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T Nadu lost Rs 3000 cr in coal scam, says NGO

ADITHYA NARAYAN

Chennai: The activist group, Arappor Iyakkam, in a press conference on Thursday, came out with what it said was fresh evidence against Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation (TANGEDCO) in the controversial coal imports case and claimed that the state had lost about Rs.3000 crore between 2012 and 2016.

The group, headed by Jayaram Venkatesan, named the former Power Minister of the state, Natham R Vishwanathan, and the former chairman and managing director of TANGEDCO, K. Gnanadesikan, for reaping personal benefits. It also demanded that a Special Investigation Team (SIT) look into the issue.

However, in a press release, TANGEDCO denied procuring lower grade coal at higher prices.

The statement denied all allegations and said that Arappor Iyakkam could not explain how the price adjustments on coal imports were carried out.

Since late 2014, the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) had been investigating various private companies and Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) for over-invoicing coal imports from Indonesia.

Some of these PSUs are the National Thermal Power Corporation Limited (NTPC), the Metals and Minerals Trading Corporation Limited (MMTC), the Metal Scrap Trading Corporation Limited (MSTC) and the Karnataka Power Corporation Limited (KPCL).

The matter came to light with the arrest of Manoj Kumar Garg, a Hong Kong-based Indian national in February 2016, for opening a front company in Dubai. He was accused of overvaluing coal.

The DRI, in the remand charge sheet for Mr. Garg, had accused a number of coal power plants of overvaluing their coal imports from Indonesia by creating layers of invoicing through front companies between India and Indonesia and thereby artificially increasing the cost of power generation.



Jayaram Venkatesan (C), head of Arappor Iyakkam, holding up the press release, with fellow activists, that exposed the over-invoicing of coal imports.

ADITHYA NARAYAN

Since then, neither the CBI nor the DRI has made any progress and they have been sitting on the evidence for nearly two years,

claims Arappor Iyakkam.

The copies of tenders and purchase orders accessed by the group through RTI showed that

there was a difference of 25 per cent between the market price and the purchase cost of the coal imported between 2012 and 2016.

Pricing of coal is based on its Gross Calorific Value (GCV). While the Indian Government measures GCV on an air-dried basis, the Indonesian government does it on a Gross As Received (GAR) basis. The group claims that this difference in parameters was used to perpetrate the scam.

Venkatesan explained that "between 2012 and 2016, Tamil Nadu imported 2.44 metric tons of coal for which they mentioned the GCV as 6000 Kcal/metric ton."

"This should be compared with 5500 Kcal/metric ton of Indonesian coal. There is a price difference of \$10 between the two," said Venkatesan.

This difference further translated to a loss of Rs. 3025 crore for the Tamil Nadu Government, he added.

The group believes that this fraudulent approach had been adopted countrywide and it amounted to a loss of Rs. 30000-Rs. 50000 crore for the national exchequer.

Venkatesan also claimed that 49 per cent of the total coal imported was from Adani Global Pte Ltd, a

company known to be close to the national ruling party; he also named it as the major beneficiary.

While the CBI had filed a FIR on the January 22 in the Delhi High Court, it did not say anything about these fraudulent practices.

This was because of the presence of powerful corporates like Knowledge International Strategy Systems Pte Ltd (KISS), Chettinad Logistics Pvt Ltd, MMTC Ltd and MSTC Ltd, he added.

Apart from over-invoicing of coal, the group also claimed that the tender proceedings were rushed and did not last for the 30 day-period, as stipulated by the Tamil Nadu Tender Transparency Act. This was done to mint money before the Assembly elections.

The Arappor Iyakkam named Natham Vishwanathan and K. Gnanadesikan as being responsible for the scam and submitted evidence at the Delhi High Court through senior advocate Prasanth Bhusan.

Bhusan has already filed a case seeking SIT to probe the over-invoicing of coal.

Hike in bus fare makes struggle for commute harder than ever

ANJALI VENUGOPALAN

Chennai: The bus fare hike, announced suddenly on January 22 after the transport union concluded its strike, resulted in fares nearly doubling across the state.

The minimum fare has been raised from Rs. 3 to Rs. 6 for travel on state transport buses. For deluxe buses, such as the ones with automatic doors, it's an 80 per cent increase, from Rs. 5 to Rs. 9.

"The rich keep getting richer, while they're making our struggle to commute even harder", said a farmer, travelling to Kelambakkam from Tiruppur to buy farm tools.

Erin Jeremiah, an HR manager at a firm in IIT Research Park, said that the housekeeping staff in her office was almost stranded on the day the hike was announced. "They bring the exact fare, and that day, they had to borrow money to get home."

According to reports, long-distance commuters too were stranded at bus depots because the fares increased overnight. Lakshmi, a domestic help, says that her bus fare has risen from Rs. 18 to Rs. 32, a 77 per cent rise. She will now be spending nearly a sixth of her salary of Rs 6000 on commuting



Commuters at Madhya Kailash bus stand are stunned by the price hike in bus tickets.

ANJALI VENUGOPALAN

from her home in Semmencheri to Okkiam on the Rajiv Gandhi Expressway.

And while passes can save passengers money, those like Lakshmi didn't have the time to get a pass made as the passes are only made at Tiruvanniyur depot, and she was busy taking care of her sick husband. Some, like Amuda, a flower-seller who travels from Tiruppur to Kelambakkam, can't afford to get a pass made as she doesn't have that much ready cash. She depends on

day-to-day sales, which range from Rs.300-1000, for subsistence.

Opposition parties like DMK and CPI (M) have opposed the hike and have demanded a rollback. Students of Government Fine Arts College staged a protest on Poona-mallee High Road on Monday.

The state's rationale is that the fares haven't been increased in years. The state transport corporation has been running at a daily loss of Rs. 9 crore for several years now. It said that it would use the revenue

to pay the outstanding dues of retired personnel.

The transport employees' union held a strike for eight days against non-payment of retirement benefits.

Bus conductors and drivers have been promised a hike. However, mistrust seems to run deep. One conductor, who did not wish to be named, said that his salary would be raised from the existing Rs. 17000 to Rs. 19000, but he wasn't confident it would be effective from this month. Another conductor Yuvraj, said that he was expecting it to become Rs. 21000. Both are part of the union.

Conductors themselves agreed that the sudden price hike was affecting the poor, and even their own family members. "It's the poor who will be affected by the hike the most", says Yuvraj.

Incentives for conductors have been cut by 44 per cent as well. Yuvraj used to make around Rs. 4000 every month as incentives on the number of tickets he issues. He isn't sure how much he will make this month.

Says Jeremiah, "The bus fare hike doesn't make that much of a difference to me, but what about others?"

AASHA SRIRAM

Chennai: Monogamous women are at a higher risk of contracting HIV along with transgenders and transsexuals, say experts.

Earlier, injecting drug users, sex workers and the gay population were considered high-risk groups, according to them.

"The trend has totally changed. We can't say that the high-risk groups are always at high risk anymore. It's the risk behaviour that matters. We have a lot of regular people coming here and testing positive. More than 25 per cent HIV positive persons are housewives," says Satish Kumar, Manager at Y. R. Gaitonde Centre for AIDS Research and Education (YRGCARE) at Taramani's Voluntary Health Services.

Most of these women are monogamous, and have been infected by their husbands who are either bisexual or drug users, he says.

"We had a manager of a company come here to get a confirmation of his HIV status. He had already tested positive but was sure that was false because he has only engaged in sex with one woman. He tested positive and is now on antiretroviral therapy," says Satish Kumar.

Monogamous persons are at a higher risk of contracting HIV today, says Amrose Pradeep, medical officer at YRGCARE. The stereotype that only sex workers and truck drivers from lower economic backgrounds are at risk does not hold true today, he says.

"Most monogamous women are at high risk even though they are just married to their spouses and that's their only risk. More than 50 per cent of our HIV pa-

tients are corporate employees and educated," he says.

HIV positive persons are also at risk of contracting Hepatitis C. With 0.3% prevalence rate of HIV, roughly 2 million Indians are at risk of contracting Hepatitis C. "We have teamed up with Abbott to conduct tests for HIV positive patients. Hepatitis is curable with the treatment period as short as 12 weeks and is prevalent in high-risk groups, especially the sex workers community," says Pradeep.

In 2015, a UNAIDS report revealed a 32 per cent decline in new HIV infections and a 54 per cent decline in AIDS-related deaths between 2007 and 2015 in India. Currently, India has the third largest HIV epidemic in the world with 2.1 million HIV positive persons as of 2016.

Tamil Nadu has more than 2 lakh HIV positive persons and is one of the four states that accounts for 55 per cent of all HIV infections in the country, according to a report published by the World Bank.

"We used to see around 120 patients a day. Now, it's come down to 80 patients a day. But, that doesn't mean that incidence is declining. With HIV it is very difficult to measure incidence because the outbreaks are in clusters," says Rama Pandian, founder of Tamil Nadu Network for Positive People, a NGO in Guindy reaching out to HIV positive persons.

Newer medication and fewer side effects have ensured that very few cases progress to AIDS. Out of the 25,000 patients seeking treatment for HIV/AIDS at YRGCARE, 20,000 are on antiretroviral medication.

"More than 300 children have been delivered, where both parents are HIV positive and there has been no case of an HIV positive child," he says.



Beaten up by police, cabbie dies after self-immolation

AFEEFA

Chennai: A cab driver, who immolated himself to protest against the unethical approach of police personnel, passed away at Kilpauk Medical College, on Friday. R. Manikandan (23), an Ola cab driver, was infuriated with the police's inappropriate comments during a vehicle check near Rajiv Gandhi Salai on the Old Mahabalipuram Road, on Thursday.

It is alleged that, Manikandan was asked to wait for more than 45 minutes during a vehicle check on OMR. "He was not in his uniform, neither was he wearing his seat belt," said Saravanan S, an Ola cab driver. Manikandan was asked to pay a fine of Rs. 100 and lost a trip, as he was held for too long. He started taking videos on his phone in an attempt to capture the policemen asking for bribes. He was asked to leave after a

while, but continued capturing the scene on his phone. Four policemen are alleged to have beaten him up, leading to his self-immolation.

One of the doctors at Kilpauk Medical College said "The patient was able to walk when he was admitted, but burn victims can collapse unexpectedly if the injuries are spread over 60 per cent of their bodies."

Action has been taken against the four policemen, according to the city Police Commissioner, A. K. Vishwanathan. Saravanan said that the cab drivers' association is planning to protest, demanding fair compensation for Manikandan's family in Tirunelveli.

This is the second such incident in one month. Two weeks ago, an Uber cab driver jumped in front of a local train, near Kathipara junction, to protest against police demanding bribes.



A screenshot taken from R. Manikandan's video, which he continued to shoot even as he was being harassed.

BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Bio-mining to clean dumping ground

ARVIND PRASANNA A

Chennai: The Sembakkam landfill in Tambaram is the first dumping yard in the city to get a bio-mining plant aimed at reclaiming land which has been left polluted by toxic solid waste.

Bio-mining is a process where bacteria is used to quickly decompose the biodegradable components in the solid waste. Then the non-biodegradable leftovers are segregated and depending on their types are sent for recycling or re-use.

The Sembakkam landfill's plant is set up and managed by the Erode-based Zigma Global Environment Solutions and has been in operation for about a month.

The plant is expected to process 100-200 tonnes a day. It operates over an area of 4.5 acres with about 35000 tonnes of garbage.

"The plant was originally supposed to begin operation in November but it was delayed till December because the rains interfered with the pre-processing work," explained Mukeshwar, the

current supervisor.

However, the process is bound to be a slow one as disturbing piles of long forgotten garbage can be a risky undertaking.

"These garbage piles have been undisturbed for years and the natural decomposing will have generated gases like methane which are highly flammable. So we sift through them slowly to avoid fire accidents," Mukeshwar explained.

Though specialized machinery is used for the separation process, the collection and feeding processes are undertaken by manual labor.

"First, we spray the garbage with the bacteria culture and leave it for a set time. After that we collect the piles, which will be stabilized and sterilized, and feed them into the machinery for segregation. In the end the two piles of organic and inorganic waste are then further separated, manually," he said, outlining the process.

With near zero-emission, bio-mining has become an attractive method to reclaim land and lakes which have been occupied by these



Sembakkam landfill overflowing with waste.

toxic landfills. The Sembakkam landfill itself lies adjacent to the Hastinapuram Lake.

"In addition to being health hazards, these landfills are also very volatile and are prone to sudden fires. The 2015 Kannadapalayam fire is a good example.

That's the next landfill we'll be working on," B. Raheem, the on-site engineer for the Sembakkam Bio-mining plant explained.

A fire broke out at night at the

Kannadapalayam dumpyard in Tambaram in July 2015 and raged for 14 hours before it was put out. Zigma Global Environ Solutions has an estimated annual budget of about Rs.1.5 crores and is expected to complete one dumpyard in 12 months' time.

The company's previous bio-mining undertaking in the Kumbakonam municipality allowed them to reclaim about 3.5 acres of land out of the total 7.5 acres, since 2015.

Mobile snatchers held

AISHWARYA S

Chennai: The Mambalam police nabbed a five member gang of mobile snatchers earlier this month making it the second arrest in four months of gangs that steal smart phones in the city.

Six months ago, following multiple complaints of mobile theft from Teynampet, one of the gang members was arrested and remanded for three months.

At the start of the New Year, when phone snatching increased in Mambalam, police officials started going through CCTV footage and identified the same man sitting on a stolen bike behind a helmeted driver.

Officials were able to trace his whereabouts to the Kannagi Nagar

slum. His comrades were arrested from Saidapet, Tambaram and Kasi-medu.

The young boys between 20-25 years did not have a permanent residence. They kept changing their location from one slum to another to avoid suspicion.

According to P Sekar, Inspector of Police, Crime Branch, Mambalam, Suresh, Lokesh, Sarvanan, Pradeep and Raja were the ones arrested.

The gang members rode on fast bikes and snatched mobiles from the people who were speaking on phones on the road. The gang used stolen bikes with altered number plates for easy escape.

After a theft, one of them later sold the phone for Rs. 1000- Rs. 2000 in local markets.

Addicted to alcohol and drugs,

many times the gang also bought liquor from shopkeepers in exchange for stolen mobiles.

Whenever the boys ran out of money, they started stealing phones, said the inspector. Sekar added that now-a-days, mobile thieves avoided going to second hand vendors because most of the mobile stores have CCTV cameras.

The shopkeepers also ask for identity proof before accepting phones which makes getting cash in exchange for phones more difficult. Ritchie Street, an unorganised shopping hub for electronic items in Chennai, has numerous kiosks selling expensive second hand phones like the Google Nexus or the Samsung Note series.

Mobile snatchers used to frequent the street to deal in second hand phones but according to Kaja Moideen, a second hand vendor of mobile phones, most of the shopkeepers demand original Aadhar cards before buying a phone.

Since most smart phones now have active GPS, it is easy to trace them if they are reported stolen. When such a mobile is bought by the owner, it lands him in big trouble, he said.

Another vendor Rafiq said that last year, the Ritchie Street Sellers Association warned all second hand dealers against those people who came to their shops to exchange phones for hard cash.

The association asked the vendors to ensure that they got proper identification from people and checked the phone's battery life, touch pad and applications before accepting them.

If a phone appeared to be new or in a condition which did not demand a resale, they immediately ensured that they had all the seller's details.

Further, many of the shopkeepers usually exchanged an old phone for a brand new one and gave cash only up to a margin of Rs. 5000.

Online shops like Flipkart also eat into the second hand sale. Many vendors prefer buying second hand phones online and selling them on the street.

'You will find vendors dealing with stolen phones in Burma Bazaar even today,' said another shopkeeper.

However, even after launching FIRs and seizing numerous mobiles, many stolen phones have not yet been found.

The arrest this month marked the third arrest of mobile thieves over the last six months.

Usually those involved in these petty crimes are children from poor households. Their parents are daily wage labourers and the boys are high school or college drop outs who have fallen into bad ways, according to Sekar.



Mambalam Inspector P Sekar with the recovered temple property

Temple loot recovered

AISHWARYA S

Chennai: The Mambalam police have arrested a man accused of burgling the Vembuliamman temple and recovered the silver moulds of the goddess worth Rs. 1 lakh.

Two men broke into the temple, half a kilometre away from the Mambalam police station, on the night of Jan 20 and stole two silver moulds (coverings) of the goddess, two brass lamps and three thaalis (necklaces) along with other pooja vessels.

While the thaalis adorn the goddess, the lamps and moulds are usually stored in an almirah (cupboard) inside the temple and are taken out only during the Aadi pujas during August.

Upon reaching the temple for the morning pooja, Ramesh, the head-

priest, found the main lock of the temple broken. The door to the almirah had also been tampered with.

According to him, the thieves also tried to break open the donation box of the temple to steal the cash inside but were unsuccessful.

Police officials confirmed that the robbery happened at around 1 a.m. on the night of Jan 20. They also found a lungi (cloth) belonging to one of the robbers on the temple premises.

Officials questioned the rag pickers who work in the area around the temple and were able to track the accused in Kannagi Nagar slum two kilometres away.

P Sekar, Inspector of Police, Crime Branch, Mambalam, said that Vedu, 39, was arrested from one of the houses at the Kannagi Nagar slum on January 23. So far,

the silver moulds and lamps have

been recovered.

Sekar said since Kannagi Nagar fell under the Slum Clearance Board, many people accused of petty thefts stayed there as someone or the other gave them a place to lie low after the incident.

While the search continues for the second accused and the rest of the stolen property, Ramesh praised the Mambalam police department for their efficiency.

According to the Commissioner of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment (HR&CE), R. Jaya, 372 stone idols and 832 icons belonging to 387 temples were stolen from 1992 to 2017.

"Out of more than 1200 thefts reported, only 56 have been traced and in only 18 cases, possession of stolen items was restored to the temples."



Mobile thieves nabbed by police.

Polio drive launched in Chennai

AINDRILA PAUL

Chennai: The nationwide Intensified Polio Immunisation Programme (IPPI) was launched here on Sunday.

Children from age zero to five were given Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) drops from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. at immunization booths.

The second round of vaccination is scheduled to be held on March 11 where Injectable Polio Virus shots will be administered.

Around 1640 booths had been set up around the city, including 1436 fixed booths, 163 transit booths and 41 mobile teams.

The transit booths functioned at church/temple, railway station, bus stand, trade fairs, Primary Health Centres, Police Booth, Airport, Government Offices.

On duty were 6468 volunteers constituting of Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) staff, NGO members, Rotary club members and others.

"Inbound travelers to India and outbound travelers to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Syria, Cameroon are required to receive a dose of OPV four weeks



A child being vaccinated against Polio

prior to departure regardless of age or vaccination status. Although the last reported case of polio in India and Chennai were 2011 and 2003 respectively; strengthening of routine immunization is necessary to make sure the virus doesn't enter our soil from the neighboring countries," said Public Relations Officer Y Edison.

Polio indelible marker pens are used to make a mark on the left little finger; covering the nail, nail bed and the adjoining skin.

The doses given during IPPI are supplementary irrespective of doses given earlier, repeated doses provide additional protection.

Uma Maheshwari who has been a Family Welfare Unit nurse for the last fifteen years said "The challenging part is tracking down the migrant population."

"On Day two we visit slums, construction site, religious congregation and cater to underprivileged children after seeking consent of their parent," she said.

"Care is taken to not touch the skin of the child while administering OPV to avoid contamination."

AINDRILA PAUL

Chennai: Although the government spends seven per cent of the total health sector budget towards health insurance, only twelve per cent of the total population is aware of it. Over Rs 9 crore were spent last year on the awareness campaign of Chief Ministers Comprehensive health Insurance Scheme (CMCHIS) yet most remain aware of the eligibility criteria. Under the scheme, fifty six per cent of the total state population with income below Rs 72000 will benefit from free treatment.

Jamila who has been receiving

treatment for her pancreatic cancer treatment from Voluntary Health Services Hospital (VHS) for the past one year now has already run into debt with moneylenders.

"I enquired about insurance schemes but the administrative department provided very little concession. I took a loan from the bank instead but couldn't pay back the installments on time. So I had to turn to money lenders," she said.

According to a Deccan Chronicle report out of the 771 hospitals empanelled under the scheme, 616 are private hospitals but seventy per cent did not know they could get treat in only registered hospitals

. Mary who had been working as a nurse at the Apollo hospital for the past twenty years said "Private hospitals discourage low income group people from seeking treatment and send them to government hospitals which are overburdened."

Health Inspector Dr Jaiganesh Srinivasan at Stanley Medical College said "Over 1.5 lakh families are covered under the CMCHIS scheme which covers thirty three different ailments ranging from mental disorders to transplants."

Due to lack of awareness the public often know it by different names but it's essentially singular scheme.

Back in Black: A Republic Day Experience

ARVIND PRASANNA A.

Chennai: A trainee journalist was denied entry for the viewing the Republic day Parade from the VIP section on Kamarajar Salai in the city despite having an invitation from the Additional Secretary of the Home Department C. Samayamoorthy.

Debdutta Mitra, a student of the Print stream at Asian College Journalism in Taramani was turned away by a security cordon at 7:30 a.m. due to having worn a black shirt.

"I was told that black clothing was not allowed in the area by the police at the security check," he said.

"Though, when I asked Mr. Samayamoorthy, he told me of no such thing. The officers also told me that they don't know the reasons for these rules but were told to enforce them," Debdutta said.

However, P. Manikandan, a probationary officer serving in the TN Police explained that ever since the Jallikattu protests of 2017, the police have taken a stance to turn away people with black clothing in the area.

He also added that it was common knowledge in the city. Mitra said "Such outrageous rules being made on their whim and fancies, and enforced without prior information should stop."

"This was almost like they were following a religion and not the constitution," Debdutta remarked.

Violence against women on the rise in Chennai

AASHA SRIRAM

Chennai: Violence against women has increased in Chennai, with 63 assaults on women and 7 cases of sexual harassment reported in 2016, according to the 2016 National Crime Records Bureau report. In 2015, 32 cases of assault and 2 cases of sexual harassment were reported.

Despite being known as the "safe city", Chennai, which ranks 18th in crimes against women, reported 10 cases of stalking and 14 eve teasing. These remain common crimes in the city.

The number of rape cases was 25 in

2016, same as that in 2015. As many as 178 domestic violence cases were recorded in 2016.

"Eve teasing is the most common crime, and special police vehicles are stationed outside schools. Women constables are stationed in crowded bus stops to monitor people," says V. Vishweshwarayya, Assistant Commissioner of Police, Mylapore.

Eve teasing cases are seldom reported and do not reflect in data, say the police.

"We have had three cases of eve teasing in the last four years, and the victims reported it only because they were extreme cases. If a woman is being catcalled, she

will ignore it and until it crosses a limit, it doesn't get reported," says A.V. Sophia, Sub Inspector at Mylapore Police Station.

If women are catcalled, they can dial 100 and a police vehicle will be sent to the location, says Vis. Mheshwarayya.

"Even if it happens when you're walking on the street, you can call 100. Every entry is registered in the control room, and the calls are attended to," he adds.

"There have been 5 rape cases filed this year. All five accused have been arrested and 4 have been convicted to 5 years in prison and a fine. Till now, we have not had a case where the rapist was unknown to the

victim. It is usually a family member," says A.V. Sophia, Sub Inspector at Mylapore Police Station.

However, most cases against women go unreported and convictions are hard to obtain because of long judicial processes, say the police.

"The witnesses back out during the trial. Our society is still not open about women attending courts. Victims are often asked inappropriate questions about their behaviour and don't come forward. We try to not register complaints because it reflects poorly on investigating officers when the accused doesn't get convicted," says M.R.

Manjula, Sub Inspector at the all women's station in Royapettah.

Complaint boxes have been installed at school gates to encourage students to report any physical or sexual abuse, says Sophia.

"Students can report these incidents and we go through the box," she adds.

Local schools like Sir Sivaswami Kalamaya and Vidhya Mandir in Mylapore have already received a few complaints. "Some of the female students feel unsafe on their way back home from school. We are following up with the students and have notified the police," says Jashoda Sundar, Vice Principal of SSK, Mylapore.

R K NAGAR BYPOLL

AADITYA ANAND M

It has been nearly a month since the much awaited and much expected R.K Nagar election came to an end. The people chose TTV Dinakaran, former deputy general secretary of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) as their MLA, but they feel apprehensive about his administrative capabilities.

"It came as a surprise to all of us," said S. Kumaran, an auto driver about TTV Dinakaran becoming the MLA. He contested as an independent candidate this time on the "cooker" symbol.

"We believed in DMK's Marudu Ganesh coming to power. We wanted a change as we lost hope in AIADMK who neglected us completely," he said.

After the death of Chief Minister Jayalalitha, no government work



RK Nagar voters feel apprehensive about capabilities of TTV Dhinakaran

| THE HINDU

took place in any fronts in the constituency.

"The main problems here are the

lack of proper functioning of the ration shops and drinking water supply, which usually gets mixed with

sewage," said K. Saravanan, a shopkeeper.

"As a strong opposition party,

"We believed in DMK's coming to power. We wanted a change as we lost hope in AIADMK who neglected us completely"

we wanted DMK to come to power and we hoped they would do something good to us," he added.

Saravanan also admitted that Dinakaran becoming the MLA was unexpected.

The people were also quick to admit that despite rules and regulations this time to prevent bribery, the parties did not stop giving money.

"The majority of the people here are poor, so if they give money, nobody will reject it as it will be helpful to them," said M. Anand Kumar, a resident. He also strongly felt that it was the main reason for

Dinakaran coming to power.

"All the rules and regulations were just an eye wash. Vehicles from outside were entering the constituency and the ruling party and almost all the parties gave us money. We got Rs. 500 to Rs. 2000 per vote, the results favoured the one who gave more," said K. Palani, an auto driver.

"It has been just a month and only now he is thanking the voters. I don't think he can bring about any change to the constituency since he is an independent," he said.

S. Kumaran said "By giving the money to voters, corrupt politicians have corrupted the minds of the people. Now the people no longer think about the future and just vote based on the money they receive."

The people of R. K. Nagar feel that the administrative neglect would prevail in their constituency until the next election.

Auto fares up after Govt raises bus ticket price

ANJALI VENUGOPALAN

Chennai: Time or money? It's a hard choice for the city's commuters after the Tamil Nadu Government drastically increased bus fares on January 22. The minimum fare has been raised by 100 per cent from Rs. 3 to Rs. 6.

Muthammal, 48, a flower-seller in Koyambedu market, used to take a share auto for Rs. 10 from the Koyambedu bus stand to the market.

This was after taking the bus from Velachery to Koyambedu bus stand, which cost her Rs. 15.

Now, the share auto has begun to charge Rs. 20, and the bus ride costs Rs. 30. Sometimes, she is also charged an extra "luggage ticket" for the flowers she carries.

Unable to afford the steep hike, she has begun to walk the 2km from the bus stop to the market. She works to support her husband, who is an alcoholic.

In some places, however, there is a shift from buses to share autos as costs have now become the same. Saraswati, a domestic help travelling from Okkiyam Thoraiappakkam to Tirupurur, now takes the share auto which costs Rs. 10, as the bus price is also the same. It was Rs. 5 earlier.



The bus fare hike has made autos more expensive.

However the share auto drivers at Madhya Kailash say that they have not increased their prices in the aftermath of the hike.

Says Santhanam, a share auto driver, "We did not raise prices even during the bus strike, and we won't now either."

Commuters have a different

story to tell. Erin Jeremiah, an HR professional who takes the share auto from Tidel Park to Madhya Kailash, says she was charged Rs. 15 instead of the usual Rs. 10. She added that the housekeeping staff at her workplace in IIT Research Park have begun to skip taking the mini-bus to the OMR main road and

walk instead to save money.

Although data on this is now out yet, an official at the Kasturibai Nagar railway ticket counter said that an estimated extra 50 passengers every day had been added since the hike.

Officials at Chintadripet and Indira Nagar stations, however, said that they haven't seen an increase in passengers. Many don't have the choice of taking a train instead of bus, because train routes in the city are limited.

ANJALI V

Jeremiah says she doesn't prefer to take the train to Egmore from Tiruvanmiyur because the railway station is far from her home. She would rather take a bus, which now costs double of what it used to.

"Those who can afford it can take autos or taxis, but not people like us who have no other option", says Muthammal.

The trawling threat: 180 turtles wash up dead

AFEEDA

Chennai: The city has become an unsafe haven for the 'endangered' Olive Ridley turtles, with 180 of these animals being washed ashore this year. The global proposal to elevate the olive ridley turtles from 'endangered' to 'threatened' species is being hampered by these continuing deaths.

The Chennai shores that often harbour these turtles from January to April have seen over 180 deaths in the first month alone.

"The presence of olive ridley turtles are the indication of a healthy marine biodiversity, which is important for the survival of the ecosystem," Dr. Supraja Dharini, the co-founder of TREE Foundation (Trust for Environment Education, Conservation and Community Development), Indian chapter, explained in her interview to Times Now.

"They have a certain behavioural characteristic when it comes to mating and nesting. They travel all the way back to where they were born and lay eggs there," she said.

Due to increased sea water pollution, plastic waste and other factors, by the time the turtles reach the Chennai coast, they die. It is the hatchlings that face danger the most. Artificial lighting along the beaches, trawling, ships sailing along the coast are the main



Turtles are indicators of healthy marine biodiversity

SIDHARTH YADAV

threats to these turtles.

"The trawling nets are placed in the water for around two hours. The turtles have to come to the surface of the water every hour to breathe. Once they are caught in the nets, they get trapped and suffocate to death," Nishanth Ravi, an SSTCN (Students Sea Turtle Conservation Network) volunteer said.

R. Panchamritam, a fisherman from Bhajanakoil, said that they do find

turtles and hatchlings dead in their fishing nets very often. The live ones are left in the sea while the younger ones and turtle eggs are safely stored to hand over to the turtle conservationists and volunteers.

Nishanth Ravi, also said that the situation is taking an alarming turn with over 180 deaths of the olive ridley turtles in a span of two weeks. During 2005-2010, the deaths were limited to 55-60 per year. It was three years back the most number of turtle deaths took place—315 deaths.

"This year, the situation worsened even more with at least 180 deaths taking place in the first two weeks of the turtle season itself."

Commuters shift to metro during bus strike

APOORV PERTI

Chennai: Lakhs of daily commuters in Chennai switched to using suburban and Metro trains following the seven-day bus strike in which employees from government transport enterprises demanded that their wages increase by more than 150 per cent.

Officials at both Southern Rail (SR) and Chennai Metro Rail Limited (CMRL) denied to comment on the matter but the public said otherwise. Suman Mahesh, a student at the Central Polytechnic College, said "There is a lot more crowding in the trains during the morning hours. I usually used to take a bus from my home in Neelankarai to college but now I have to either hitchhike or get cheated by an auto driver to get to the nearest train station".

Another commuter and TIDEL Park employee, Selvi M, said "it is unethical on the part of the transport union to raise the prices so much especially since there are so many people who depend on buses daily." He added that, during the strike, it was nearly impossible to get an Uber or Ola cab but the suburban train line was and is a convenient substitute.

An employee who works at the

Ekkattuthangal Metro station said that the station did not record that great a surge of commuters. 'A single trip ticket from

to use the train even now as the bus charges are too high'.

Following massive protests across the state, the government



Metros haven't reported a surge in commuters. APOORV

here to Koyambedu costs around Rs 40 and not many people can afford it", she explained.

Even if most commuters are praising the suburban train services for its timely intervention, some complained of heavy crowding in trains and stations. Lakshmi Narayanan, another commuter, said "it was very uncomfortable in the trains during the time of the strike. I continue

has reportedly slashed prices for bus tickets to appease the masses; the reduction will come into effect from January 29. This move could again draw commuters away from the trains but additional routes, such as SR's Chennai Beach-Tambaram-Chengalpattu service and CMRL's Chennai Beach-Velachery service, can still draw in desperate commuters.

MRTS train knocks down buffaloes

Chennai Corpn to impose fines on owners for stray cattle

ANJANA KANKANALA

Chennai: Two buffaloes that strayed on to the elevated train track between Park and Chepauk MRTS stations were knocked down by a train on Jan 19.

Eight buffaloes had reportedly strayed from Velachery, the area that is common for raising buffaloes for meat and climbed onto the elevated tracks. They walked 18 km overnight before being hit by a train at around 5:30am. Two animals were killed and six were injured.

Despite the railway authorities building a 1-metre wall cordoning off the elevated area, the animals had managed to stray into the area and were not reported by anyone.

Dawn Williams, general manager of Blue Cross, who headed the rescue operation says, "We got a call only around 6am. Why is it that no one saw them walking on the tracks before that?"

Muthu Kumaran, a security officer at the Velachery MRTS station says that such incidents never happen at this station.

"There is no way the animals could have climbed onto the track, it is impossible." Despite the rail-

way police patrolling each station, the animals went unnoticed.

"It is not about the animals. Yes, they died and it's not fair. But I am concerned about human safety. If eight big buffaloes, each weighing 600 kg were not spotted, what will stop a terrorist from planting a bomb on the tracks?" Dawn says.

Of the six buffaloes that were injured, one was pregnant and the accident killed the fetus. They have been administered help but there's no guarantee that they will survive.

From April, the

Chennai Corporation is increasing from Rs. 1550 to Rs. 10,750 the fine to be paid by cattle owners who allow their animals to stray.

However, K. Raju, a cattle owner in Chennai says that multiple times, he has been asked by Corporation officials to pay a fine for stray animals. "They catch somebody else's animals and try to make us pay the fine."

"Now that the fine has been increased by 10 times we cattle owners must be more careful in identifying and taking care of our animals."

"If eight big buffaloes, each weighing 600 kg were not spotted, what will stop a terrorist from planting a bomb on the tracks?"
- Dawn Williams



A Blue Cross worker with an injured buffalo

BLUE CROSS

In case of injured or stray animals...

Shelter 8 Hospital:
Velachery Road, Guindy, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600032
Phone: 044 2230 0655
Email: bluecrossofindia@gmail.com



Amma subsidy scheme for women to get wheels

ARVIND PRASANNA.

Chennai: The Tamil Nadu Government will launch the "Amma two-wheeler subsidy scheme" for working women to commemorate the 70th birth anniversary of former Chief Minister Jayalalithaa on February 24, according to a press release from the Collectorate.

This scheme was announced in the AIADMK's 2016 election manifesto and will enable working women to obtain a two-wheeler with Government subsidy. The beneficiaries, limited to one per family, can either fund their own purchase or apply for loans from RBI approved banks.

The press release also listed the eligibility criteria for the scheme. This scheme can be availed by women between the ages 18 and 40 who possess a valid driver's license, and their annual income should not exceed Rs.2,50,000. They should also be natives of Tamil Nadu. The applications must

be submitted to any of the Zonal Corporation offices either in person or by post, on or before February 5, 2018. Applications forms are also available for download on the Corporation's official website.

Women working as entrepreneurs, those working in shops and private companies, government-aided institutions and government industrial establishments, those receiving consolidated pay, contract workers and those working in the unorganised sector all fall under this scheme. Preference will be given to families run by a woman, widowers, disabled women, Adi Dravida women and transgenders.

The women will be able to choose between a gearless and an auto-gear two-wheeler, with engine power not exceeding 125cc, and the differently-abled can choose three-wheelers that fit their requirements. Following this, 50 percent of the vehicle's cost, or Rs.25,000, whichever is lower, would be granted as government subsidy.

"One of the things this govern-

ment promised is finally happening. I just handed in my application with the required documents. The two-wheeler will definitely help me and my family," said Indhuja (27), a potential beneficiary of the scheme from Chennai Corporation Zone 5, Basin Bridge.

However, the scheme has been met with some criticism. The Tamil Nadu Association for the Rights of All Types of Differently Aabled & Caregivers has written a letter to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami stating that the subsidy is not adequate for the disabled. In the letter, the association demanded 25 percent extra subsidy for the disabled as stated under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.

Pointing to the preference to disabled applicants, a corporation official, said "The scheme even now does have provisions for the disabled. A 75 percent subsidy can be hard to implement at this stage but I'm sure the government will work something out."



Application forms being handed out at the Corporation Zonal Offices.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

It's all in the game

AADITYA ANAND M

Chennai: R. Andrew Chrisanthus, a final year student of the Madras Christian College is an aspiring gamer and he reached the semi-finals of a gaming tournament called South East Asia Division Community Cup, organized by Electronic Sports League (ESL), in September.

ESL is a eSports company that organizes competitions worldwide, based in Cologne, Germany.

It was a team event and his team, which had 5 members, had to play a game called Rainbow 6 Siege, a popular shooting game.

"It is a 5 vs 5 tactical first person shooting game," Andrew explained. In the tournament nearly 250 players in 53 teams from all South East Asian countries participated.

"Every team should spend a straight 48 hours in the game as nobody knows when our match would pop up. We can take breaks but if any player is unavailable when the match pops up, then we had to play without them," he said.

Out of his teammates, one person was from Singapore and all others were from Chennai.

"I do not know any of them personally. We just became friends by playing the game. We had to fight our way up to reach the semis. We lost to another Indian team in the semis and a team from Bangladesh won the tournament," he said.



R. Andrew Chrisanthus, the gamer

He said that he was introduced to gaming when he was in class 6.

"It all began in Prince Netcafe in Kozhipannai near Madambakkam.

As friends we used to gather there for LAN party games and that's where the love for gaming started."

His parents were not supportive earlier as he got addicted to gaming and gained weight and spoilt his eyes.

"I began participating in some local tournaments by playing games like Counter Strike: 1.6 and

Counter Strike: Golden Offence in Netcafes and slowly when I began to win, they let me do it. They were happy that at least I did not end up like many other kids who become addicted to smoking and drinking," he said.

Many such tournaments take place today in popular netcafes like LXG Gaming Centre in Kodambakkam High Road and Arknemesis Gaming India in Nungambakkam.

"When I was in school, the winners would receive a cash prize of

Rs. 1000 to Rs. 5,000. Today many tournaments are getting sponsored and the sponsors give their products as prize," he adds.

Once he reached college he stopped going to netcafes and switched to online gaming and started playing Rainbow 6 Siege.

"In online gaming, we will be connected to a server where there will be players from all over the world. Rainbow 6 Siege is a team game, so if I decide to play solo, I will automatically have some random team mates from any part of the world. We need to have proper gaming headset to talk to each other while playing to give some information," he said.

About the cyber abuse, he received in the past from Europeans and Australians, he said "They will usually have a big laugh over an Indian accent. They will give respect to us only if we play well, otherwise it's just abuse and racist remarks all day."

He said that today, he is well known in the online gaming circuit with his name "El Diablo" which means "The Devil" in Spanish. "I practise daily. I spend almost 8-12 hours every day practising the game. I don't sleep or eat much I have even lost 20 kg. I always wanted to get into these recognized tournaments and win."

He has a 1.5 Lakh gaming rig (computer) and he wants to buy a 2.5 lakh gaming rig to achieve more in gaming. He hopes to become a full time gamer.



TASMAC's new app will allow customers to pay and check stocks

SIDDHANT JAIN

Price app for Tasmac shops

AHANNA D. CHAUDHURY

Chennai: An app that will allow TASMAC customers to make payments and check available stock is to be launched on February 1. The app has been commissioned by the Tamil Nadu Government following reports that the shop employees in collusion with some local politicians were overcharging customers and not giving them a receipt.

The Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation is a State-owned company that sells liquor all over the state earning around Rs 25,000 crores. Employees working at elite TASMAC shops in Adyar and Velachery that sell premium brands and the smaller shops that cater to a larger crowd refused to comment on the app and its impact.

Some of the elite shops allow customers to swipe their cards but

most of them insist on cash, according to employees. In these shops the employees collect between Rs 20 and Rs 50 over the minimum retail price and pocket the difference. Only purchases over a minimum of Rs 500 get a receipt.

It is hoped that the app would prevent over-pricing because all records would be available online. Ravi Krishnan, manager at the elite TASMAC shop in Adyar was reluctant to comment on whether the app would decrease cash payments and illegal transactions. Ravi said, "I don't know about this app so I can't say much. But most transactions still now is done by cash and bills are given by us. Only the public can tell how they will accept the app."

Balaji N Thomas, a regular customer at the Phoenix Mall TASMAC shop said, "I would want

to know if the app will provide us (customers) with any special benefit or discount. I would appreciate if we are able to buy products at the MRP (Maximum Retail Price). Most of the times I return without any bills if I buy for any amount less than Rs 500. Other than elite TASMAC shops nobody gives any bill. A bottle of rum that costs Rs.850 on MRP is sold at Rs.900 or Rs.920."

Another customer at the Adyar TASMAC, Sanju Rahman, said, "Most often we do not get any receipts for our transaction. If the app provides us with authorized bills, it is welcome. If it reduces long lines at the shops, I would be relieved. At the same time, this will only benefit city customers. In the villages or the inner belts people mostly rely on country liquor which is so cheap that nobody wants any bill.

Free schooling for visually impaired kids

AHANNA D. CHAUDHURY

Chennai: Nethrodaya, a Chennai based self help organisation for the visually impaired organised a special programme where fifty new visually impaired children were admitted to its school.

Nethrodaya runs a free special higher secondary school exclusively for the visually challenged and orthopedically challenged boys and girls, recognized by Government of Tamil Nadu. The school has user friendly facilities and admits students from 6th standard to 12th standard offering them free education with separate boarding and lodging facilities for girls and boys within the premises completely free of cost.

Nethrodaya has also started a college offering B.Ed. Special Education (Visual Impairment). It was inaugurated in August 2015. The course is which is affiliated to Tamilnadu Teachers Education University and also recognized by Rehabilitation Council of India.

C. Govindakrishnan, the founder of Nethrodaya said, "The disabled population in the last five to ten years have suffered the most due to unemployment. This Republic day, we want the Government to understand that we want to help the nation too through



our service."

According to The Times of India, the number of unemployed people in Tamil Nadu has increased by 0.5% between 2013-14 and 2015-16. Data released by the Union labour ministry in the Lok Sabha shows that the percentage of unemployed people in Tamil Nadu is not only high but has gone up in the past few years. The visually impaired occupies about 22.36% of the population and almost 86% of them are unemployed.

"We want Government to understand that we do not want to be a burden. Our children are also hoisting flags and participating in chess and badminton competitions. This Republic day, we want that our labour is counted and we are valued the same," said Govindakrishnan.

Lalu Krishnaswamy, a seventeen

year old visually challenged, said "My elder brother wasn't able to get a job because of the discrimination in the system."

Govindakrishnan also said that more NGOs and self help organisations need to come forward in order to save the visually impaired population as they are an integral part of the society's youth and labour force.

"When I started, we had just fifteen members. We had less money. This year we celebrate the 16th Republic day in our organisation with almost 100 people."

"We are also including new staff to bring in teachers for advanced brail education and introducing the method of recording classes. This shall enable our kids to remember more," he said.

The function ended with a special camp where guests wishing to donate eyes after their death registered their offer through a form.

"Most often after death, people forget to donate the eyes of the deceased to the organisations or hospitals. If each eye can be donated at the proper time, fifty percent of our visually challenged population can get eyesight and they can add to the net GDP of our country," Govindakrishnan said.

Pollution high in Chennai too

ADITHYA NARAYAN

Chennai: While Delhi is projected as the poster city of air pollution in India, pollution levels in other cities go unnoticed with the Alandur Bus Depot in Chennai clocking an Air Quality of Index (AQI) of 194 on 22nd January.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of the U.S, this translates to a hazardous level that calls for minimized outdoor activity but the National Air Quality Index monitored by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) still calls this moderately safe that causes problems only to people with existing heart and lung conditions.

According to a 2015 Global Burden of Disease (GBD) survey, exposure to PM2.5 (particulate matter of size 2.5 micron), one among the five major components of air pollution, was ranked as 5th highest factor responsible for causing deaths.

The relatively small (2.5 micron) particulate matter (when compared to air that is 50 microns thick) enters the human lungs and clogs the alveoli where the transfer of oxygen takes place, causing heart and lung problems.

R. Sathesh, the traffic constable who was on duty at Cement Road Junction where the Alandur Bus Depot is located said "My breathing got laborious at around



AQI of 194 was recorded on GST Road near Alandur

ADITHYA NARAYAN

8:30 in the morning." He also attributes the cause to the presence of moisture in the air which prevents the particulate matter from moving up.

Dhurailingam, who works with Sathesh says that they face throat and sinus problems due to their nature of work. Even though they are provided with masks, he claims that it only adds to their misery.

"Unlike bikers, we remain stationary at the same spot for long durations. So there's no air circulation within the mask. We inhale the same air and the pollutants remain in the body."

G. Kernappoo who teaches at the CSI Primary School located near

the Alandur Bus Depot says "The children didn't face any trouble on the particular day. Nobody till date has had any physical condition due to the air pollution, probably because they are used to this."

Dr. P. Saiprasad, the Chief Scientific Officer at the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board says "Apart from the festival days, Chennai doesn't see a considerable increase in pollution levels." He also said "The major cause of pollution here is the vehicles and that too diesel vehicles. The industries shell out lakhs and crores for safety measures. So the main cause of pollution is vehicles itself." Mr. Saiprasad also said that

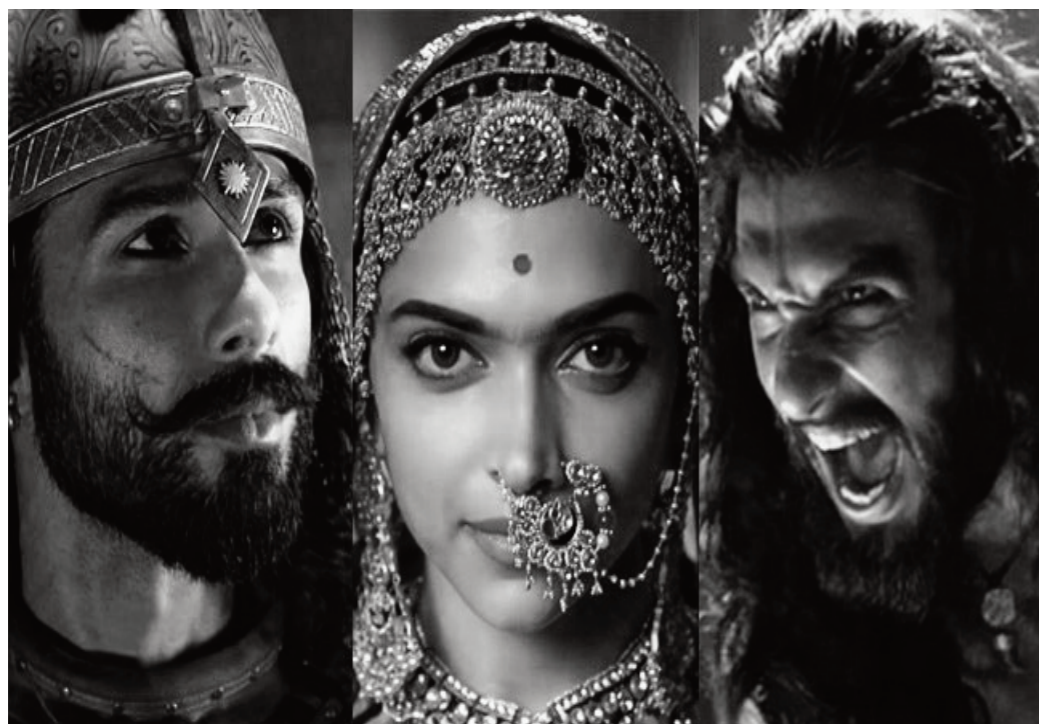
burning of synthetic materials such as tyres have come down as a result of the awareness programs conducted by the TNPCB.

Air Pollution depends on the prevailing weather conditions. Speed and direction of wind also played a major role in dispersing the pollutants.

According to Mr. Saiprasad, the Pongal day was humid and the atmosphere was dampened which made the conditions even worse.

He also said that as long as vehicle regulation remained a policy decision could be done, TNPCB's duties were confined to spreading awareness among people and measuring AQI.

No flutter in Chennai as Padmaavat hits the screens



A still from Padmaavat

INDIA TODAY

ANJANA KANKANALA

Chennai: Following months of controversy and delay, the movie "Padmaavat" was released on Thursday last week. The movie was set to release on December 1, 2017, but protests by caste groups in Rajasthan against the plot of the movie led to its delay.

Sanjay Leela Bhansali's film is based on the epic poem written by the Sufi poet Malik Muhammad Jayasi in 1540, about the legendary queen of Chittor, Padmavati.

It stars Deepika Padukone as Padmavati, Shahid Kapoor as Rawal Ratan Singh and Ranveer Singh as Alauddin Khalji.

In the epic, Alauddin Khalji, ruler of the Delhi Sultanate ransacks the Chittor fort to take Padmavati away, who is married to Rawal Ratan Singh, the Rajput ruler of Mewar. Though Khalji is a real character in history, Padmavati is fictional, though some claim otherwise despite little historical evidence.

The controversy started in January this year when the Rajput Karni Sena in Rajasthan attacked and destroyed the sets of the movie during the film shooting in Jaipur.

This incident was sparked by Ranveer Singh's statement about the movie. In his statement, when asked if there was a love scene between

"If the movie defamed the legend, then it is not right, but a few changes here and there is alright when making - Riddhi Bisani College Student"

Khalji and Padmavati and whether he would play the villain role in it, he said that he would go two notches beyond evil if given two intimate scenes with Padmavati in the film.

This sparked the rumour that there was, in fact, a love scene between Khalji and Padmavati and thus, protests began, with the Karni Sena leading them.

This alleged lovemaking scene became contentious because in the epic when Padmavati realizes that her husband, Ratan Singh, is killed, she immolates herself on his pyre in a practice called Sati.

Therefore, when this statement came out, it was seen as an attempt by the filmmakers and the actors to disrupt history and malign these leaders. However, no such scene exists in the movie.

People in Chennai who have watched the

movie think all the ruckus surrounding the movie was unnecessary.

Riddhi Bisani, a college student studying electronic media says, "Looking at the movie, I don't think the chaos was necessary. They did not show anything wrong in the movie except for the part where Padmavati danced in front of men. In reality, women didn't even come out of their chambers."

"But there was no intimate scene between Ranveer and Deepika. If the movie defamed the legend, then it is not right, but a few changes here and there is alright when making a movie." Snidha Sharan who works at a stock broking company says, "All the protests were unnecessary. Things like Sati still happen in India, that is what people must fight for. I don't understand why buses and film sets had to be burned down and ransacked."

Vikram Ramprasad, an engineer, says, "Movies are for entertainment. Why do people take it so seriously? Even if it showed Padmavati in the wrong light, so what?"

"There are so many movies where women are shown as prostitutes. How come nobody protests against that?"

"Even if the movie was defamatory of the legend, it wouldn't be of much importance to me," says Reshwin Nishith, a musician.