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THE HINDU

Head to Pulicat this weekend to witness the festival, crafts, and a catamaran race **P4**

**COOLIE AND BEYOND:
LOKESH'S FUTURE PLANS** **P5**



This February, Gautham Menon completes 25 years in the industry. The filmmaker talks about his memorable journey and how music has played a vital role in it

THE GAUTHAM instinct

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It is yet another episode in Gautham Vasudev Menon's chequered career. GVM – as he is popularly called – completes 25 years in the industry this February. Marking the occasion, the filmmaker has put together a list of 25 memorable songs from his filmography to showcase in a curated concert, aptly titled Yenmodu Vaa Veedu Varaikkum. "I was drawn into cinema because of the songs in

them. You can play any song from the 1950s or '60s, and I will tell you who the singer is, because my mother was so passionate about them," he recalls.

This year, apart from writing and directing films, Gautham plans to organise a set of curated concerts. "I hope to drive conversation through these songs. I also wish to do a Mani Ratnam and Shankar retrospective soon, based on the memorable tracks in their work," he reveals.

**CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 2**



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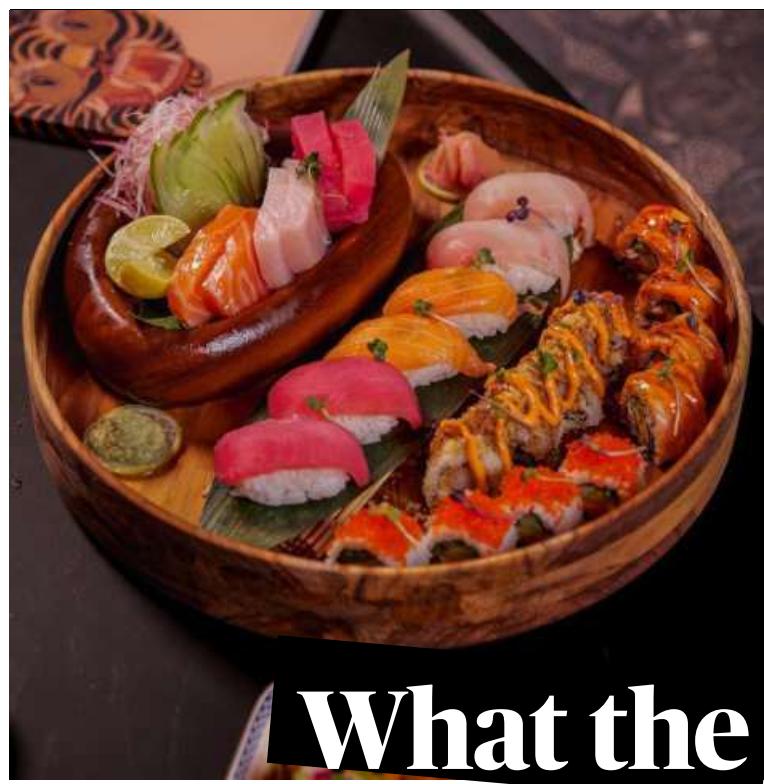
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What the fu fu?

What's in a name? Fu Fu, Chennai's newest Asian kid on the block, is full of expletives, punches, and an un-serious menu that delivers

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Le'ts get straight to it. There's a drink called mouth wash on Fu Fu's menu (in Alwarpet) that looks as ridiculous as it sounds. This sweet, tall, blue drink loaded with ice, is served with a toothbrush (a real one, alright) with an edible paste atop.

Mouth wash does exactly what Manoj Padmanaban, co-founder, BORN (which runs Fufu) says it does. It cleanses your palate between plates of nasi goreng and crispy lamb, that is loaded with onion, ginger, and garlic. It also

gets people talking. "They say you can't kiss after an Asian meal. Now, you can," he says.

The restaurant, replete with tiger prints on their seats, covers, and walls, seats 94 and has a 12-seater private dining area. What is refreshing is the music and the energy. The place refuses to take itself seriously, yet serves

delectable sushi with fresh fish and nasi goreng with perfectly flavoured fried rice and well-charred skewers on the side. Why tigers? "We want to embody the spirit of the tiger. We want to usher in that intensity but the only way to really be intense is to also enjoy the process of setting up new places with great zest," says

Flavour bomb A sushi platter; (below) Nobu black cod. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Japtej Ahluwalia, the other founder.

Manoj says that he and his partner Japtej got tired of restaurants 'toning it down' – toning down the garlic and the spice especially. It is why they are choosing to maximise the flavour profiles that Japanese, Thai, Indonesian, Vietnamese, Korean, and Chinese cuisines lend themselves to. "Chilli chicken has been sent to Jolly Indian [their newly-opened Indian restaurant one floor above] because it is now Indian but the rest is here. We want families to swarm this place, making it their spot for big get-togethers," he says, laughing.

We order a tom yum soup to test the waters. The soup, fragrant with lemongrass, galangal, kaffir lime leaves, garlic and chilies, does exactly what it is meant to do – captive and clear the throat.

A plate of maki soon arrives with pink, fatty salmon right atop the sticky rice. Saoirse-Monica Jackson, the lead in the Netflix hit show *Derry Girls*, says in her intense Irish accent that it is hard to mess up 'cold rice with cold fish on top'. But the plate with four pieces is demolished in under four minutes so it is

testament to sushi's greatness. We try the Cantonese bamboo shoot salad with beans and cherry tomatoes which requires a bit more acid to offset the bitterness of the bamboo shoot, while waiting on the main course. Yet, two other small plates – the okonomiyaki (cabbage pancake) and crispy lamb arrive instead.

The fried cabbage pancake with kewpie mayo and ketchup "is a salad" argues Manoj, and says that it is a great way for him to eat vegetables. In this version with chopped prawns, the flavour of the fish comes through effortlessly. The crispy lamb on the other hand with an assortment of long-sliced onions and bell peppers, reminds one of every great fried meat in conventional "Chinese" sauces, making it to the future "must order" list.

My favourite dish on the menu is the nasi goreng though. Topped with a perfectly round runny egg in the centre, this rice dish from Indonesia, served with a chicken satay skewer and a crunchy salad is satiating, and full of flavour from the soy, garlic and shallot-tossed glutinous rice.

There is a variety of desserts and drinks with boba (including one with taro) that you could try but I would recommend the light Thai water chestnut pudding. I will however be back to try the mochi someday. The drinks are good but can be skipped in order to eat more food.

People might ask why Chennai needs yet another Asian restaurant. Fu Fu though is exciting and deserves to be on your eat list because at the end of your meal, it is likely that you would walk out of their parking mirror-filled disco entrance with your belly full and a smile on your face. Unless its a break-up or family-feud. Don't ask me then.

Fu Fu is on the third floor, Born Restaurants, 61/45, CP Ramaswamy Road, Alwarpet. Contact 9600037124. A meal for two is priced at ₹1,800.

Whisk me away

Part-food fair, part-community gathering, the Great Madras Bake Sale returns for its fourth edition

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January is the month of vows.

Sugar is sworn off with solemn resolve, and desserts are demonised. For a few weeks, restraint feels virtuous. But willpower, like frosting left out too long, has a short shelf life.

At the Great Madras Bake Sale, for one Sunday afternoon, the city is invited to pause its resolutions and remember that pleasure, when chosen deliberately, is not failure. It is participation. Quitting sugar may be a goal, but un-quitting it, briefly, can be an act of community.

Now in its fourth edition, the Great Madras Bake Sale has established itself as a fixture on Chennai's community food calendar. Hosted by entrepreneurs Maaria Tanveer, Cindana Manickavel and Priya Anup, the one-day event returns on February 1, bringing together home bakers, small businesses, musicians and pet lovers under one roof.

The 2026 edition features 34 home bakers, up from about 30 last year, alongside a handful of commercial vendors like Boba Baba. "We go through menus and make sure each stall has something unique to offer, not just the usual brownies and chocolate cupcakes," says Maaria.

That intent shows in the menus.

Visitors can expect milagai podi donuts from Kookies, Kakes and Bakes, Bournvita jars by Food Indulge, and samosa pinwheel puffs from Cranked Palette. Look out for elaneer payasam choux by The Kraft Girl, pandan Japanese cheesecake from Fave Dainty, butter chicken pizza from Homemade Treats by Marzia and a chilli chocolate brownie by Dolci & Co.

A notable addition this year is a dedicated baking ingredients and supplies section by three brands Viveka Essence mart, Ossoro Flavours, and Bakersville, aimed at home bakers looking to experiment. These stalls will offer everything from essences and sprinkles to whipping cream and baking accessories.

The event continues to foreground its pet-friendly identity. A pet adoption drive, in partnership with iAdopt, returns with adoptions offered free of cost, alongside a stall selling pet-friendly cakes and cookies by Soul Blends.

The bake sale is at Chettinad Sath Sadhana, Adyar, on February 1 from 2pm. Tickets on district.in at ₹55.

Sugar and spice Chocolate chilli brownies. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



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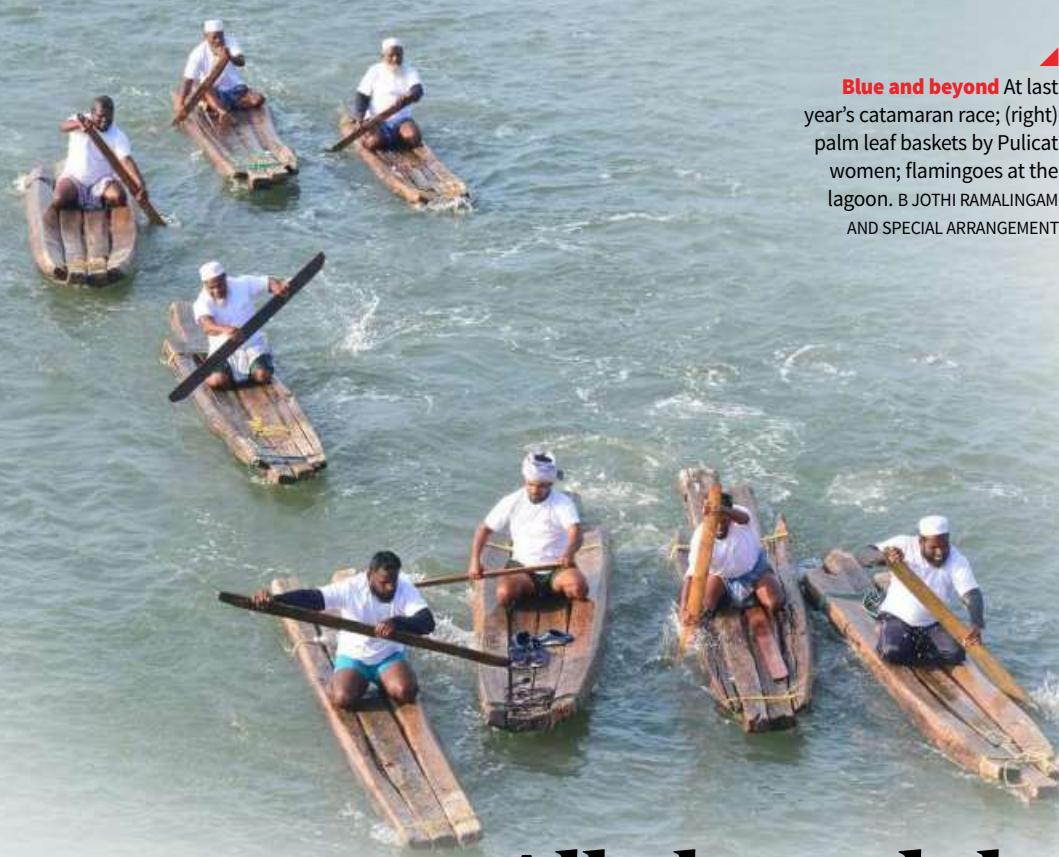
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Blue and beyond At last year's catamaran race; (right) palm leaf baskets by Pulicat women; flamingoes at the lagoon. B JOTHI RAMALINGAM AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

All aboard the catamaran

Pulicat Day is upon us — there are events lined up for children and adults from the historic coastal town — the most exciting of which is a catamaran race for fishermen

Paint every step (Clockwise from right) Visitors at the exhibition; and Sacred Moments by Shalini Biswajit. M SRINATH AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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Lalit Kala Akademi was transformed into a visual tribute to Odisha and its classical dance Odissi, over six days. In Let a Thousand Flowers Bloom, the sensuous curves, silences and rhythms of Odissi step off the stage and onto the canvas, paper and photograph. At the heart of this exhibition is Datuk Ramli Bin Ibrahim — dancer, choreographer and founder, Sutra Foundation (dedicated to promoting and preserving traditional and contemporary performing arts) — whose interpretation of Odissi has inspired artistes for decades. Bringing together drawings, paintings, and photographs by 21 artists from India and Malaysia, many of the works respond directly to Ramli's body, presence and philosophy, treating him both as a medium and a muse.

The exhibition is also a tribute to the late Dr Dinanath Pathy, artist and scholar who connected dance with visual work, and contributed to Sutra in many ways. Travelling through Chennai, Bhubaneswar, and Malaysia, the exhibition showcases Odissi as a vibrant art form, one where the essence of its movements lingers well beyond the performance.

From Bhubaneswar, artist Helen Brahma's series, Penari Ulung (The Transcendental Dancer), explores her relationship between textile and culture. At the heart of her work is the Sambalpuri textile, draped around Odissi dancers. "The ikat motifs used all over the body of the dancers are intimate to my



A fluid canvas

An exhibition at Lalit Kala Akademi traces how Odissi moves beyond the stage, finding form in painting, drawing and photography

cultural roots," says Helen. The portraits embody the divine feminine, but are also inspired by Ramli's moves that have moved her profoundly. Similarly, AV Ilango from Chennai, has used acrylic on canvas to bring out the subtle movements and the grace of the dance form. The palette is ripe with the colours of India — mango yellow, marigold, chilli red, royal purple, peacock blue, emerald and parrot green embracing the outfits of the dancers.

The exhibition also presents a series of photographic works. Malaysian photographer Diana Lui's series of photographic prints presented at the exhibition is a selection of a larger body of work made in the 1990s. The photographs on canvas follow a younger Ramli, and his dancers caught mid-dance form, as their bodies yield to the cadence of music.



Malay artist Shivarajah Natarajan, who also serves as a curator of Malaysian artists, has his canvases unfold as a visual stage where drama, emotion, and rhythm are showcased with evocative clarity.

A striking artwork titled The Great Migration embodies the ancient tales of *matsya* avatar, the fish incarnation of Vishnu. The work reimagines these ancient tales through the rising sea levels

all over the world today. The faint silhouette of the Jagannath Temple in Puri emerges in the background, drawing viewers closer to Odisha.

"The aim is to create contemplative spaces where movement pauses, sound dissolves into silence, and Odissi's spirit resonates anew," says artist Shalini Biswajit, Chennai curator and participating artist. One of her artworks features a dancer caught in a swirling motion, right in the midst of the drama that surrounds every dance piece. "I have tried to capture the essence of Odissi through colour and metaphor, while each artist brings their own distinct response to the form," she further adds.

Let a Thousand Flowers Bloom is on at the Lalit Kala Akademi, Greams Road till January 29, from 11am to 7pm. Entry is free.

together in 2010. It's been 16 years since we stood on stage as bandmates," says Bruce. When they reunited earlier this year for an acoustic performance in Bengaluru, the ease of the collaboration surprised them both, setting the course for what followed.

The show, part of Scarlet Nights at the Alliance Française of Madras, is deliberately stripped down. Two musicians, acoustic instruments, and a set that moves between older material, newer compositions written together and independently, and a small selection of covers.

Behind Scarlet Nights is Pro Musicals, a name more often associated with music technology. For founder Sudhin Prabhakar, the series marks a return to an earlier impulse. "This is really about bringing music back to the centrestage.

Not the sponsor, not the lighting, not the flash around it. Just the music," he says.

The performance will be professionally recorded using Focusrite equipment, part of an effort to demonstrate how live performances can translate into high-quality recordings outside traditional studio settings.

The recordings will be archived, not released immediately, a deliberate decision. "We want people to come out, sit in a room together, and listen again." Scarlet Nights is envisioned as a monthly series, each edition centred on musicians with experience.

Scarlet Nights, hosting Bruce Lee Mani and Rzhude David, is on at the Alliance Française of Madras on February 5, from 7.30pm. Entry is free with mandatory registration on promusicals.com.



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Sixteen years is long enough for bands to dissolve and musicians to drift apart. Next week in Chennai, musicians and ex-band mates, Bruce Lee Mani and Rzhude David will make their way back on the same stage, closing a distance that last opened in 2010. "Rzhude and I last played



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When the sea turns rough, Hamsa Beevi can hear the waves from her home a kilometre away in Pulicat. The whoosh of the waves is a constant in her life, so are the palm leaves she weaves deftly into boxes, bags, and purses. The 75-year-old artisan who has been working with palm leaves for the past six decades, won the Life Time Achievement honour from Chief Minister MK Stalin at the Poompuhar State Awards recently.

She learnt palm leaf craft from her mother Asavi, who would spend several hours a day folding the leaves into what locals call 'petti' of various dimensions. The craft is one of Pulicat's defining characteristics and Hamsa is among the many artisans supported by the Art and Architecture Research Development & Education (AARDE) Foundation, a Chennai-based non-profit trust involved in the conservation of Pulicat. AARDE Foundation and the Tamil Nadu Tourism Department are set to observe Pulicat Day on January 31 to celebrate the lagoon's people and its natural heritage. But most importantly, the event is to tell the world about Pulicat, a little gem along the East coast of Tamil Nadu.

Pulicat lagoon, spread across 759 sq km is the second-largest brackish water body in the

country. It plays a crucial role in attracting rain clouds across India's South-East coast. However, much like several of our natural resources, it too is in a fragile state owing to factors such as unplanned development and rapidly changing climate patterns. Organisations such as AARDE Foundation are helping create awareness on the lagoon.

"Last year, we won an award endorsed by Ramsar in recognition of the interpretation centre we have been maintaining at Pulicat," says Xavier Benedict, founder-trustee, AARDE. The award and the recognition artisans such as Hamsa and four others from Pulicat who were also honoured by the State Government received has set the tone for the 15th Pulicat Day celebrations. While the day-long event is akin to a festival in the historic coastal town — there are kolam competitions, eco quizzes and drawing competitions for school students apart from cultural events



and heritage walks — the highlight is the catamaran race.

Every year, fishermen from hamlets in and around Pulicat sign up for the race with enthusiasm. The race is driven entirely by the energy and spirit of the men and their wooden catamarans. "The catamarans used by Pulicat fishermen are the last of their kind in existence today," says Xavier. "Similar ones can be found only at Kodiyakarai." Catamarans, an anglicised term for *kattumaram* meaning tied wood, enable fisherman to catch prawns and crabs in shallow waters. "They are able to remain stable as the fishermen collect crabs. A fibreboat, on the other hand, might not be able to stay in the same position for a long time," he explains.

The idea behind the race is to encourage fishermen to stick to catamarans without switching to fibreboats. "Around 30 kattumaram are set to enter the race," says Xavier, adding that he hopes the Tamil Nadu Government promotes it on the lines of Kerala's boat races. "Much like jallikattu, it has everything in it to be considered a traditional Tamil sport," he says. To watch the race, head to the town this weekend. It happens only once a year.

The catamaran race is from 3.30pm onwards on January 31 and is open for public viewing. Pulicat is 50 kilometres from Chennai. Call 9884013409 for details.

Something old, something new

In her recent book, *Aging (Un)Gracefully*, author Lalita Iyer says that growing old is both a liberation and a licence to be your true self

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For long, when women got older, many cultures preferred it happened out of sight. That rule book has been thrown out by 50-plus author Lalita Iyer as she navigates ageing and its attendant disruptions in her latest book *Aging (Un)Gracefully*, published by Simon and Schuster.

When we speak on the wire,

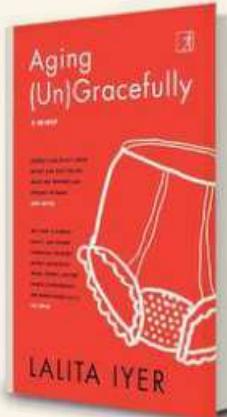
Lalita's sprightly voice catches me off guard — she sounds decades younger. The journalist-essayist and author of books such as *Sridevi: Queen of Hearts*, lives in Kodaikanal but has been racing up and down the country promoting her latest book, which she says "was born from a series of revelations".

Written over two years but one that has lived in her head for nearly five, Lalita says, "as women we are always living by the body clock — you have to get married and have kids by a certain age, they need to go to college by a certain age... I was trying to catch up because I married late and had my child when I was 41. Menopause was, for me, the turning point."

A different take

Lalita says she felt the hormonal changes were preparing her not for the endless whirlpool that most women drown in, but "for a new kind of freedom" because she felt she finally had "permission to just be alive".

Before Lalita headed for the hills, she was a Bombay girl through and through — graduating from the Institute of Chemical Technology,



finding her groove in copy-writing and journalism, marrying and raising her son in the city until the COVID-19 pandemic hit. "I moved to Goa during the pandemic and it was a liberating time," she says, adding that it was also the time the physicality of perimenopause set in — the bodily changes, anxiety, the greying, the aches... "But pain teaches you to be still. I was forced to be compassionate to my body. As a result, I started, for the first time in my life, putting myself first."

"When I started writing posts online on confronting ageing, many wrote back and I discovered that there were different ways to deal with this stage. I realised that maybe there is a book here, and not a quiet prescriptive one at that," says Lalita.

"I was also experiencing being in the sandwich generation

where I am raising a child and my parents at the same time. I was also learning that now I have to raise myself too. I learnt I could say no. You don't have to be invisible or inaudible as you age. The book is about encouraging women to laugh together."

The writing is not always linear. The chapters tell it as it is — In Which I Pressed My Reset Button, Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety, and My Friends are Worried About My Sex Life. The writing is light and conversational and dwells on an attitude that grabs life by the horns. Lalita discusses how her late motherhood came at the brink of perimenopause, and she writes about going through that and a divorce all within a span of a decade. "There was plenty of advice on how I should strength train or get on HRT or restore my factory settings. I told myself and the world you have done enough combat."

There is also an entire chapter addressed to her ex-husband.

And if she had to give the reader a takeaway from the book? Lalita says, "People will expect you to shrink as you age, vanish from the workplace, shrink socially and invalidate your feelings. Don't do it. Go out and reclaim yourself!"



Telling it as it is Lalita Iyer.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Back in tune

Bruce Lee Mani and Rzhude David reunite for an intimate acoustic set in Chennai next week



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Sixteen years is long enough for bands to dissolve and musicians to drift apart. Next week in Chennai, musicians and ex-band mates, Bruce Lee Mani and Rzhude David will make their way back on the same stage, closing a distance that last opened in 2010. "Rzhude and I last played

Taking a different route

Tharun Bhascker on his dark turn in *Om Shanti Shanti Shantihi* and directing *Ee Nagarani Emaindi 2*



Marriage story Tharun Bhascker and Esha Rebba in *Om Shanti Shantihi*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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Director Tharun Bhascker is currently juggling multiple commitments, shooting the sequel to his 2018 buddy comedy *Ee Nagarani Emaindi* (ENE). Aware of the expectations riding on the film, he is nevertheless keen to see how audiences respond to a different turn – a grey character in *Om Shanti Shanti Shantihi* (OSSS), which releases on January 30.

Directed by AR Sajeev, OSSS is a remake of Vipin Das' 2022 Malayalam film *Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey*. At a time when remakes are often seen as risky, with originals readily available on streaming platforms, the question of why he took it on is inevitable. "This is a role many male actors would hesitate to accept because of its negative arc. The woman is clearly the protagonist," he says. Esha Rebba reprises the role played by Darshana Rajendran in the original. "Basil Joseph did a remarkable job in the Malayalam film, and the character stayed with me for a long time."

So far, Tharun has

largely been seen in breezy, happy-go-lucky roles. "I did not want to get stereotyped," he says. "OSSS gave me the chance to break away and explore a darker, more uncomfortable space."

He is aware of the risks remakes carry in the age of OTT. However, Tharun says the producers are confident, having done their homework, that the film will connect with audiences in Tier-2 towns across the Telugu states, where access to multiple streaming platforms is still limited.

Tharun admits that ENE 2 comes with its own set of pressures as well. "Many directors have tried to build on cult films and failed, which is why I never wanted to make a sequel," he says. After several years, Tharun says he experienced a coming-of-age moment of his own, which prompted him to explore how the friends from *Ee Nagarani Emaindi* might have evolved over time.

ENE 2 is expected to release later this year. Meanwhile, Tharun will also be seen in a film directed by debutant Kashyap and another directed by first-timer Badri.

The future of LCU

What are director Lokesh Kanagaraj's plans for his cinematic universe? The Coolie director opens up

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A lot has been spoken about ace filmmaker Lokesh Kanagaraj over the last year. Despite collecting more than ₹500 crores at the box office, his previous film, the Rajinikanth-starrer *Coolie*, drew a lot of flak from audiences. Further, there were speculations that it led to Lokesh being dropped from the much-awaited Rajinikanth-Kamal Haasan

reunion film. It didn't stop there; netizens came across reports stating that even Aamir Khan backed out of the previously announced superhero film helmed by Lokesh, a rumour that Aamir's team soon clarified to be false.

The real curveball, however, came a few weeks ago. While the audiences were waiting to get an update from Lokesh on *Kaithi 2* – his much-awaited Lokesh Cinematic Universe film starring Karthi, which has been in the talks after

Lokesh's previous LCU film *Leo* – it was announced that the director would team up with Telugu star Allu Arjun for an upcoming film tentatively titled AA23. All this fuelled speculations that Lokesh has dropped LCU altogether and that *Kaithi 2* has been shelved due to a tiff between Lokesh and the makers.

Now, on January 26, a composed Lokesh addressed the media in Chennai to put to rest many of these controversies. First, Lokesh thanked the audience for the reception his film *Coolie* got and said that he was grateful to know that the film ran for 35 days and turned out to be a profitable venture for Sun Pictures despite the criticism. "The criticism made me think

a lot. I understood the kind of cinema and storytelling the audience wants from me. I take all of that as lessons, and I will try my best to ensure my upcoming films don't get such criticism," he said.

Stating that he doesn't take critical comments too personally, the star director said that it would be unfair to accept acclaim and reject criticism. "*Coolie* wasn't my first film. *Maanagaram* was my first film. And I know how much appreciation I received in those nine years. So it's unfair not to accept criticism."

Lokesh also feels grateful for how his fans have stuck with him during these difficult times; even their criticisms come from their heart, he notes. "For instance,



'I can't do light-hearted films'

Clarifying his exit from the Rajini-Kamal project, Lokesh stated that it was purely due to creative differences. "They both were quite eager to do a film together, and that was a very big opportunity to me, because that's mean that they thought of me as the one to direct it." Lokesh worked on the script for a month, after which he narrated it to the two legends. "They seemed very excited about the script. However, they noted how they've been doing a lot of action films of late. So they wanted to do a light-hearted subject together. However, I can't make a light-hearted film, and so I backed out of that project."

A new start

Acclaimed actor-director Basil Joseph, who was recently seen in a cameo appearance in Sivakarthikeyan's *Parasakthi*, is set to make his Tamil debut as a lead in the upcoming Tamil-Malayalam bilingual film *Raawadi*. Directed by debutant Vignesh Vadivel, the comedy film also stars LK Akshay Kumar, the young actor who recently turned heads with his performance in the Tamil movie *Sirai*. The cast of *Raawadi* also features John Vijay, Sathyam, Sharqi Hassan, and Aishwarya Sharma. With music scored by Jen Martin, the film has cinematography by Leon Britto and editing by Barath Vikraman. *Raawadi*, produced by SS Lalit Kumar of Seven Screen Studio, is scheduled to release this summer.

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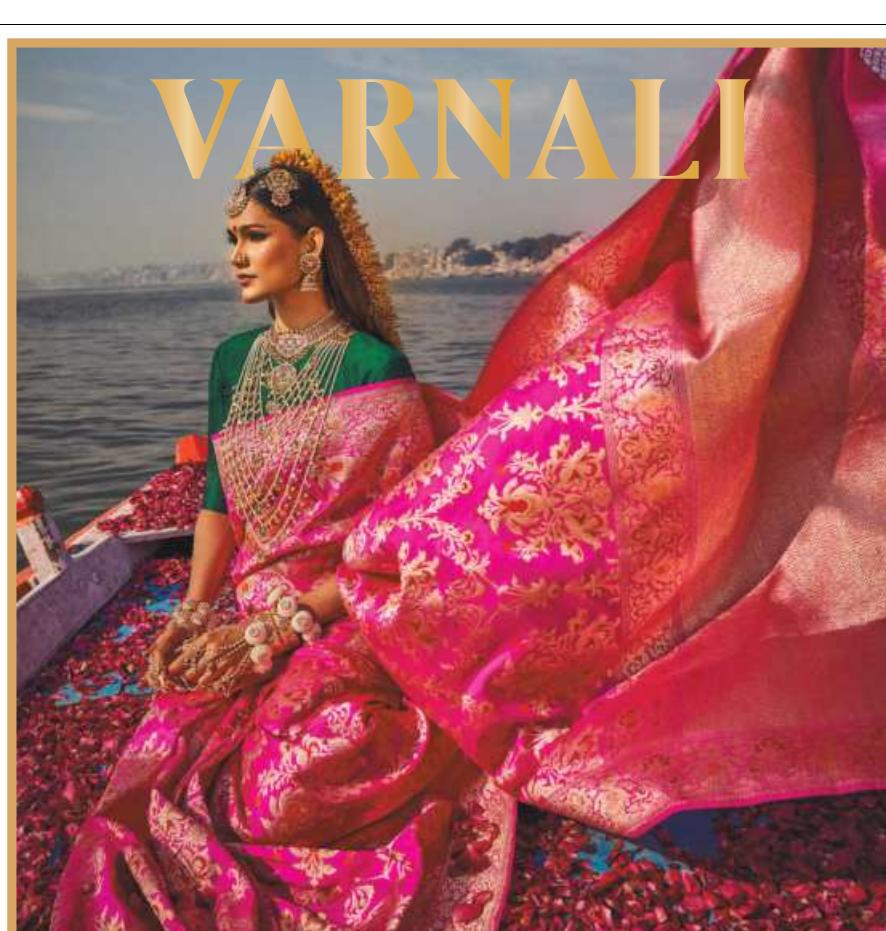


Frame and fame
The first edition of the Touring Talkies Frame and Fame Awards 2026 was held at the Kamarajar Arangam in Chennai on January 25. The organisers honoured artistes, technicians, and creative professionals who have made remarkable contributions to the industry. The event was attended by acclaimed actors, filmmakers, technicians, and producers. As a major highlight of the evening, Dhanush won the Best Actor in a Leading Role (Male) award for *Idli Kadai*, while Aishwarya Lekshmi won the same in the female category for *Maaman*. Abishan Jeevinth won the Best Direction award for *Tourist Family*, while his acclaimed film was awarded Best Picture. The show was organised by veteran journalist Chithra Lakshmanan's Touring Talkies, along with eminent PROs Singaravelu, Riaz K Ahmed, and Paras Riyaz.



King is here

Shah Rukh Khan's upcoming actioner, *King*, finally has a release date. The Siddharth Anand directorial will be released in theatres on December 24 this year. The promo video unveiled to make the announcement features Shah Rukh standing atop a snow-capped mountain. Earlier, a teaser of the film was released which gave a glimpse into its high-octane, bloody world of action. *King* has Deepika Padukone starring as the female lead, marking her sixth collaboration with Shah Rukh. Notably, the superstar's daughter, Suhana Khan, actor Jaideep Ahlawat and Akshay Oberoi will also play pivotal roles in the film.



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Clearing the air

Lokesh Kanagaraj.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

if you have 10 friends, there might be one or two who point out your flaws. That doesn't mean they aren't your friends, no? My fan base is of that kind, and I am very happy about it," he said.

Of the many things that worked against *Coolie*, the enormous pre-release buzz and sky-high expectations on the film's box office performance certainly backfired big-time. Netizens also wondered if stars and technicians drumming up their film during the pre-release interviews could have led to the same. Lokesh accepted that this was indeed the case.

"My ideology is that you can't make a film aiming for a specific box office collection. We can't write a film saying, 'This will collect ₹1,000 crores.' But no matter how much I told them not to, many technicians and cast members, out of excitement for the film, Rajini sir and seeing so many stars together, spoke about the ₹1,000 crores box office collection. Because of that, I am now held answerable even for a film that earned ₹500 crores."

Rubbishing off rumours of LCU being shut down, Lokesh promised to honour his commitments to make *Kaithi 2*, *Vikram 2* and the *Rolex* standalone film. "In the meantime, we have an LCU film, *Benz*, in production, which will come out soon." The director also assured that he is still in talks with Aamir Khan for the superhero film. "Both Aamir sir and I have a lot of commitments. So, while we don't know when that will happen, we are talking about it," Lokesh said.

Up next, Lokesh will be seen in *DC* – not as a director, but as an actor. The film, directed by Arun Matheswaran, has him play the male lead opposite Wamiqa Gabbi. He will also be seen in a cameo appearance in Vijay's *Jana Nayagan*.

For now, after months of silence and online negativity, Lokesh seems quite positive about his place in cinema, and most importantly, unperturbed by the online toxicity that he has been subjected to.

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