’s artworks are personal, inspired by people, places and things that she sets her eyes on, during her travels around the world with husband and Consul-General of Singapore in Chennai, Edgar Pang. Last week at Vinyl & Brew, to the backdrop of vinyls and live music, Mimi, who is currently based in Chennai, showcased her work spanning mediums – acrylics, crochet works and watercolours in an exhibit titled Colours of My Soul.

“Art is a form of meditation for me. I have had a love for crafting since when I was in primary school. These are works done over the years in different places, that is also why there are so many colours and themes. Being in India, being in Chennai inspires me,” says Mimi who tries to do at least one piece in every city that she lives in. “I find Chennai very charming and quiet. A walk through a quiet lane often inspires me,” she says. In the display, there were artworks inspired by Laos, Vietnam and of course, India as well. She is currently mentored by Chennai-based artist Thejo Menon.





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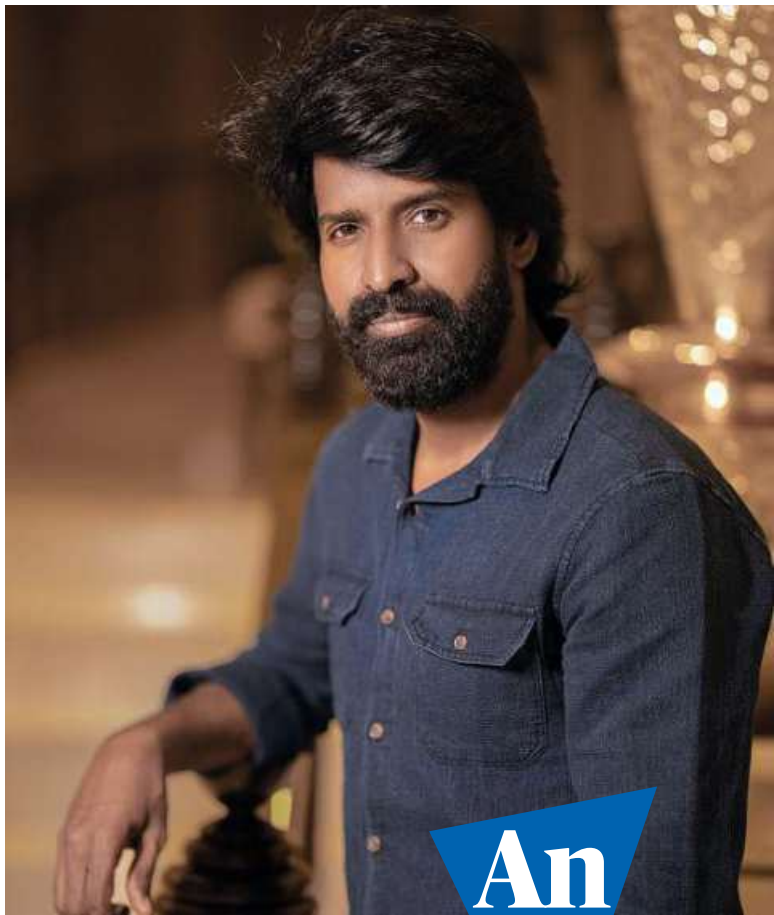
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▲ **A new shade** Soori;  
(below) a still from *Maaman*.  
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

release of *Maaman*, a family drama which centres around a maternal uncle's affection for his dotting nephew. This is an attempt to reveal the dramatic shade to the actor in him, says the actor.

"I am just focussed on bringing unique characters to audiences, and so I wanted to do something entirely different from those three lead roles, as an ordinary family man," says Soori, who has written the film's storyline.

The actor reveals that producer K Kumar asked director Prashanth Pandiyaraj to request Soori if he could narrate his one line. "I absolutely loved his web series *Vilangu*, but more importantly, the way he conversed with me, and the inputs he gave after listening to my story gave me the confidence that he would do a good job with it," adds the actor.

What has struck a chord with Soori's second innings as an actor is his choice of characters; despite having made a strong impression as a comedian, his protagonists appear as they are, not resembling the comedian Soori we are familiar with. "That's what I strive a lot to do. Sometimes, in films like *Garudan*, I had to be conscious not to appear as the *old* Soori."

Soori is all the more familiar with family entertainers boasting a long ensemble cast – Rajkiran, Swasika, Bala Saravanan, Baba Bhaskar, and Viji Chandrasekhar appear in *Maaman*, alongside female lead Aishwarya Lekshmi. He has even appeared as the maternal uncle of heroes and heroines. So he must have naturally thought of punchlines and jokes that can help the film. "Of course, but I would ask the director to let Bala utter those dialogues; though we couldn't utilise him a lot in *Maaman*, he is in the film specifically for comedy, and so it's only right that he scores with those lines."

After *Maaman*, Soori will be seen in *Mandaadi*, directed by Vetri's associate and *Sefie*-director Mathimaran Pugazhenth. While he wants to take on experiments, he would not mind some commercial crowd-pleasers either.

"I want all my films to have a strong story and compelling character writing. I now wish to do an action film with a good story. Maybe also a film that lets me do a lot of dancing," he says.

# An ordinary man

Why Soori hopes that his upcoming family drama *Maaman* will reveal a new shade of his acting repertoire

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“**V**andhorai vaazhavaikkum Chennai.” When actor Soori came to Chennai in 1996, the city may have tested his belief in that idiom, which loosely translates to ‘Chennai shelters all those who seek.’ When asked what this city has meant to him, Soori gets nostalgic about his days of struggle, reminiscing about a time when, he says, the film industry was not even visible to people who came to Chennai with celluloid dreams. “Chennai taught me life, cinema, relationships and the importance of family. It taught me life even before I entered the industry.”

Two years later, in 1998, Soori acted in an uncredited role in *Maru Malarchi*. “Back then, I just wanted to act. You can't ask for an

acting chance easily. I worked as a carpenter or a painter, hoping that just being on the shooting spot would prove helpful if they needed a junior artist in the last minute.” And that's precisely how he got his turn in Suresh Krissna's *Sangamam*. “Did you know that I painted the *puli vesham* on the kids in the ‘Mazhai Thuli’ song? I was also supposed to ensure they don't jump into the lake and spoil their make-up.”

Decades later, Soori has transitioned into a bona fide Tamil cinema hero. After successful turns in *Viduthalai*, *Kottukkaali* and *Garudan*, Soori is now awaiting the



## A mass of things

Why is Basil Joseph selling a police station? The actor-director talks about his latest Malayalam film directed by Sivaprasad

**Shilpa Nair Anand**  
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**M**aranamass' Luke is subversive and a nuisance; he has even tried to sell the local police station. He is a peroxide blond 'sigma' who wears loud clothes and speaks Gen Z. But hidden underneath that bravado, which borders foolishness, is the boy-next-door that we have all come to love – actor-director Basil Joseph.

*Maranamass* is a mad caper, with a motley crew of eccentric characters, which the director Sivaprasad calls ‘a story told from an experimental perspective’. But for Basil, in the case of this movie, it was relationships that led him to the film. Actor Tovino Thomas is the film's producer while the film's director was an associate (*Minnal Murali*) and Basil has acted in a television commercial directed by Sivaprasad.

“This movie happened mainly because of the relationships and familiarity I have with the team. Then there is the story and the setting with the serial killer which I found interesting. Luke's character, who puts up the police station for sale, has an eccentric story and how it was tackled was

fascinating. The one line of the story was the hook for me,” says Basil, explaining the hook for *Maranamass* and Luke.

Having worked with Sivaprasad and being familiar with his ‘loud, experimental, eccentricity metre’, he says he trusted his director and everyone else, including his co-actors, on the team to deliver. And deliver, *Maranamass* has.

On whether the team is important when choosing a film, Basil says, “No, I look at the story and my character before I commit. Relationships come later; it was only in the case of

*Maranamass* that being familiar with the team came first. My way of looking at it is, if I do a film based purely on that factor, it may not be beneficial for either parties involved if the story and character don't hold and the film does not work.”

He confesses that he did not intend to be an actor when he came to the film industry. “I did not think about it even in my wildest dreams. I thought I did not have the ‘hero’ kind of looks or the physique for it. I had a bunch of complexes but not any more. I am confident now, these complexes have no value, I have realised one has to just go ahead and do it. There are no limitations, one should not be held back!”

Right now, he is back doing what he loves most: directing a film. He is currently busy with the pre-production of the project that goes on floors in 2026. “It feels so good. It is like being back home. There is no pressure of acting, everything is routine. All I have to do is think about the film...there is so much excitement. This will be my life for the next couple of years.”

*Maranamass drops on SonyLiv on May 15*

▲ **A new vibe** Basil Joseph.  
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