



Gutka being sold despite the ban

Page 2



Stigma holds back eco-friendly pads

Page 3



'All journalism is investigative'

Page 4

'City expansion to erode panchayats'

SIDHARTH YADAV

Chennai: The proposed seven-fold expansion of the city's metropolitan contours would imperil grass-roots democracy and erode agricultural activities, according to experts.

Following an announcement in the Tamil Nadu State Assembly last July, the Chennai metropolitan area is set to expand from the current size of 1,189 sq. km to 8,878 sq. km making it the second largest metropolitan region after the Na-

ment Authority (CMDA) Chief Planner P. Selvadurai said that the existing local bodies would remain undisturbed and receive support from the four proposed zonal offices.

"We would delegate more powers to local bodies. Only encompassing decisions would be taken at the central level," he said.

Ecologically sensitive areas including water bodies, eris (tanks) and channels would be earmarked and encroachment upon marshy lands would be prohibited, added

midipoondi industrial corridor, auxiliary facilities like residential enclaves, recreational parks, and water and waste management become essential. Our mandate is to provide them."

Yet, he admitted that the plan aimed at the State's "overall development and sustenance of economic health".

He also said, "We are facing stiff competition from the Bengaluru and Amravati regions, which are attracting investment. However, we are not emulating any urban development model. Our strategic plan is localised and peculiar to regional needs."

A. Srivathsan, Academic Director at the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology (CEPT), Ahmedabad, said, "Satellite towns would inevitably crop up with infrastructural development along the peri-urban areas. Such enclave based development is unviable."

"Instead of focusing on one region, developmental projects should disperse and uplift smaller towns. This could help ease urban congestion and stress on regional resources," he added.

Devasahayam mentioned the grid-based urban model incorporated by Athens, Greece, involving frequent consultation with multiple stakeholders as a viable alternative, while Srivathsan said the Randstad region in Netherlands, which boasted an efficient and environmentally sustainable transit system, was another successful model.

"The expanded region would be depleted like Gurugram district [Haryana] of the NCR where unmitigated construction nudged real estate speculation and led to environmental degradation and urban sprawl," said Devasahayam.

However, Selvadurai said, "An increase in land prices would benefit the landowners. But, we can't dictate how to use this opportunity."

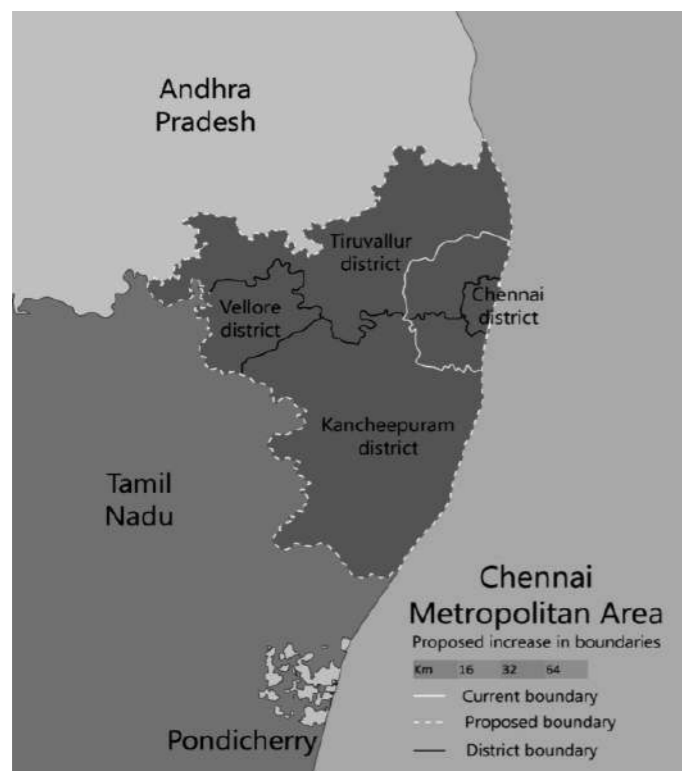
On January 22 this year, the State government had issued a Government Order (GO) opening a two-month-long window inviting suggestions and objections from stakeholders besides notifying the villages. The CMDA confirmed they had received no suggestions till February 13.

Selvadurai.

Calling for the notification's withdrawal, Devasahayam said, "Other regions of the State are trailing. Once more areas are attached, people would flock to the region for employment and Chennai's population would explode."

"The real estate market would flourish with a spike in land valuation. Capital would flow undeterred," he added.

Selvadurai responded, "The CMDA is a service agency. As development takes-off along the Bengaluru-Chennai highway, the East Coast Road (ECR) and the Gum-



tional Capital Region (NCR). Kanchipuram and Tiruvallur districts along with the Arakkonam and Melur taluks in Vellore district would be included.

Former IAS officer M. G. Devasahayam said, "The expansion would be an administrative nightmare for agricultural regions. The Panchayati Raj Act calls for devolution of powers and empowerment of local republics, not their erosion."

Claiming that the notification of additional 1,709 villages would lead to inclusive development, Chennai Metropolitan Develop-

Kamal to quit films, enter politics

SHUCHITA KUMAR

Chennai: Actor-turned-politician Kamal Haasan has declared that he would stop acting in films and instead plunge into politics.

Talking to India Today on the Harvard University campus he said "Except for the two films coming out this year, there will be no more films for me."

On being asked whether he would stick to politics even if he loses the election, he said, "I will have to do something for an honest living. But I don't think I am going to lose."

Earlier addressing students at the Harvard University, Haasan had said, "My true purpose today is to challenge the status quo and mediocrity in the polity that is plaguing our state of Tamil Nadu."

The actor announced that <http://naalainamadhe.maiaam.com>, his website was up and running and people could register for his 'mission to build a sustainable model village.'

The emergence of actors like Kamal Haasan and Rajinikanth, when the state is undergoing a po-



A screenshot of Naalai Namadhe, Hasan's website

litical turmoil after the death of late chief minister, J. Jayalalithaa, has created a buzz among youngsters who are not happy with the parties like All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK).

"I have been following Kamal Haasan for a long period of time, have seen his movies and I agree with his ideology. I want someone new, and I think Kamal has the leadership qualities," said C. Aravind,

a Kamal Haasan fan.

In the wake of the support Kamal Haasan and Rajinikanth are garnering after their decision to launch their political parties, A.S. Panneerselvam, political observer, said, "Rajinikanth and Kamal can make some noise but cannot come to the forefront of Tamil Nadu politics. They have no clue about the State."

Commenting on people supporting Kamal Haasan he said, "It is a nuanced condition, Kamal Haasan

is raising some issues but Rajinikanth is talking about spiritual politics which no one has a clue about."

Although the youngsters agree that the current politics of Tamil Nadu needs a change, there is a difference of opinion regarding the ideologies. R. Krishnamurthy, a college student said, "I believe in Rajni's spiritual politics and am against Kamal, who is trying to divide the society."

There are some like D. Hariprasad, a student of Central Polytechnic, who don't want actors in politics but are not happy with either AIADMK or DMK.

"If need be I will vote for Kamal because I think he will help us, while he is addressing some issues Rajni is not," said Hariprasad.

While Haasan is confident that he is not going to lose, Panneerselvam doesn't think star value can win him votes.

"If you see actors like Hema Malini and Govinda, they had backing from political parties. If you are a film personality without a political backing you cannot win an election."

Row over Jaya portrait

VIGNESSH

Chennai: The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and other opposition parties protested against the unveiling of the portrait of former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa in the Tamil Nadu Assembly.

The party has moved the Madras High Court seeking removal of the late All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) leader's portrait from the assembly citing her conviction in a disproportionate assets case in 2014. "We have petitioned the court seeking legal interpretation on whether a convicted Chief Minister's portrait can be placed in the State Assembly or not," said S. Manuraj, lawyer and DMK spokesperson. "Unveiling a convicted leader's portrait would set a wrong precedent," he said.

Manuraj added that the President, Prime Minister and Governor did not attend the event as they had known the legal issues surrounding the deceased leader.

Tamilan Prasanna, DMK's joint secretary for media relations, said "The AIADMK leaders can hang Jayalalithaa's portraits in their homes and offices to show their respect. They cannot place it inside assembly with the taxpayers' money."

However, AIADMK members feel happy about having their leader's portrait in the Assembly with those of the former Chief Ministers K. Kamaraj, C.N. Annadurai and M.G. Ramachandran.

"If the government had not unveiled the portrait, the party members would have taken steps to do that," said G. Kabilan, an AIADMK functionary. "The Supreme Court restored the Special Court's verdict only after Amma's death. So she was not a convict until she died while in office," he said.

The seven-feet high portrait was unveiled by Speaker P. Dhanapal on Monday. MLAs of DMK and Indian National Congress parties boycotted the event.



An MTC bus near the Park Town Station | BHARVI DASSON

Bus pass to remain

SUSMITHA SURESH

Chennai: A Metropolitan Transport Cooperation (MTC) official has denied media reports that monthly bus passes had been cancelled. The cost of these passes has been increased, according to the official.

"The fare hike has no correlation to the MTC's stand on cancelling daily and weekly bus passes," he said.

"The daily and weekly passes were being misused. MTC was planning to stop issuing them even before the fare hike," he added. "The monthly bus pass costs will be increased from Rs 90 to Rs 160, depending on the route and distance." Earlier, the MTC had announced that daily and weekly bus passes costing Rs 50 and Rs 300 would be no longer available. The price of the monthly pass was increased while the Rs 1000 monthly pass remained untouched.

"If you compare the number of people buying monthly passes currently to the number of people that used to depend on daily and weekly passes, then there is a huge decrease" said an employee at the Adyar Bus Depot.

J Pritvi, an employee at Tidel Park, said "I use the bus to travel to my workplace. I used to buy a monthly pass, but with the revised rates, share autos are preferable."

The measure seems to have hit daily wage workers and employees of small scale industries.

"We don't always get work" said S Meena, a construction worker, "Buying a monthly pass when we work three or four days a week doesn't make sense."

Meena also added the recent fare hike was affecting her life drastically. "Some days we only get around Rs 100-200; on those days, with the current fare we'll have to pay most of it for bus travel. Our employers don't give us bus fare since the daily bus pass was cancelled."

The MTC had increased the basic fare following an employee strike demanding a pay raise in January. After facing opposition, they had reduced the fare.

An MTC official said, "The wages should be on par with that of those in Government services; the last fare hike was in 2011, and since then things have changed, like the diesel prices going up; and for the maintenance of the buses as well."

18 months to go for T Nagar multilevel parking

SIMRAN BAJAJ

Chennai: The proposed Multi-Level Car Parking (MLCP) facility at Theyagaraya Nagar and Thani-kachalam Road junction will be ready in 18 months.

The facility will cost Rs. 36.54 crores and constitute nine floors. Two basement floors for parking 550 two-wheelers and the ground plus six floors for accommodating

250 four-wheelers.

V. Suresh, a policeman, said, "Parking on roads never caused any accidents, but, caused obstruction. It hinders the smooth flow of traffic. But now we are looking forward to ease congestion in the area."

The facility, which is being constructed on a land measuring 1,488 square metres will be fully equipped with all security provisions.

Y. Edision, Assistant Public Relations Officer (Information), Greater Chennai Corporation said "The complex will have CCTV cameras installed on all floors and security personnel will be arranged."

Govinda Agarwal, Project Management Consultant (PMC) said "The MLCP will have Dolly Shuttle System [an automatic vertical parking system where a robotic

trolley carries the vehicle to and from the parking slot]. The time taken to get the vehicles from the parking slots will be 60-90 seconds."

"All disaster management precautions are being taken, the plint platform on which the vehicle is put to be taken to parking slots will be one metre above ground so that there are no problems during floods," he added.

The parking will also have a waiting room for drivers and whether it is chargeable or not will be decided by the Corporation.

The cost of the parking facility, timing of the lot, maintenance and other provisions of the MLCP will be decided by a local body council which will be headed by the Chennai Corporation Commissioner. The council is yet to be formed.

Where your senses guide you through the shades of darkness

TENZIN KHANDO

Chennai: Dialogue in the Dark is a unique exhibition where visually impaired workers guide visitors through a pitch dark room where they have to make use of their other four senses except their vision, to identify objects such as wood carvings of animals.

Faizal, an employee, instructed the visitors to place their right hands on the shoulder of their friends in front of them.

As the tour started, a voice greeted the visitors. "Hello guys, I am Radha and I will be your guide."

Everyone introduced themselves in the dark.

Radha asked the visitors to touch the objects on the wall.

"Can you tell me what it is?" asked Radha. What felt like a window with bars to the visitors, turned out to be a bamboo stick fence.

Then there was a bunch of Formosa Lilies (a plant with long and narrow leaves). The visitors also felt their way through the carvings on the wall that included a pyramid, a rabbit and a tiger.

The tour seemed smooth until Radha warned of a bridge ahead which might break anytime.

When the first person stepped on the bridge, she started screaming as the bridge shook strongly.

The visitors were provided with



Entrance of the exhibition

EXPRESS AVENUE

a bench where they had to sit and listen to the voices of nature.

While they were engrossed with the nature, Radha silently slipped away and came back with a basket full of vegetables. She made them identify each vegetable by touching them. Then she brought three small containers, which stored cumin, clove and cardamom. The visitors had to smell them and identify them.

The visitors also played cricket with Radha. The ball made a clinking sound. Visitors had to pay attention to the sound and hit the ball.

Finally, the visitors were instructed to carry Rs 50 so that they can buy the secret snack inside. Radha

served the snack and the visitors had to identify it. It was bhujjija that time, but they change the snack every other day.

"I didn't know that I was being guided by a visually impaired person until the end of the tour when Radha opened the gate for us and the light fell on her," said Amrita, an MBBS student.

Radha who is a graduate wants to write the civil services exam and join the service.

Dialogue in the Dark is headquartered at Hyderabad and has branches at Bengaluru and Chennai.

The workers of Dialogue in the Dark have to go through a month's

training where they are taught how to deal with the customers and to become comfortable with the dark room.

Taste of Darkness (TOD), is a part of this franchise where people have to eat their meals in pitch dark. People are served vegetarian and non-vegetarian food. The customers have to manage in the dark and eat without spilling anything. They have no choice over the menu, (which changes every day.)

"The main purpose of this kind of franchise is to make people aware that all the five senses are important and one should know how to balance the use of each sense," Radha said.

Gutka sale thrives despite ban

SIDHARTH YADAV

Chennai: On the upmarket Greams Road here rests a ramshackle kiosk of Raju*. Craning his neck toward the police station just 100 metres away, he stealthily lifts a gunny bag stacked under the counter, pokes his hand inside, and thrusts a sachet of MDM over to a customer.



The embattled brand MDM being sold freely across the city [SIDHARTH]

MDM is a brand of gutka, a mixture of areca nut and tobacco, which has been banned.

"We trust no one after the ban. We sell gutka only to regulars," he said, under his breath.

While the State wide ban on the manufacture, sale and distribution of gutka came into effect in 2013, the sale of gutka continues unabated in certain pockets of the city.

Another gutka seller on the up-market road, besides four others on a kilometre long stretch, sold MDM and Pan Parag. The sachets did not feature health advisory or manufacturing and price details. This contravenes the Pan Masala Packing Machines (Capacity Determination and Collection of Duty) Amendment Rules, 2010.

"To new customers I sell it for Rs. 20 per sachet and for the known

said, "No one sells gutka here. Go beyond the two kilometre radius of secured public places like these and you would easily find it."

Six other shopkeepers denied that they were selling gutka yet displayed strips of Pan Parag, a pan masala.

Many regular consumers have switched to alternatives owing to limited availability of gutka.

"I was a daily user before but it is difficult to procure tobacco now. What we get is way above the MRP. I eat mawa or Pan Parag instead, but it does not produce the same effect," said an auto rickshaw driver outside the Madras High Court.

A cab driver said, "I get gutka from Saidapet for Rs. 35. Most sellers fear sleuths and the fine of Rs. 35,000 which is imposed in case of seizure."

On a kilometre-and-a-half stretch on Mount Road from Gemini floyver to the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) Building, out of 11 paan kiosks four sold gutka.

Most sold the embattled MDM brand, which is stuck in a scam involving bribe allegedly paid to an erstwhile State Health Minister to

allow gutka circulation.

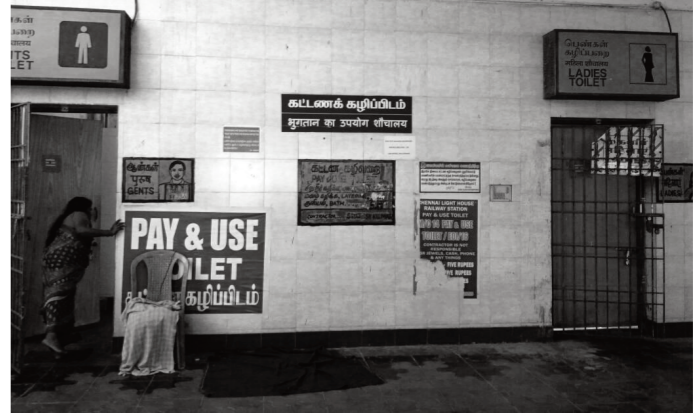
Two shops in Kanagam sold tobacco near the Institute of Hotel Management (IHM) in violation of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act, 2003, which prohibits sale of tobacco products within 100 yards of educational institutions.

Another kiosk sold MDM near the Indra Nagar MRTS station.

Dr. Vidubala E, an independent cancer research consultant who, with others, conducted the Tamil Nadu Tobacco Survey 2015-2016, said, "We found that a majority of the available brands are manufactured outside the state. Therefore the State Government could clearly catch smugglers if they wanted, but they are not concerned."

"There is no alternative to banning tobacco if you are serious about cancer and tuberculosis control. This is a life and death issue. You cannot let people die for the sake of money," she added, saying the ban helped reduce tobacco sale in the State and had increased the number of those wanting to quit the habit, according to the survey.

The Food Commissioner of Tamil Nadu refused to comment. *name changed



Some cleaners on the Chennai Beach to Velachery route are in dire straits due to low or no wages [SHUCHITA]

MRTS workers face wage issue

SHUCHITA KUMAR

Chennai: Workers who clean the MRTS stations on the Chennai Beach to Velachery route say they are finding it hard to make ends meet with low or sometimes no wages.

"The contractor is cheating me, he has not paid me for the past two months, I am partially blind but I still clean the toilets. I have been surviving on the 10-15 rupees people give for the Pay and Use Toilets and that too is not a regular income," said Chinnappan (66), a cleaner at the Kotturpuram station.

Chinnappan, who was a farmer before taking up this job four years ago, says "I am able to eat three times a day only when I earn 15 rupees in a day and it is only with my wife's income that we are able to pay Rs 2,500 rupees as the rent of the house. I am in dire straits but the contractor is not even concerned," said Chinnappan.

According to the Southern Railway, the Chennai Mass Rapid Transit System comes under C category where a 'no profit, no loss' system is practised and the contractor doesn't have to pay the railways.

The contractor gets the tender after which it is his/her responsibility

to pay the workers, provided them with instruments required for cleaning and even for the minor repairs of the toilet.

R. Shanti, who cleans the toilets at Mandaveli station, is paying out of her pocket for the toilet cleaners for the past four months.

"It's been four months since the contractor has provided the materials required, but I am the one who has been given the responsibility to clean the toilets, how can I let them remain dirty?" asked Shanti.

Another worker who didn't want to be named said, "The contractor has said he will not pay us from this month, since we earn 50-60 rupees daily from the Pay and Use Toilets. We only get rupees 3000 per month even though we work from 7 am to 8 pm. I don't know how will we manage with no regular income."

The workers are in a fix because they are bound by a contract and whenever they raise their voice the contractor asks them to leave. "I am unable to sustain my family on a meager sum of 50-100 rupees earned daily. There is no money or respect here. I have been asking the contractor for dustbins but to no avail, I feel dirty picking unwrapped sanitary napkins with my bare hands," said Mohammad Nafiq.

No streetlights; woe of women in J.J. Nagar

VIGNESSH

Chennai: Women of J Jayalalitha Nagar area in Taramani are still reluctant to send their daughters out after it gets dark. Faulty street lights on the road leading to J.J. Nagar are the main reason for their reluctance.

Around half a kilometre away from J.J. Nagar, MGR Main Road, which serves as the entry point to Information Technology parks including RMZ Millenia and SP Infocity, is lit well. But, out of ten street lights along the 300-metre stretch near Taramani power substation, only the one at the corner of the road works.

Chandralekha, an unemployed resident, makes sure her Class 12 daughter returns home before 5.30 p.m. daily.

"My daughter studies at Chennai Higher Secondary School at Taramani. After special classes, she comes back home at 5.30 p.m. She would inform me and come back soon if she goes to her friend's house. But that happens very rarely," said Chandralekha.

"They not only harass us, but also snatch our chains. Seeing me in uniform, they would refrain from committing any such act," Sathyabama

To add to the woes of the residents, drunk men roaming on the road abuse women both sexually and verbally.

Sathyabama, who works as a security guard at the Government Hospital for Children in Egmore, said that she usually called her husband to pick her up from the main road.

When her husband is unavailable, it is her uniform that gives her courage to walk alone along the dark stretch.

She said that the drunkards would think she was a cop because of her khaki uniform. "They not only harass us, but also snatch our chains. Seeing me in uniform, they would refrain from committing any such act," she said.

Roads are another major problem for many residents.

Suguna has lived in J.J. Nagar for over 32 years. A large number of potholes on the road, which has never been concreted, give her knee pain.

"I have to use the road for filling water to the pots from Corporation tanks. First I suffer knee pain and then I will have fever," said Suguna.

Many residents complain that the counselor of the J.J. Nagar ward does not pay attention to their needs. Their appeal to repair street lights and lay concrete roads have always been neglected.

Cat meat found in mutton biriyani

SATENDRA SINGH

Chennai: An investigation by the People for Animals and police has revealed that the meat of cats was being sold as mutton at roadside eateries/hotels in Pallavaram, Avadi and Otteri, according to a report in The Hindu.

The manager at the Spiizee Madras, Indira Nagar, said that chicken and pork were easily distinguishable, but it was difficult to distinguish between mutton and meat of other animals.

The manager of the Aasife Brothers Biriyani Centre, Thiruvanniyur, said, "We have a team for



Cat meat was found in mutton biriyani that was sold in a lot of eateries in Chennai [THE HINDU]

checking and verifying every type of meat we order."

Still many road side eateries do not possess food license and are clueless of The Food Safety and Standards Bill, 2006.

A worker at a roadside eatery in Adyar said "We just have to give money to the police now and then."

According to a report in The Times of India, only 14,462 out of 32,002 food establishments in Chennai have been certified by the Food Safety department.

The Food Safety and Standards (Amendment) Bill, 2014, the Food Safety and Standards Authority (FSSAI) has to regulate the manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import of food items.

Residents unaware about ECR project

ROCHANA MOHAN

Chennai: Residents and vendors on the East Coast Road from Thiruvanniyur to Akkarai are still unaware of the developments with regard to the extension of the highway from a four-way to a six-way road.

The project began in 2013 and involves the acquisition of land along the ECR in Thiruvanniyur, Kottivakkam, Palavakkam, Nee-lankarai, Injambakkam and Vettuvankeni to facilitate better traffic regulation on the highway to Pudu-cherry.

"There have been some talks about compensation by the Residents' Association," said Guru Prasad (28), a resident of Thirukural

Apartments in Thiruvalluvar Nagar, Thiruvanniyur. "However, nothing is certain. We don't know how much we are getting and we don't know when we will get the money."

Around 700 property-owners are to be compensated and Rs. 10 crore was allotted in 2005-06. Recent reports state that Rs. 100 crore has been distributed to land owners.

"I have not been told by the land owner," said R Selvarajan, shopkeeper at Shankar Electrical and Appliances.

"If they extend the road, I have two options. I will either have to move, or break down the building and construct it further behind. I have loyal customers so I will probably do that."



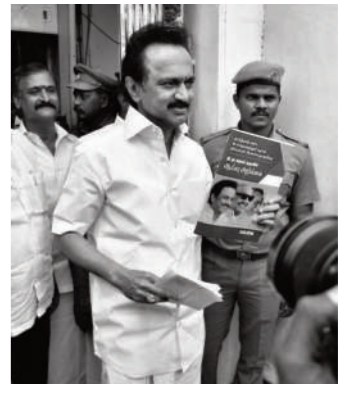
The ECR sees around 30,000 vehicles per day, double of what it can actually accommodate. [THE HINDU]

"My partner and I have not received any compensation or notification," said P Ponnuraj, owner of Anand Stores.

"This is our land that we have bought and built on. If we are notified of anything, we will have to take a call because we own many properties on ECR." Ponnuraj is also the owner of Shankar Electricals.

Many shopkeepers and land owners near the ECR also dismissed the project as it had been in the works since 2005 and they felt as though it would continue to be delayed.

In addition to widening the road, construction of a 1.2 mt-wide median and a footpath-cum-stormwater drain will be done.



DMK President MK Stalin [THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS]

Stalin meets with CM

SUDIPTO CHAUDHARY

Chennai: DMK Working President MK Stalin submitted a report proposing improvements to the Tamil Nadu Transport Commission to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswami at the Secretariat on Tuesday.

The report comes after the recent protest that followed the hike in bus fares across the state. Stalin said that the report had 27 recommendations which, as he said, would lower the bus fares and reduce the burden on the people if the Chief Minister followed them.

He said that the government was struggling with the administration, hence as the opposition, they (Stalin and the DMK) were giving some ideas.

The main suggestions among the 27 submitted by Stalin include the immediate roll back of the hike in bus fares, government taking up the construction of coaches for buses, yearly allocation of Rs 1000 crore for new buses and replacement of buses every six years or six lakh kilometres and issuing monthly bus passes.

Additionally, the losses incurred by TN state transport corporation and the burden of pensions for the staff have to be borne by the government, with employee PF and pensions credited regularly to their bank accounts. Diesel fare fluctuations should be passed on to the consumers gradually without burdening them.

New cleaning machines for Chennai beaches

VIDHI VERMA

Chennai: The Chennai Corporation has ordered 8 new beach cleaning machines with Rs 9.94 crore allocated under the Tourism Department's Beach Beautification Program.

Five machines will be deployed on the Marina beach and three machines will be deployed on the El-

liot's beach.

Sieve-like devices attached to the tractors would be used to clean the beach sand and remove the waste, said S Murugesan, Assistant Executive Engineer of Zone 9 of the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC).

The two beaches are littered with plastic, paper and other wastes dumped by visitors.

Murugesan said that 59 corporation labourers cleaned the Marina beach from 6:30 am to 2 pm every day.

"In addition to manual workers, two beach cleaning machines are employed for cleaning at present", he added.

"Seven workers clean the footpath along the beach in the evening and 22 workers clean the beach road from 9 p.m. to 4:30 a.m.," said Murugesan.

Lakshmi, a cleaner said that three people together cleaned the area between every two big lights. "We usually have more work on Mondays since officers come for inspection every Monday," she added.

Metal bins are kept at distances of 15 metres along the beach.

"There are dustbins everywhere but most people do not use them," said Pushpa, a visitor at the beach.

A Corporation official said that nearly 3 tons of garbage was collected from the Marina Beach on weekdays and 5 tons on weekends.

Fishermen object to pipeline route

SATENDRA SINGH

Chennai: Fishermen in North Chennai turned up at the Collector's office on February 13 to protest against the Chennai Petroleum Corporation Limited's pipeline from Chennai Port to Manali.

There is a network of pipelines in North Chennai. CPCL is building a bigger pipeline to replace the old pipeline carrying crude from tankers docking at Chennai Port. Finished petroleum products are being sent from CPCL's refinery through pipelines to terminals at Tondiarpet and Korukkupet owned by Indian Oil, HPCL and BPCL.

K Bharathi, a member of South Indian Fishermen's Welfare Association, said "The CPCL wants to lay a 42-inch-wide pipeline to transport crude from Chennai Port to Manali, 17 km away. We have suggested that the corporation transport crude from Ennore port, which is just 7 km from Manali. It will save the environment and also not pollute the sea water."

Bharathi said, "A minor leak in pipeline can lead to fire and cause huge damage to hamlets nearby. The underground water in many areas is polluted because of leaks."

"The pipeline in Tondiarpet has had many leakages, which has badly affected the livelihood of fishermen living in the area," he said referring to the leakage of furnace oil being transported from CPCL's refinery at Manali to Indian Oil's terminal at Tondiarpet last July.

"When the oil spill happened last year, there was no technological help from the government; only people using buckets had to manually separate oil from water," said, Bharathi.

Lingan Bastin, a lawyer and a member of South Indian Fishermen's Welfare Association, said "So far, all the protests are going in vain, since there is no unity among all the fishermen's associations. But we are talking to members of other fishing association to form a larger group and protest against the government."



Garbage spilling over from a fallen trash bin at Marina Beach [VIGNESSH]



Serenading scientists steal the show

"Science at the Sabha" is an annual event by the Institute of Mathematical Sciences, to spread scientific awareness among people without previous knowledge of scientific ideas. This year's event was held at the Music Academy, TTK Road, Chennai. The event featured talks by four scientists: Dr. Shubha Tole, Professor R Rajesh, Dr. Guru Kumaraswamy and Professor Vijay Kodyalam.

All reds may not be red

SUDIPTO CHAUDHURY

The brain sees colours, lines and images that are sometimes not there, said Dr. Shubha Tole, a Neuroscientist, who works at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research as Post Graduate faculty as well as a Doctoral Studies (PhD) guide.

Tole started with the audience in a small experiment showing how our brains perceive things, by asking the audience to roll up a paper beside their hand, which, when viewed through side by side with both eyes open, made it seem like there's a "hole in the hand."

Next, using images of two fo-

wers, she gave an idea of the difference in vision in a human eye (which sees in the visible or "rainbow" colours) and a bee's eye (which can see ultra-violet and infra-red as well).

"There's nothing like neuroscience to make you really humble, as it gives us an idea of how utterly flawed our circuitry is." A few high-contrast images, explained how the human brain can make up patterns that didn't exist.

Next was a representation of the McGurk Effect (our ears only hearing movements as our eyes) with three videos of the same person's face, opening his mouth in three different ways, accompanying dif-

ferent sounds. Depending on the face the audience saw, the sound that they heard seemed different.

"Our brain gives us a myriad of abilities and enriches our life. It even makes our life." She explained this with a video showing the similarity in a human and a fish embryo, viewed side to side. Remarkably, the development that a human embryo underwent in nine months, the fish embryo did in five days.

Tole is also a trained Kathak dancer explained how a nerve cell itself works, with videos of isolated nerve cells branching out to "feel" the environment around them in all directions. She showed a physical representation of the movement of these nerve cells by the hand movement used by Bharatanatyam dancers.



Shubha Tole

Reversing time

TANISHAA NADKAR

Is it possible to go back in time and erase our blunders? Why does time go forward?

These questions were posed by Dr. R. Rajesh, a physicist working on granular powders and polymers at IMSc.

Dr. Rajesh, who received his PhD from the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), dived into particle physics instead of dwelling on the opportunities presented by time travel.

"Imagine a cup falling on the ground and shattering into fragments. We never see the fragments jump together to form the cup. However, the laws of physics allow

equally for both possibilities. So, why do we see only one type of behaviour and never the other?" he asked.

While seeing time travel in the opposite direction such as seeing a broken vase repair itself may not be possible according to the laws of physics, the study applies to learning about the migration and flock formation of birds and more ambitiously to predicting how humans will behave.



R Rajesh

Women towards an upward climb

SRIJA PODDER

Chennai: An exhibition featuring 13 Indian women in the field of scientific research was held at the Music Academy on February 11 to mark the International Day of Women and Girls in Science.

The Institute of Mathematical Sciences (IMSc) partnered with "The Life of Science", a science media platform run by two independent journalists, to focus on women scientists in India. The aim was to display the valuable contributions of women scientists in laboratories and institutions scattered all over India.

The exhibit comprised photographs and write-ups about award-winning scientists like Rani Siromony, a leading Indian Theoretical computer scientist, and Sanghamitra Bandopadhyay, who helped researchers detect water contamination and track the development of HIV and Alzheimer's disease.

It was a component of the annual event, "Science at the Sabha", where distinguished scientists informed the general public about the exciting possibilities of science in uncomplicated terms.

Sulekha, a 22-year-old, a student said she looked upto D. Indumathi, a theoretical physics professor at the institute, who was among the scientists featured in the gallery for her research involving neutrinos (the smallest sub-atomic particles in the universe).

S. Varuni, Outreach Associate at the IMSc, said, "We are celebrating the International Day of Women and Girls in Science today. To promote the participation of women, we are holding the women in science exhibition in collaboration with 'The Life of Science'.

It should inspire more young women scientists in pursuing a

career in science.

Nandita Jayaraj and Aashima Dogra who run the website, started working on this feminist project in February 2016. They decided to tell the untold stories of women they met at research institutions in India.

A speaker at the event, R Rajesh commented on the gender aspect saying, "I have observed that while the percentage of women is lower in top scientific research organizations, the percentage is bigger in smaller laboratories. That needs to change."

"This project took shape when we realized there is lack of popular media coverage on female role models in India," Nandita Jha said.

Other scientists like Kaneeika Sinha, a specialist in analytic number theory, and Uma Ramakrishnan, an evolution expert, were also featured in the gallery.

Ramakrishnan's work involved studying the tiger to understand if it was under the threat of extinction. It involved taking a look at genetic diversity and vigorous campaigning for the use of science-based protection policies to save the endangered species from extinction.

However, the problem pertaining to inequality lies at the heart of the Indian society, Indumathi said. "It's across the world that women are demeaned," she added.

Guru Kumaraswamy, another speaker, stressed the importance of having an exhibit as it communicates that women are at par with men in all spheres. "It's an excellent way of giving women representation in this domain," he added.

Also featured was Rama Govindarajan, known to be the first and one of only two women to win the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Award in aeronautical engineering.



Knot a problem Between solid and liquid

SUDIPTO CHAUDHURY

Tying shoelaces is an important skill counted as one of the mental and motor coordination milestones of a growing child, according to Professor Dr. Vijay Kodyalam, faculty at the Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Chennai. He has been awarded his PhD from Purdue University, USA.

Kodyalam then shed light on comparatively more complicated knots, like the "figure eight" and "hangman's knot" and explained the difference between everyday knots and "mathematical knots". The ends of the rope in mathematical knots were fused together making the rope in essence a circle, that is knotted.

Then he introduced the "unknot", which is the knot equivalent

of zero. The next one, the trefoil knot, is represented as two types of laterally symmetrical knots. Lastly, the "figure eight" mathematical knot which is the same as a normal figure eight knot, just with the ends fused together.

Kodyalam moved on to "links" which are multiple knots joined together. Special emphasis was given to the Borromean rings (a link where no two components are directly linked, yet they cannot be separated without cutting the link open) which, due to its unique design, is used as a logo for many institutions, including the IMSc. This could be found in temple carvings dating back to hundreds of years.

Kodyalam listed various types of knots (classified by the number of times the components cross each other).



Vijay Kodyalam

TANISHAA NADKAR

Dr. Guru Kumaraswamy, a Principal Scientist from the National Chemical Laboratory (NCL) in Pune, spoke about how the principles of science are ignored in movies.

Playing a clip from an old film "Mella Thirandathu Kodhavu" where the leading lady is getting sucked into quicksand, he explained how experiments have proven that it is impossible to drown in it.

"It was a hilarious plot device in old movies and they all ignored science but it often set me thinking," he said.

Dr. Kumaraswamy, an alumnus of IIT Bombay and Caltech, USA worked at the Max Planck Institute in Germany before joining NCL in 2001 where he works on understanding the properties and structure of soft materials.

He further explained the various kinds of materials being researched

on such as "ooblek", a mixture of cornstarch and water which may be used to revolutionise and simplify the technology behind bulletproof vests.

"Currently people have to wear heavy jackets but with shear thinning technology, they will be much lighter," he said.

Ooblek is a special substance which acts like a solid when struck with a hard force but a liquid when touched gently.

Stressing the importance of looking at our environment for inspiration, he described the various naturally occurring properties which scientists are trying to replicate.

"What kind of a material is toothpaste? It acts like a solid inside the tube but comes out readily with the slightest squeeze."

"Something as easy as unders-

tanding the structure of a sea-shell can help us create better protective glass used in windshields," he said.

Ditching the old lecture technique in which science is usually communicated to the masses, the interactive sessions provided a refreshing evening for anyone enthusiastic about science.

"I've never paid this much attention to a science lecture in my life, not even in school. It makes me wish I could go back in time and take up science in college," said 23-year old Swetha who attended the event.

"Something as easy as understanding the structure of a sea-shell can help us create better protective glass used in windshields."



Guru Kumaraswamy

Smart street lights from IIT

TENZIN KHANDO

Chennai: Four IIT-Madras second year students, who won the Zero Carbon Challenge competition on Friday, are planning to offer their intelligent street light device to the Centre as it will benefit the 'smart city project'.

The light will become brighter when there is movement of human beings and vehicles near it.

Prakhar Thakuraya, who had worked almost a year for this project, said, "The device reduces the power consumption at night by 50% which is done by dimming the lights by 20% after 12 a.m. because people barely travel after that time."

The other members of the team who worked on this project are Sushant Wadavkar (who came up with the idea), Shashank Yadav, Abhishek Nayyar and Abhinav Shrivastav.

The device is an add-on and

works on LED lights alone. "We did this because the government is replacing all sodium vapour lamps with LED lamps," said Sushant.

According to Professor Devendra Jalihal, HOD of electrical department of IIT-M, this project was funded by companies. "The students were recently awarded Rs 5 lakhs for winning the zero carbon challenge", he added.

"In Chennai city, we will be able to save 44% energy and 52% carbon content will be reduced"

Sushant said their device was four times cheaper than other products. He said, "We have a provisional patent. And we are in the process of getting the final patent." "In Chennai city, we will be able to save 44% energy and 52% carbon content will be reduced", said Sushant.

The life span of the device was 15 years and in three years, investors would get their returns, he said.

According to Sushant, his team planned to offer the device to residential areas first, then to corporate sectors like Reliance, and then the Municipal Corporation of Chennai.

The device can detect hazardous elements like fire and sends notification to a server. The street light will brighten and become dim depending on the size of the living being or moving object, which should be equal to or bigger than a normal size dog; and the speed of the moving object (vehicle) or a living being.

"If a vehicle is passing by at a normal speed, the street lights A, B and C will light up in a synchronised manner. If it is passing by in high speed, the street lights will detect the speed and accordingly light up", said Sushant.

Sustainable is the new suitable

SIMRAN BAJAJ

Chennai: A number of startups and established enterprises put on display a new way to healthy and environment friendly living at the second edition of Reciprocity, a sustainable fest, held at the Kalakshetra Foundation in Thiruvanniyur.

The device can detect hazardous elements like fire and sends notification to a server. The street light will brighten and become dim depending on the size of the living being or moving object, which should be equal to or bigger than a normal size dog; and the speed of the moving object (vehicle) or a living being.

The house had windows installed by Fenesta, which provides insulation against noise, dust, rain and pollution.

Ezee, a six-month-old startup, offered handmade soaps with 95 per cent natural elements. Gregory, co-founder Ezee, said the natural soap was in the shape of coconut, banana, apple, orange, betel leaf and flowers.

They were made of goat milk,

coconut milk, rose, orange, aloe vera and multani mitti.

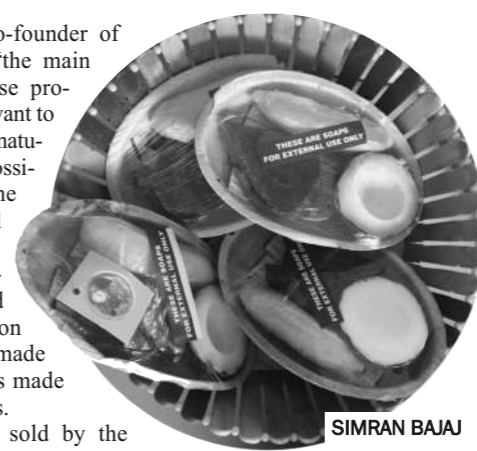
Another startup Fouziya offered a range of handmade pickles, sauces and jams.

Abdul, the co-founder of Fouziya, said, "the main idea behind these products is that we want to provide as much natural products as possible. It ensures the best taste as well as health."

A not-for-profit Trust called Aarde Foundation offered handmade bags and baskets made from palm leaves.

The products sold by the foundation were meant to empower entrepreneurial women from low-income households, and at the same time, it used its revenue for generating awareness for the

conservation of Pulicat lake, which is the second largest brackish water body in India.



SIMRAN BAJAJ

Making pencils out of paper was an initiative started by Narayan Enterprises. The sales executive at the stall said, "We employ

women, give them the raw material at the beginning of the day and by evening collect the day's produce."

The Enterprise sells paper bags, paper covers and paper pencils.

They also recycle plastic cold drink bottles to make t-shirts. One t-shirt is made out of 16 pet bottles.

Goli Soda, a brand involved in up-cycled and organic goods, sold jewellery, wallets and bags made from fabrics left over at tailoring stores and old sarees.

They also had a range of notes, books marks and photo albums, which are all made from elephant dung.

The organisers of the fest held sessions for young children to make them aware of a sustainable lifestyle, and also offered free plant samplings.



Stigma holds back eco-friendly pads

ROCHANA MOHAN

Puducherry: Health concerns and taboos surrounding menstruation pose as an obstacle towards the use of cloth pads among rural women and girls.

EcoFemme, an independent non-profit organization that sells cloth pads, faces challenges in breaking established habits and clearing misinformation surrounding menstruation.

Disposable pads contain chemi-

cals which produce dioxins that are harmful to the body. Each pad also takes around 800 years to decompose.

According to Jessamijn Miedema, co-founder of EcoFemme, the popularity associated with disposable pads is due to the use-and-throw mentality associated with it.

"Disposable pads mean that they are convenient. They can be thrown and not thought of again," said Miedema. "It also speaks to their aspirational levels because

the women are told that disposable pads are more hygienic when they are not so."

According to WaterAid, 89% of women in India use cloth during menstruation, but it can pose health hazards if not cleaned properly.

Miedema explained that healthy conversation and dialogue had to take place in order for rural women to make informed choices on their menstrual hygiene.

"Menstruation is not spoken

about in our community, and if it is, it comes along with layers of dirtiness, impurity and it's considered a curse," said Nikethana Venkatesh, facilitator of EcoFemme's Pad for Pad programme.

"We face challenges of opening up these conversations among women and getting them to think about these issues on a cultural level."

EcoFemme's educational wing conducts workshops with rural women and girls on menstruation

and menstrual hygiene.

Venkatesh said that a major part of their work included women to consciously rethink their own bodies and habits associated with it.

This all-women's group has thus far sold over 1 lakh cloth pads and distributed around 13,500 cloth pads among rural girls.

They also provide subsidized cloth pads for economically-disadvantaged rural women, with the cost of one pad being Rs. 50.

'All journalism is investigative'

Journalist narrates her experiences in 'Victims for sale'

VIDHI VERMA

Chennai: All journalism is investigative but sting operations and prying had no place in it, said N. Ram, Chairman of The Hindu Group of Publications at the launch of 'Victims for Sale' written by Nischinta Amarnath.

On the risks faced a journalist investigating a story, Ram said India was one of the 13 countries

where the killers of journalists acted with impunity. Most victims were journalists from small towns investigating corruption or political misconduct. They were killed either by the arm of the State or some gangster.

"Murder is bad but even worse is the message that gets across — that you can do this and get away with it. Nothing happens to the killers of journalists," he added.

Author and journalist Amarnath's book was released in January 2018.

Ram said, "There is a strong autobiographical element to the book. It teaches you about the Indian notions of honor."

Over 100 people attended the book launch on February 9 at Odyssey bookstore in Adyar. The book launch was followed by a panel discussion on investigative journalism and women in media. "Each character in the book is an amalgam of the experiences I've encountered as a journalist," said the author. She added that on-the-job learning was intrinsic to a journalist.

Amarnath said that one of the key messages of her novel was to portray a sense of displacement of cultural identities against the backdrop of protectionism.

On what went into the making of her book, she said that she did extensive fieldwork in New York, conducted interviews with Scotland Yard officials, BBC a

"There is a strong autobiographical element to the book. It teaches you about the Indian notions of honor."

-N. Ram, senior journalist

NBC News employees and barristers.

"The approach of dealing with things as a journalist is what helped me the most with the book," she added.

One of the panelists, Sanjay Pinto said that investigative journalism was becoming a catch phrase today and there was absolutely no privacy at all.

"Everything has been made easy for journalists today. There is no trouble of sifting through loads of documents. In our times, there were greater challenges," he added.

Alexis S. Wolf, a panelist, said it was crucial for women to pursue a career in journalism. "Women have far greater access to people and places that their male counterparts don't have," she added.

The absence of legal backing is a potential threat to journalism today. Pinto added that an integration of in-house talent with domain knowledge was missing in news organizations today, and aiming to achieve an amalgam of both would help improve the quality of journalism.

Amarnath's two non-fiction publications, 'The Voyage of Excellence' and 'Citi and its Scuffle with the Watchdogs' were published in 2005 and 2014.



(L-R) Dr. Anastasia Veneti, Sampath Kumar, Devadas Rajaram, Dr. Einar Thorsen, V.S. Sambandan | SHRUTI



N. Ram present at the book launch. | NISH AMARNATH FB

Where you learn to stir or shake

SRIJA PODDER

Chennai: Ever wondered how a bartender mixes a mean cocktail? You can also learn how.

The Indian Institute of Bartending (IIBT) claims to be the first bartending institute in the country to provide jobs in cruise ships during the nationwide job fair conducted year.

A member of the trust that runs the college, said, "The fact that our students as well as students from other institutes in different cities can take part in it and get lifetime placements makes it the 8th biggest hospitality job fair in Asia."

The students undertake a 3-month certification course to acquire bartending skills.

There is also a six month diploma course that teaches bar management in addition to bartending skills.

The principal, Utpal Kumar Laha, said, "In IIBT we purely concentrate on knowledge and education. We don't do outdoor catering business unlike other colleges."

The students learn to mix different kinds of liquors and make original cocktails. The labs are fully loaded with liquor which allows the students to experiment.

A student said, "Many feel there is no need to attend a bartending school but it helps you to get hands-on experience at serving your customers efficiently in a crowded pub."

The institute claims that the students will get placed in 5-star hotels and cruise ships.

The institute also plans to organize a national level bartending competition next month.



A still from the movie The Sea The Flying Fish, being screened at the festival.

Films from Iran screened at festival

SUSMITHA SURESH

Chennai: The three-day Iranian Film Festival organised by Indo Cine Appreciation Foundation (ICAF) in association with the Culture House of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mumbai came to a close on February 14 at the Russian Centre of Science & Culture, Alwarpet. "Chennai has a very good audience for Iranian Films," said E Thangaraj, General Secretary ICAF and the Festival Director of the Chennai International Film Festival.

The festival, conducted yearly, screened five films selected by the Culture House of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the audience here at Chennai including 'Bodyguard' directed by Ebrahim Hatamikia which was nominated for five

awards and won five at international film festivals.

"The screening is mainly for the members of the society," said B Loganathan, a member of ICAF, "But

We regularly conduct a minimum of at-least two film festivals a month. The movies come from various embassies and consulates"

-E. Thangaraj, General Secretary, ICAF

it's also open for the public as well."

The other movies that were screened were 'The Corridor' directed by Behrooz Shoybi, 'The Sea & The Flying Fish' directed by

Mehrdad Ghafarzadeh, 'A Time to Love' directed by Ebrahim Farouzes, and 'Charm' directed by Jalal Dehqani.

"The movie 'A Time To Love' brought tears to my eyes," said V Bhanu, a student at MGR Government Film and Television Institute. "It was about a boy with disabilities and how his family were ashamed of themselves because of it. The acting was beyond brilliant."

"We regularly conduct a minimum of at-least two film festivals a month. The movies come from various embassies and consulates," said Thangaraj. "We've been showcasing films for over 15 years."

ICAF, started in 2003 with just over 100 members has 450 members of which 50 are life members. They also organise film festivals at various colleges in Chennai.

'Fake news is nothing new'

SHRUTI AGRAWAL

Chennai: Fact checking and depending on multiple sources for information were two things that could help eliminate fake news, said Sampath Kumar, a veteran journalist.

"Fake news is not new to India. When our currency was demonetised, messages on WhatsApp said that Rs. 2,000 notes were fitted with a chip making it difficult to counterfeit those notes," he added.

Sampath Kumar recalled an incident during Uttarakhand deluge when a leading national daily carried the news that a helicopter organised by the Gujarat Government under the then Chief Minister Narendra Modi had rescued 15,000 people in a day. The next day people questioned the credibility of the claim. The reporter concerned then revealed that he had been given the information by a Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) spokesperson.

These observations came during a panel discussion on 'Fake news, populist politics and the need for

another education' organised at the Asian College of Journalism (ACJ) here on February 13 as part of Festival of Learning - India 2018 by Bournemouth University (BU).

The panel comprised Sampath Kumar, Head of Radio Stream, ACJ, and Devadas Rajaram, New Media faculty at ACJ; Dr. Einar Thorsen, Associate Professor of Journalism and Communication at BU; and V.S. Sambandan from The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy. The panel was chaired by Dr. Anastasia Veneti, Senior Lecturer in Marketing Communications at BU.

The speakers spoke extensively on the dissemination of fake news and its ramifications.

Devadas Rajaram gave an instance where Janet Cooke, an American Journalist was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for a story published by The Washington Post; it was later discovered that the story had been fabricated.

"News literacy is the need of the hour. It should be mandatory in school syllabus. This is what Ger-

many has done," he added.

Dr. Einar Thorsen talked about the dynamics of news, and the need to differentiate the fake from the fact.

"US President Donald Trump has an extraordinary cavalier attitude towards truth. Even in the United Kingdom, the fourth estate has been attacked by organizations. To combat fake news, the U.K. Government launched Fake News Unit," he added.

V.S. Sambandan said, "The asymmetry in dissemination of news was flattened by the advent of internet. Now we are not only the consumers of news but also its producers."

He underlined the importance of journalists being consistent with knowledge and facts. He also mentioned truth, goodness, and usefulness- Socrates' three filters and their importance.

"If a politician is lying, it is good. He is doing his job. We as journalists should take a step back and assess. We have become laid-back journalists," he added.

Eye-popping handicraft for your Valentine

SHRUTI AGRAWAL

Chennai: A pre-Valentine Pop-up exhibition was organised by a city-based start-up Pop N Roll at The English Tea Room in Alwarpet on February 10. As many as 13 new brands displayed their produce — handmade footwear, trinkets, silver jewellery, organic beauty products, cotton clothing, sweet, cloth jewellery, and doodle art.

Deepan, owner of Brownie Heaven, said "In exhibitions we cater to people coming from different demographics. These people understand the subtleties that make a product different. Therefore, we can bank on them for honest reviews and word-of-mouth publicity."

At Brownie Heaven, roasted cashew nuts, peanut butter, chocolate chip cookies and brownies are handmade.

At Pot Of Silver, one finds glinting silver nose pins, anklets, rings, bracelets, earrings, and toe-rings at reasonable prices. For handmade and hand embroidered silk, cotton sarees and blouses, Shruthi's is unparalleled.

Stachoo, a company started by Faiyaz Muhammad prints mini 3-D

figurines and replicas of your choice. They also make use of Augmented Reality (AR) that breathes life into pictures.

Co-owners Of Pop N Roll, Shiv Dhanya and Infanta Ziona Sushmitha felt that scores of exhibitions organised in the city focused on trousseau, lehengas, heavy gowns, and expensive sarees that could not be purchased every day.

Dhanya said, "People want to buy small stuff that are of good quality, and different. We organised this exhibition keeping these very interests in mind - affordability and novelty."

These entrepreneurs started Pop N Roll a month back. Patience and stability, which they describe as the necessary traits for any entrepreneur, have earned them recognition.



Pop-up exhibition organised by Pop N Roll at The English Tea Room in Alwarpet. | SHRUTI

City sleuths plying their trade in a legally grey area

TANISHAA NADKAR

Chennai: Private detective agencies may be operating in a legally grey area when it comes to following persons and clicking photographs without their knowledge.

A major portion of the cases taken on by private detective agencies deal with extramarital affairs where the police can do little investigating. In such cases, these photographs remain one of the most important pieces of evidence.

"We do a lot of pre and post matrimonial cases and most of our clients are women who suspect their husbands are having an affair. They often feel more comfortable talking to us than to the police as private agencies can be most sympathetic and understanding," said

Goutham Sundar of Alpha Detective Services which is based in Chennai but has freelancers all over the state.

While following photographing and recording a person in a private space is a clear violation of their Right to Privacy, doing so in public even without their consent is perfectly legal.

"Such photographs and written reports by detective agencies are considered evidence and can be grounds for divorce," said city based lawyer Nandita Krishnan.

Although Right to Privacy was not declared a fundamental right till 2017, according to The Private Detective Agencies (Regulation) Bill, 2007, the breaching of an individual's right to privacy is punishable. Despite this, some agencies



may flout rules during investigation.

"We have faced backlash from some persons but we have always managed to deal with it," said Goutham.

Agencies also stress on the need for anonymity and confidentiality and reveal information only to the client.

"It is best if the person being investigated does not find out where the information is coming from which is why we ask our clients to be careful with it as well. Many people do lodge complaints about being followed around but we have not had any so far," said N. Ramesh Kumar, Managing Director of Golden Detective Agency which has a staff of 15 people of which only two are detectives.

The agency is also involved in providing security personnel to companies, asset verification and running background checks on potential employees.

Ramesh Kumar founded the agency after working at Globe Detective Agency, which has branches all over the country, for over 10 years. Sitting in his brightly decorated office and a whiteboard with words like "sting" written on it, he said that no strict qualifications were required to become a detective.

"During interviews, we only look for a good level of intelligence in the candidate along with a degree and English skills. We give them all the training they would need and the duration depends on the candidate's ability," he said.

Despite this, many detectives have a background in criminology and are familiar with basic legal practices in the country.

Many agencies also provide pre-matrimonial packages to run background checks on their financial status, vices, previous marriages and any undisclosed information relating to the entire family of the person.

"A person cannot be expected to follow their spouse around but sometimes people put up surveillance in their homes if they have suspicions of infidelity which may not be illegal in the court," said Nandita Krishnan.

"Sometimes, Right to Information on the part of the one person may override the Right to Privacy of another."