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Snapshots of the Circular Coastal Clean-up conducted at Kovalam beach on January 22. Photos: Special Arrangement

Pop up scrap shop at Kovalam beach clean-up

A concept that is gaining traction at recyclables collection drives at apartments is now finding extended application at Chennai's beaches with encouraging results

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Pop up scrap shops at apartments must be dew-fresh in the memory of Mylapore, Mandaveli and R.A. Puram residents.

"We have done quite a number of pop up scrap shops in the Mylapore region; we have done almost over 100 pop-up collection events with neighbourhood associations. We have associated with Ganga Sridhar (a resident of Mandaveli Raja Street) in many of these events," says Siddharth Hande, founder and CEO of Kabadiwalla Connect. "Basically the idea here is that on a Saturday morning, we get the scrap shop to come to an apartment and set up shop there, temporary shop. Over those two hours, people from the apartment, but now also more and more from that neighbourhood go and sell their recyclables to the scrap shop."

Recently, on January 22, Kabadiwalla Connect was trying out the "amphibian" capabilities of the pop up scrap shop model by pairing it to a coastal clean-up at Kovalam beach. Even at a distance from the scene of activity, anyone with only a slightly perceptive mind would have sensed that something more than a regular coastal clean-up was unfolding.

At the centre of the congregating space was a sand artwork fea-



turing a heap of undulating sand, simulating waves; turtles waddling around; and a tricycle with discs, small-sized real recyclables lodged in its sandy carrier body. The work of art was titled "Circular Coastal Clean-Up", the words indented into the sandy artwork. A pop up scrap shop with shamiana for roof stood near by. Siddharth says Circular Coastal Clean-ups are the need of the hour because of the proportion of these clean-ups. He estimates that "on an average 200,000 beach-ups happen every year on the Indian coast".

"The idea is whenever somebody has a beach clean-up anywhere in the city, we can help find them

the local scrap shop and ensure the scrap shop is a vendor or a partner of the clean-up. And that is what we call the circular clean-up," says Siddharth. It generates instant value for a beach clean-up and an incentive to organise it more often.

Siddharth observes that they had actually tested the efficacy of the Circular Coastal Clean Up model much ahead of the event at Kovalam, which Kabadiwalla Connect organised in collaboration with Residents of Kasturbanagar Association (ROKA) and United Beings Foundation.

"Before we did this work in Kovalam, we tested the model with the National Centre for Coastal Re-



A vital link

Siddharth Hande, founder and CEO of Kabadiwalla Connect, on the all-mighty scrap shop across the corner:

"In 2017, we mapped all the Kailan Kadais (local scrap shops) in Chennai. We discovered that there were about 2,000 Kailan Kadais across the city. These guys are very interesting because they are not just buying from waste pickers; they are also buying from the com-

munity. In fact, these 2,000 scrap shops were collecting something like 130,000 tonnes of waste every year. So that is about 24% of what the city generates on terms of recyclable waste. They are a key supplier in recycling. The community engagement idea that we had was what if you created simpler connection loops to these Kailan Kadais. And one of the things is we have a smartphone app that people can look up and find their closest scrap shop."

search (NCCR). During their International Coastal Clean-up Day last year, we did a pilot with them for Chennai, working at five beach clean-ups simultaneously in the city, bringing five different colleges on board."

A key finding. "On an average, about 20 to 30% of the materials that get collected can be recycled into the local recycling supply

chain if you do a pop-up activity with the scrap shop for a clean-up."

A word of advocacy. "What we are trying to advocate is: partner with your local scrap shop, ensure that the guy comes for your clean-up and 20 to 30% of the collected material will not go to Pallikaranai and Kodungaiyur. They can go back into the recycling ecosystem."

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An 'extended monsoon' in Anna Street alone?

Long after the showers have ceased, a tractor pressed by GCC into its flood mitigation work in 2025 stays put on this narrow street. For all practical purposes, this is an abandoned vehicle; and the civic body has an all-season campaign against vehicles abandoned in public spaces



The tractor; and an abandoned white car on the other side of Anna Street in Thiruvannamiyur. Images were taken on January 21 and 22, 2026.



tion's craft centre, just across its main campus. Oddly, the tractor still wears the banner proclaiming its service to Greater Chennai Corporation's flood mitigation work in 2025. The machine has obviously tarried longer than it should on a narrow but significant link road where motorists are often cramped for space. For all practical purposes, the tractor is an "abandoned vehicle". GCC is comfortable with the tractor's presence, as also with a white cab with flat tyres standing abandoned on the other side of the road, the side where parking is allowed. On any other road, vehicles cooling their tyres indefinitely might be viewed without a pained look, but not on Anna Street its girth disproportionately narrow to the volume of traffic it entertains.

PRINCE FREDERICK

As with wisdom stories emerging from antiquity, the Aesop's fable *The Two Bags* is paraded in various forms, the rechiselling happening every time a new al-

legorist picks it up. As with wisdom stories, the chiselling is usually intricate never reaching the kernel of the story and altering its message. Here it is: humans have two bags around their neck, the one bearing other's people's faults dangling in front of their

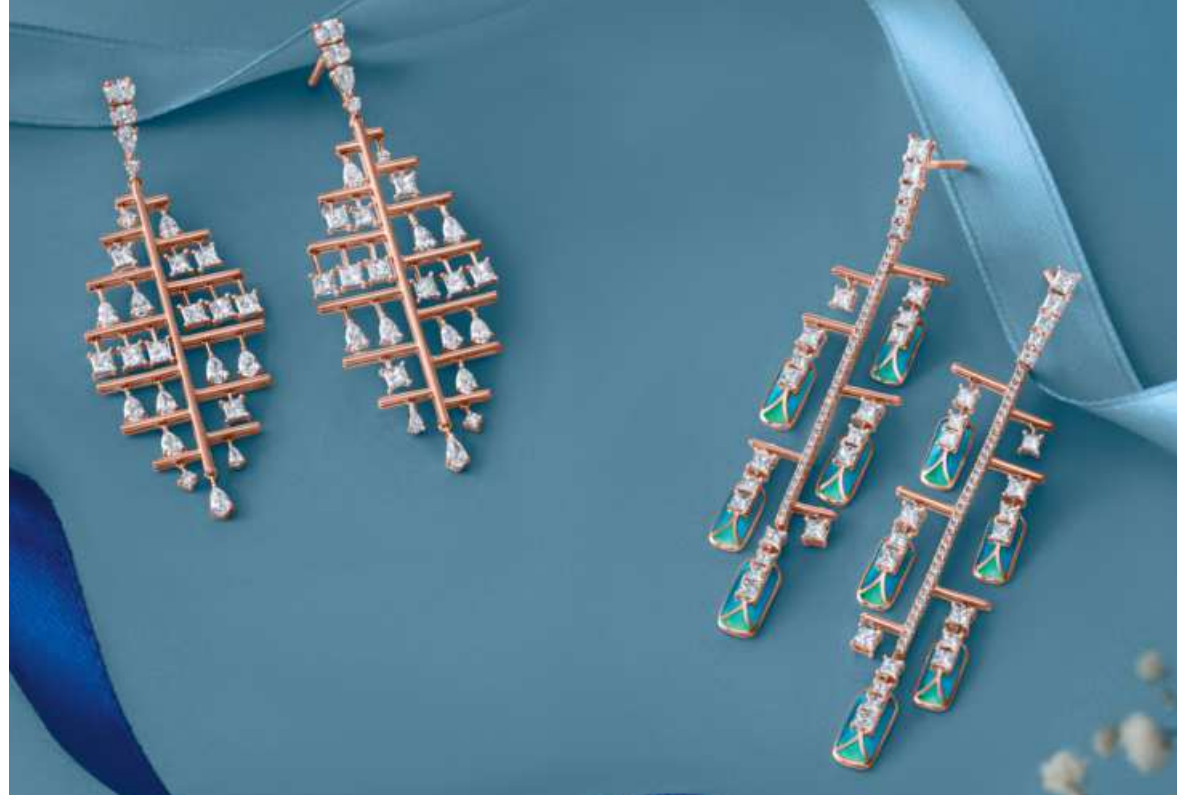
eyes and the one bearing their own, hanging behind them and staying unseen. In a hyperlocal version (with the dateline "Anna Street, Thiruvannamiyur") that presses the chisel deeper and alters the message, Greater Chennai Corporation is wearing both bags in front

of its eyes, and is at peace with what it discovers inside both.

The monsoon has long retreated, but the tractor rolled into Anna Street in Thiruvannamiyur to check waterlogging stays put. It stands within a hair's breadth of the compound wall of Kalakshetra Founda-

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The arch was inaugurated on January 26, 2001 with Sri Kapaleeswarar Nagar Residents Welfare Association funding it; the community hall; and the group photo is from an event organised by Sowbhagya Ladies Association.
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



The triumph of citizen activism

In the 1980s, Sri Kapaleeswarar Nagar in Neelankarai lacked the upmarket sheen that defines it now; that might be true of almost all relatively new neighbourhoods within GCC limits. What sets this one apart from most others is a deep-rooted civic consciousness among its residents that has ensured its evolution into a model neighbourhood

LIFY THOMAS

In 1984, C.L. Narayana Pillai relocated to Neelankarai from Besant Nagar, leaving behind the familiarity of a house they owned and inhabited for years.

There was a striking starkness to Neelankarai of the 1980s. What passed off as roads were hardly roads. Connectivity by Pallavan Transport Corporation (as MTC was known then) was abysmally poor. Neelankarai lay much beyond the last outpost of Madras, which was Thiruvanniyur in those days.

Why would Narayana do the unthinkable?

"Although we had our own house in Besant Nagar with sufficient civic facilities to buffer the challenges of everyday living, the high TDS in the groundwater was bothering us. In the three to four visits I made to Neelankarai, I noticed water from the area being transported in lorries to parts lying within Corporation of Madras. I was convinced that the aquifer was good with water being available 10 feet from ground level," says the engineer who runs his own business at age 72.

Narayana had bought land in an approved layout called Sri Kapaleeswarar Nagar in Neelankarai.

As Sri Kapaleeswarar Nagar in Neelankarai celebrates 50 years of its establishment, long-time residents of the locality cannot but look back on the collective effort that turned the locality into a model colony in Chennai.

The layout had been approved as early as 1975 when the Director of Town and Country Planning Development marked 500-plus plots for sale. Besides its proximity to the beach, there was nothing really striking about investing in this part of the city. Rows of lily ponds, paddy fields and sandy tracks largely defined East Coast Road, even the section close to Madras.

Pocket-friendly plot prices and a gut feeling that this section of the city would develop in the future were a few reasons why a small community of people started building houses in Sri Kapaleeswarar Nagar.

"The layout of the colony showed that the main roads were 40 feet wide and interior streets ranged between 23 and 30 feet in width, which sounded very attractive for the ₹40,000 per ground that I purchased," says Narayana.

Karpagam Vasudevan, who came to Sri Kapaleeswarar Nagar as a pre-schooler on a bullock cart, remembers her mother coming to

pick them from school in Adyar. "Bus number 19 and 19 Cut were the only two routes then and would be packed. If you miss them, you cannot get back home by bus," says Karpagam. She also shares memories of residents going on night rounds around the neighbourhood to keep an eye out for burglars.

On July 12, 1981, residents came together to form Sri Kapaleeswarar Nagar Residents Welfare Association and registered it under the TN Societies Registration Act 1975. Since then they started to rally together to get basic amenities in the Nagar. "The Association started with just 12 members," says Narayana, who served as president of the Association for four terms and is currently its advisor.

Women power

A big rallying point for SKNRWA was the support they received from Sowbhagya Ladies Association, formed in 1985. From a 'walking club', it expanded to take up social

and cultural activities that helped improve the Nagar at multiple levels.

Jayalakshmi Rajagopalan, 82, who moved to the Nagar in 1982 when her husband, then working with Southern Petrochemical Industries Corporation Limited, and a group of other employees from the company bought plots in this suburb, says that when they started out, they were collecting a monthly subscription of ₹3 from ladies to run a variety of programmes.

Along with Rotary Inner Wheel Club, they improved the Panchayat Union Middle School in the neighbourhood that was running on empty, with insufficient staff strength, so they hired two teachers and paid salaries for them for close to seven years.

Later they expanded to form the Sowbhagya Educational Trust in 1992 where meritorious students from the Panchayat School were given scholarships for higher education.

"Krishnakumari Mallikarjuna Rao and I were invited to join the RWA and for six years we played an active role in the committee," says Jayalakshmi, adding that the ladies wing ran for close to two decades.

How easy or difficult was it to increase membership those days?

Seventy eight-year-old R. Chandrasekharan, who bought a plot in 1979, says as there were not many houses until the mid-80s people wanted to know each other and do things to make life easy for all.

"As there were no telephone lines, we used to send handwritten circulars informing people about Association meetings. In the early years, as we did not have a community hall, executive committee members would take turns to host the meeting in their house. The AGM was generally held in a school and we had 40-50 people in attendance then," says the septuagenarian who retired from Ennore Power Plant and served as secretary between 1987 and 1989. He recalls a souvenir brought out during those years that narrated the various challenges residents faced then.

Wagging battles

Starting from getting a pucca road to street lights, the RWA rallied around seeking provision of civic amenities by government line agencies.

In 2019, SKNRWA along with other associations on ECR fought a bitter battle to oppose stormwater drain project in the area as they felt the permeable sandy soil does not need such a facility.

Residents were successful in getting the burial ground shifted and raising the height of the compound wall around it. Regulating withdrawal of water from the Nagar was another fight residents showed unity. SKNRWA's efforts to revive ponds in Neelankarai was also highlighted in these pages. Association spearheaded many drives to make the beach stretch clean.

Green champion award

In 2021, the RWA received the Green Champion Award from the Department of Environment and Forest for its tree-planting exercise that had covered much ground.

With the blessings of the senior residents, the current team has launched a new pickle ball court, tennis court and tennikoit court. Since a majority of residents are senior citizens, meet-ups are held and a newspaper and magazine section has been provided. Many initiatives are being planned to celebrate the golden jubilee year.



Marathon today

Krishnamachari Srikanth launches the t-shirt and logo of a marathon that marks the 50th year celebrations of Sri Kapaleeswarar Nagar in Neelankarai

Sri Kapaleeswarar Nagar Residents Welfare Association (SKNRWA) in Neelankarai on East Coast Road kick-started its golden jubilee year with the launch of a marathon t-shirt and logo on January 20.

Former captain of the Indian cricket team and a resident of the Nagar, Krishnamachari Srikanth, was the chief guest. He officially launched the SKN golden jubilee logo and t-shirt. The event was attended by office bearers of the Asso-



During the launch. PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ciation and residents of the area. The golden jubilee marathon and walkathon, one of the flagships events planned to commemorate 50 years of the forming of the nagar, will be held on January 25 to promote community bonding, health and civic pride.

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SCAN TO SHOP



Greenery needs attention

Kelambakkam Bypass Road makes for a smooth drive. The drive can become a scenic one too if the median gardens and roadside greenery, particularly on the Padur leg of the road, are better maintained

PRINCE FREDERICK

Motorists would like to be treated like guests, not family. Here is why. The family seldom checks itself to be on its best behaviour around you; unless you were born or married into a mutated subspecies of *homo sapiens* that can never put a foot wrong. Never a wet towel on the sofa. Never a morsel of leftover food on the plate. Never a pair of dirty feet on a mopped floor. But real families are guilty of all these improprieties and more, setting your teeth on edge, getting it to chatter in rage every nano second. Government agencies taking care of roads sometimes behave like real families, to motorists. An illustration from the outskirts of south Chennai.

Stretching outwards in an almost parabolic curve from one point (Padur) to another (Thaiyur) on Old Mahabalipuram Road, Kelambakkam Bypass Road helps motorists pass over bottlenecks around Kelambakkam. Constructed and maintained by Tamil Nadu Road Development Company (TNRDC), this bypass makes for a thoroughly smooth drive, and a scenic



one too, particularly on the Padur leg. The scenic element can be improved. On this leg of the bypass, the median garden and roadside greenery need to be walked to the "hairdresser". (No complaints yet about the median garden and roadside greening on the Thaiyur leg, newer than the Padur section and therefore still "a new broom")

On the Padur leg, the median is as unruly as the locks of a freshman who has left hometown for a campus that believes in minimal intervention in its students' lives. Not long ago in its pages, *The Hindu Downtown* displayed

sections of the Kelambakkam Bypass Road with rows of newly planted saplings enclosed by twigs woven deftly into tree guards and neatly draped in green garden cloth.

A good number of these saplings on the Padur stretch are in disarray, bent along with the twiggy tree guards or recumbent. They also stand knee-deep in weeds, which makes them almost blend into the marshy patches lying at a lower level on the sides. They would blend in but for the levels.

Returning to the guests-and-family analogy, motorists on East Coast Road are often treated like guests, workers engaged by TNRDC regularly at work on the median between Akkarai and Mahabalipuram with bush cutter machines and secateurs. Shock of tall grass following the the monsoon have been removed from much of median on this stretch of ECR. Work is now under way on giving the median on the Kanathur-Uthandi-Panaiyur-Akkarai leg a crew-cut.

Motorists hitting the Kelambakkam Bypass Road want the same hospitality and thoughtfulness extended to them, being treated like guests.



The Padur leg of Kelambakkam Bypass Road wears a dishevelled look. The images were taken on January 15, 2026.

OSR land in Medavakkam turned into dumping yard

T. S. ATUL SWAMINATHAN

Residents of Medavakkam have requested the Chengalpattu District Collectorate to issue a directive to the Medavakkam Village Panchayat to resume tree planting on an Open Space Reservation Land in the area.

Located at the end of Thiruvalluvar Street, the five-acre plot is currently used for garbage dumping.

S. Raja Mohammed, Joint Director (retired), Department of Horticulture, and a resident of the region, says, "On April 21, 2021, Bhoomi Puja was conducted, and a farm pond was created. The Medavakkam Village Panchayat, the Saint Thomas Mount Panchayat Union start-

ed work on creating a Miyawaki forest in 2024, but within a few days the planting activity stopped."

From November 2025, Mohammed along with the other environmental organisations sent a series of letters to the Chengalpattu District Collectorate seeking that the Panchayat resume work.

"Today the plot is a trash yard, attracting mosquitoes and poses a health hazard to residents of Thiruvalluvar Street and nearby area," he says. Residents say Chennai City District Collectorate gave permission to plant 27 varieties of plants within a short period of time at Pallikaranai Aanaai Eri. They hope the Chengalpattu District Collectorate gives the "green nod" at the earliest.



The Open Space Reservation land in Medavakkam. PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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Anthology by Chennai Poets' Circle released

Non-profit and non-sectarian literary group Chennai Poets' Circle (CPC) recently marked its 25th annual seminar at TAG Auditorium, Ramakrishna Mission Higher Secondary School in T. Nagar, Chennai.

The focal point of the seminar was the launch of *Efflorescence 2025*, the group's 25th anniversary anthology. This milestone publication features the verses of 143 poets, spanning a wide age band, from a nine-year-old student to veterans aged 80 and above. The anthology was officially released by chief guest K. Ganesh, former associate professor and head of the department of English at Madras Christian College, according to a press release.

The seminar drew approximately 60 poets from across India, including representatives from Maharashtra, Telangana, West Bengal, Kerala and Karnataka. Notably, over a dozen budding poets featured in the collection participated in the session, accompanied by supportive parents and teachers.

In his welcome address, M. Thirumeni, chairman and a founding father of CPC, emphasised how writing in English served as a bridge, connecting a



community of writers across geographical borders. S. Kannan, president and co-founder, addressed the relevance of 'poetic consciousness' in the age of AI, while paying tribute to the stalwarts of CPC who paved the way for Indian English writing, says the press release.

In an erudite keynote address, K. Ganesh framed the concept of *Efflorescence* as the literal "act of flowering". He traced the literary trajectory from the seasoned perspectives of pre-90s poets to the evolving sensibilities of the millennial generation. He highlighted that poetry celebrates "unity in diversity" and suggested that by engaging with translations, writers can learn to write more "unself-consciously", free from the pressure to conform to rigid Western standards..

The event also featured the launch of *In a Cage and Beyond*, a

poetry collection by eminent Nagpur-based writer Ratnakar D. Bhelkar.

A poetry-reading session, seamlessly anchored by secretary Hema Ravi, offered joyous, poignant and introspective moments as the audience listened to diverse voices, including award-winning poets. Additionally, a research paper presented by Debdoot Mukherjee from Kolkata was chaired by Sridevi Selvaraj, a renowned bilingual writer and academic, the press release adds.

The seminar concluded with a vote of thanks by treasurer Ravi Ranganathan, followed by a delicious lunch. The day left participants energised for the next chapter of CPC's journey.

Poets interested in the activities of the Chennai Poets' Circle may contact Hema Ravi at chennai-poetscircle@gmail.com.

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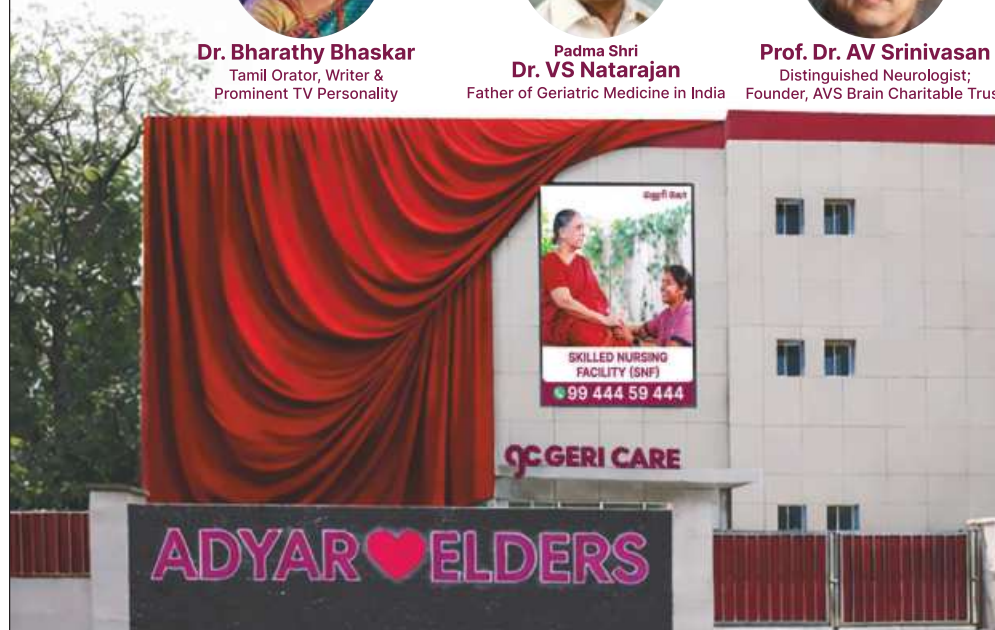


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