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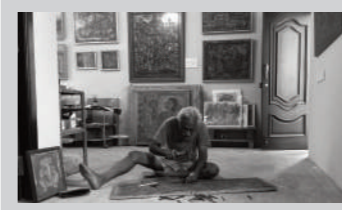
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Kamal's party to fight corruption

PRATIBHA SHARMA

Chennai: Tamil film star Kamal Haasan launched his political party 'Makkal Needhi Maiam' (People's Justice Center) and hoisted the flag carrying the party's symbol at Othakkadai ground in Madurai on February 21.

The 63-year-old actor, who is on a three-day statewide tour, visited APJ Abdul Kalam's home in Rameswaram and spoke about his entry into politics. From Rameswaram he went to Ramanathapuram and his birthplace Paramakudi.

The Hindu reported that what started as 200 people at Kalam's house grew to a crowd of 2000 people at Paramakudi.

"I am no more a cinema star, I am the lamp of your house. Protect me and keep me lit," the actor told a gathering at Ramanathapuram.

Calling his party Makkal Needhi Maiam (Centre for People's Justice), Kamal Haasan said "Good education must reach all, communal and religious instigation must end. We will achieve it and be an example to all. If we end corruption, there will be no dearth or stoppage of amenities or access to services."

Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party leader Arvind Kejri-



Kamal Haasan at the launch of his party 'Makkal Needhi Maiaim' at Madurai | THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

felt Haasan's political venture depended on various factors.

"Kamal's success in politics depends on how attractive or relevant he is politically. An average voter likes to vote for a winning candidate rather than a person he likes," said G.C Shekhar, a senior journalist.

Duraisamy Ravindaran, a political observer, said "Kamal's success depends on his political strategy. So far, he has maintained anti-BJP and anti-AIADMK stand, and people might support him. Whether he succeeds in politics or not, he will surely cut into AIADMK vote."

Haasan who has a strained relationship with AIADMK was in news since past few months due to his acerbic political statements against party. The actor is also being seen as an opportunist who has conveniently chosen to speak against the party after the death of AIADMK leader Jayalalitha's death.

"Anti-corruption cannot alone be a plank. He still needs to come out with an agenda, not a full manifesto but five to six points regarding what he is going to do. Until he does that, I don't think he will win", said G.C Shekar.

Shivagami, a domestic help, said that although she liked Kamal

Haasan's movies, she wouldn't vote for him. "He is going to change once he enters into politics," she said.

G.C Shekhar remained sceptical of Kamal Haasan's fanbase turning into votes as he believed that he had unnecessarily antagonized the Hindu fanbase, by making controversial statements.

This English speaking middle class and the urban population which comprise the bulk of Haasan's fanbase would not vote for him, he said.

"There is a possibility that the DMK and the Kamal Haasan's party might enter into an alliance to prevent the split in anti-AIADMK votes," Shekar added.

Ravichandran, a college student, said "Haasan is playing ideology-driven politics whereas, in rural Tamil Nadu, caste is still a strong political factor. So Kamal might win one or two seats, but capturing power in the state is a distant dream for him."

Nirupama, a seafood vendor said that she would still prefer to vote for "Amma's party" - the AIADMK led by Jayalalitha.

"Kamal Haasan talks of putting an end to distributing freebies. Where will poor people like us go? Amma was a bold lady, she cared for the poor", she said.



Customers line up at other service providers' outlets after Aircel network crashes | NARAYANAN V

Aircel network dies overnight

NARAYANAN V

Chennai: Airtel and Vodafone showrooms in the city had a field day on February 22 after thousands of Aircel users thronged them for new connections following Aircel's late night suspension of service.

However, Aircel users complained that the other service providers were taking advantage of the situation and exploiting them.

Aircel's sudden shutdown of operation came as a rude shock for thousands of its customers who swamped the showrooms of other network providers to port their connections or to get new connections.

"They know to fleece ignorant customers with caller tune messages, but they cannot send intimation before suspending the service," said J.M. Yuvaraj (43), who runs a water purifier business.

"I have had this number for years but never experienced such a poor coverage as in the last few days," he added.

Many Airtel and Vodafone showrooms were crowded with senior citizens, housewives, office-goers and daily laborers seeking to retain their Aircel numbers but use the service of other available networks.

Most people want to hold on to the Aircel number because they have linked it to their Aadhaar cards and bank accounts; they need it for their online transactions.

If they get a new number they need to register it with the banks which will take time.

"I get my work assigned over phone on daily basis but without this connection now I have no clue how to reach my mason," said C Ravi (52), a construction worker, who was at the Airtel showroom in

Velachery. "They say it will take minimum 7 to 10 working days for activation, what will I do so long without connectivity?" he asked.

Making most out of the situation, some Airtel and Vodafone showrooms are seen insisting that Aircel customers take postpaid connections if they wanted to retain their old number.

While post-paid connections come with hidden costs, prepaid ones are under the control of the subscriber.

"They are not accepting requests for prepaid number portability; they asked me to come after two days," says E. Perumal (40), a hardware merchant in Velachery. "Without phones it is very difficult to

run our operations" he added.

A saleswoman at an Airtel showroom in Vijayanagar said, "We are facing very high demand for porting hence unable to accept any fresh prepaid requests."

Aircel customers can port their number to Airtel or Vodafone by taking postpaid connections on a payment of Rs. 25 towards SIM charges and submission of a copy of the Aadhaar card and biometric scanning.

"Customers are free to revert to prepaid connection any time after 90 days from conversion," the saleswoman added.

K Krishnan (55), an auto driver from Pallikarnai, said "This will create unnecessary monthly burden on us."

According to news reports, Aircel's late night network suspension came as a result of Idea cellular suspending its interconnect services consequence to Aircel's failure to honour the payment commitments despite several reminders since November 2017.

New 3-phase EMU fails on its second day

PURNIMA S DAS

Chennai: The advanced three phase Electrical Multiple Unit (EMU) introduced into service on the Chennai Beach - Tambaram - Chengalpattu route on February 20 has failed to function the next day.

The station master at Chennai Beach station said, "Today, it started from Chengalpattu and reached here at 11:15 p.m. in the morning but will not function for the rest of the day due to technical faults."

Though, he did not specify the exact problem but called it 'minor glitches.'

Mohan Gandhi, a motorman said, "Yesterday, it made six rounds instead of nine." As per the proposed plan, there will be six services between Chennai Beach and Chengalpattu and three services between Chennai Beach and Tambaram.

B Umapathy, Senior Section Engineer (SSE) said, "This is just in the 'trial phase' and problems like these are bound to happen with newer technologies."

However, the press release from the Southern Railways on February 19 did not mention that it was in the trial period.

The conventional EMU train speed is restricted to 96 kmph whereas the new three phase EMU train can run up to 105 kmph. This 12 car rake has the provision for 4852 standing passengers while the conventional rake has the capacity of 3768 standing passengers, according to Umapathy.

S Sudha, a commuter said, "Yesterday, I took the new train from Chennai Beach to Tambaram and it was impressive. The CCTV (Closed circuit television) cameras were there and with increasing number of chain snatching incident, it is the need of the hour."

R Kumaran, another commuter said, "The GPS based passenger system in the new train is an attractive feature which will give real time location unlike the current one which gives us pre-recorded announcements."

M Madhu, a psychology student, said "I hope this does not end up like many other governmental facilities - all glitter and on paper with zero delivery in practice."

K Krishnakumar, Inspector, Public Grievances Cell in Southern Railways said, "We will make sure that it will run smoothly."

No tree was felled: Anna University

MOHINI CHANDOLA

Chennai: Anna University has dismissed as "false" and "misleading" reports in a newspaper which said rare trees were among those that were felled for construction work on the campus.

V K Stalin, Estate Officer, said none of the rare or endangered trees had been felled, as the newspaper implied.

Three buildings have been demolished and two neem trees uprooted for the construction of new buildings for Geology, Medical Science and English departments behind Knowledge Park, according to the official.

The buildings were initially used as women's hostel until the hostel was relocated across the road.

"The papers are flashing wrong information about us. These people don't understand that they were cut for a reason, but we planted more trees after the cyclone than we've cut now."

Anna University, which is home to nearly 50 species of trees, suffered a massive blow to its green cover after being hit by Cyclone Vardah in December 2016.

K. Murugamandan, Horticulturist at the University said, "After Vardah hit the city, we planted thousands of saplings and I personally took care of them."

In April, a "Massive Tree Plantation" programme was held on the campus with the concept of "One Student One tree", i.e., to plant one tree per student. By September 27, 2017, more than 2, 00,000 saplings were planted on

the main campus and in the affiliated colleges as well.

Regarding the new construction, he said, "The neem trees had to be cut down since we were unable to transplant them to a different location. They would not

be able to survive. The banyan tree in the vicinity has only been pruned, not cut."

"The entire area was a jungle, filled with shrubs of Seemai Karuvellam (Prosopis Juliflora) which has short, green leaves, which sucks up the ground water. We only cleared the bushes as per the High Court order," he added.

A Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) leader, Vajrapuri Gopalsamy filed a petition in 2015 seeking to uproot the Semmai Karuvellam shrub from several areas since it drained out groundwater. After 2 years, the High Court ordered that the shrub be removed from poromboke land, lakes and certain institutions. However students on the campus had other views. Meera, an Electronics student said, "Our college is known for its green cover and it also adds to the view from classroom. There are so many monkeys and now they're going to lose their habitat. It is environmental degradation." Avish, a student of Material Science said, "It's very cruel to cut trees and it will get hot without them; but it is necessary to do so."

Apart from common species like neem, tamarind and palmyra, rare species of trees like Pongamia Pinnata, Ashoka, Odina and Peltophorum tree are conserved on the campus with drip irrigation method.



The Banyan tree behing Knowledge Park was pruned and not felled | MOHINI CHANDOLA

Online gaming lounges become Chennai's latest fad

NEHAL CHALIAWALA

Chennai: The mouse clicks rapidly as Praveen taps the left button multiple times a second, his face glued to the computer screen. His thumb is not idle either; there are three buttons to be clicked by his thumb. His mouse, unlike the regular ones, has eight buttons.

E Praveen who manages Playerz Gaming, a 24x7 computer gaming lounge in Nungambakkam, is playing Defense of the Ancients 2, or Dota2, as it is colloquially known, a popular strategy game. A graduate in Statistical Studies from the Loyola College, Praveen is an avid Dota2 player.

Gamers and gaming lounges hosting titles like Dota2, CS:GO, League of Legends, et cetera are a common sight these days - the cul-

ture has arrived in our city.

Numerous gaming hotspots have sprung up in Chennai over the past few years - LXG, Yuri's Yard, Arknemesi, Blur, to name a few. These places no longer hide behind the guise of a cyber cafe - they mean business. They invest heavily in expensive gaming equipment and in building the perfect ambience for gaming.

With dim theme lighting, backlit keyboards, mouse and headphones, high-end gaming systems and plush swivel chairs, these lounges have become the perfect recluse for gamers. These computers are assembled systems configured for gaming with a special high speed disk and a huge memory bank.

A good gaming system can easily cost upwards of Rs 1 lakh and that is just the cost of the CPU

(Central Processing Unit), says Praveen. The cost of the other paraphernalia is over and above that. "These are luxuries that all can't afford at home, so they come here," says Praveen.

"We get all types of customers - college students, school kids, doctors, engineers," says Yuri, proprietor of Yuri's Yard in Nungambakkam. "The fun comes from playing together. That's why they come to the cafes; they won't get that fun playing alone at home." The gamers seldom know each other by their real names. They are known by their gaming aliases in their circles.

Globally, video gaming has been a billion-dollar industry since the 80s. Professional gamers earn by the millions. "However, it is still in its nascent stages in India,"

says Praveen. A major reason for this is that professional gaming is not yet recognised as a career here. Parents encourage children to pursue the 'safer' conventional jobs.

"It's difficult to find professional players in Chennai. You may find a few in cities like Mumbai, Pune or Bangalore," he said. To become a professional gamer one needs to have a top global ranking in their game and to achieve that one needs to put in hours of work over several months, he explains.

U Aakash, who goes by the gaming alias 'Dante', is a final year Statistical Studies student from the Loyola College. He has an appreciable global ranking in Dota2 but has given up the game till his exams get over in April.

"You first have to get a degree and then you have to get a job. Ga-



ming is considered no more than just a hobby," he says.

Combined with the high cost of the gaming gear, it is no wonder that gaming is still in its infancy in

India. However, with the proliferation of such lounges, a vibrant gaming culture is brewing in the city attracting dedicated as well as leisure gamers.

Revised fares affect taxi drivers

Daily earnings slide down by Rs.300; Uber and Ola offer hard competition

NITHIN KUMAR

Chennai: The Prepaid Taxi Association at the Anna International Airport here has reduced fares by Rs 50 to Rs 60 to compete against cab companies such as Uber and Ola Cabs.

"This is a very desperate step that we took due to our competition. We hope our business will improve after this," said Srinivasan, an Association official.

The reduced fares still do not attract passengers, but have affected the drivers as their salaries have been cut.

"Previously, we earned Rs 800 a day and we did a maximum of seven fares. But our salaries have now been reduced to Rs 500," said P Muthu, a driver.

Even with the reduced fares, most of the passengers book an Ola Cab or an Uber. These companies also have kiosks and pick up points at the arrival gates.

"I booked my cab while I was waiting for my luggage, so when I come out I wouldn't have to wait for long," said Chandrasekar, a passenger who arrived from Muscat.

According to P Muthu and other

drivers in the Prepaid Taxi Association, there are numerous hidden charges that the other cab companies impose on the passengers.

"Those taxis (Uber/ Ola) charge more for traffic, night-hours, bad weather and for waiting. But the rates for prepaid taxis are fixed regardless of all those conditions," Muthu said.

The new fares of the prepaid taxis are: Rs 400 for areas within eight km from the International Airport. The areas include T.Nagar, K.K.Nagar, Ashok Nagar and Nesapakkam. Previously the fares

DESTINATION	NEW FARE
T.NAGAR	Rs.400
MOUNT ROAD	Rs.450
GREAMS RD.	Rs.450
MYLAPORE	Rs.450
ALWARPET	Rs.430
ADYAR	Rs.390
MAMBALAM	Rs.400

for these routes were Rs 450/ Rs 460.

The fare is Rs 450 for areas such as Alwarpet, R.A.Puram and Mylapore.

"The majority of our fares are to Mount Road and T Nagar where there are hotels. So we are charging only Rs 400 for those areas, which were previously Rs 450 or Rs 500," said Kannan, a driver.

Madhivannan, another driver at the airport, said "The Uber and Ola Cabs show a discount price on the Application, but they add the cost that was cut and impose it on future fares we take. So, we end up paying them all the money for the ride. There is no discount."

A first time Ola Cabs fare to K.K.Nagar from the international airport is Rs. 450 approximately.

"For a second trip from the airport to my residence in two months, I paid Rs. 470 plus change," said Dr. Sarojini from the Hindu Mission Hospital in Tambaram, who recently used an

Uber from the airport to her residence in West Mambalam.

There are 304 taxis at the airport, according to the association and only 100 taxis are being used in a day at present.

"I parked my taxi here yesterday at 10 AM and it has still not been called. And there are 50 taxis behind me, waiting for their turn," said Kumar, who was cleaning his black and yellow car at the Prepaid Taxi parking lot near the Airport Metro Station.

The cars are equipped with safety features such as the ABS, disk brakes and the older cars that lack these features are regularly maintained.

"Out of the 304 taxis, we have 30 Hindustan Motor Ambassadors. But when people see the Ambassadors, they think of it as very old cars and do not book them," said Madhivannan. "But, the Ambassadors are 2008 and 2009 year models and all our other cars are Maruti Swift Dzire, which are only 2 years old," he added.

Passengers prefer the taxis which have an Uber or an Ola Cabs sticker.

"We have been in business for 60 years now. Ever since there were passengers at the Airport, we have been in operation. But these multinational companies are new and have reached a point where they have put us out of business," said Srinivasan.



Taxis awaiting their turn in the airport parking lot

| NITHIN KUMAR



The new tenements at Perumbakkam | PRASHASTI S.

Patience is the key, says TNSCB

PRASHASTI SINGH

Chennai: People who were evicted from slums along the Cooum River and resettled elsewhere in the city are complaining of lack of basic facilities like transportation, healthcare and education and that the government was not doing anything about it.

"We have been shifted to an isolated area and even going to the hospital in cases of emergency is difficult for us. School children travel for more than one hour to and from school daily. To go anywhere, we have to walk to the bus stop which is far away from our block, and then we pay more than we can afford to travel, since every place is far away from here," said Lalitha Ramesh who shifted to Perumbakkam from Greams Road three months ago.

Twenty-four hour water and electricity supply is being provided to the residents, but it is difficult for them to earn the money to pay bills. Lower job opportunity is also a pressing issue. Ramesh Bharati, 30, says, "There were a lot of job opportunities near our old house. Most men worked as labourers or drivers, and most women worked as domestic helps. The flats they have given us are for the rich since they are surrounded by facilities that only the rich can avail. If we get work, we manage

to earn about Rs. 5000 monthly. How can we go to these places? Either we should be able to afford sending our kids to international schools, or we should be able to pay their daily travel allowance to the city where their schools are located."

However, the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (TNSCB), which is responsible for the Resettlement and Rehabilitation plan of this initiative, has claimed to have provided all basic facilities like healthcare, soft skills training, and free transportation for children going to school.

Nirmal Raj, Community Development Officer of TNSCB, said, "The places where they were living previously were extremely unhygienic and the flats they have been given now are clean and comfortable. Even though they are a little far away from the city, they face no problems because we have collaborated with the Metropolitan Transport Corporation (MTC) and have provided them with free bus passes."

"These facilities take time to reach the people. They have to be patient. The ones who have been shifted in the past few months might not be getting these facilities, but our animators and supervisors will ensure that they benefit from the facilities at the earliest," he added.

Poor education haunts residents

PRASHASTI SINGH

Chennai: Families displaced from the banks of Cooum River to Perumbakkam say that the distance between their children's schools and their new locality and lack of healthcare facilities top their list of woes.

Sree Yadavendra, 40, said, "My daughter has to travel for one and half hours to and from her school daily by bus. She gets tired due to travelling so much. She comes back home and goes straight to sleep. She devotes very little time to her studies because of her routine."

Many young boys who used to go to schools occasionally have dropped out after being shifted to Perumbakkam.

Hari, 17, said that he did not understand why one should travel so much to go to school. "I would rather stay at home study. I have books at home," he said.

The other problem that troubles the residents is that there are very few affordable hospitals for children around their settlement.

"In case of an emergency, we first have to pay for the long bus ride that takes us to the nearest hospital, and then pay even more for expensive treatment. Earlier we used to go to the Egmore Hospital, since it was very close to our house," said Ramesh Bharati, a resident, referring to the Government Hospital for Children, Egmore.

Also, most children play on the roads or in front of their houses in the evening. "At around 6-6:30 pm, people consume alcohol and roam around. Since a proper playing space for children has not been created, children are forced to spend time among these people," Bharti added.

However, the Community Development Officer of Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (TNSCB), Nirmal Raj, said, "The board has collaborated with an NGO called World Vision to provide children with the kind of environment they need.."

Legal issues delay MRTS project

NARAYANAN V

Chennai: Work on the 3.5 kilometre stretch connecting Velachery to St. Thomas Mount station through Mass Rapid Transit System (MRTS) has been delayed for more than three years on account of legal tussles in acquiring land for laying the last 500 metres of the track.

The St. Thomas Mount railway station with an Electric Multiple Unit (EMU) railway line and a metro rail station is a major connecting hub for thousands of residents from the nearby suburbs such as Adambakkam, Velachery, Madipakkam, Medavakkam, Nanganallur, Vanuvampet and Puzhuthivakkam.

"I get down at Velachery station and take a bus to reach my destination. Had this line be laid I can directly get down there," feels 28 year old B Ramya, a resident of Nanganallur, who works for an IT firm in Thiruvanniyur.

Nearly 90 per cent of the track laying work on the 3.5 kilometre elevated stretch had been completed when the project landed in a legal trouble in acquiring the land required for completion.

A section of residents had earlier moved the Madras High Court seeking revised compensation under Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 as against the old 1984 land acquisition act. The pending litigation has delayed the completion of project which was scheduled to be completed by December 2016.

"I feel the landowners are justified in asking for a fair compensation as the current market rates are way higher than what the government offers them," said a tenant residing at the disputed site in Thillaiganaganagar.

Meanwhile, construction work on two railway stations along the 3.5 kilometre stretch in the Inner Ring road (IRR) has also slowed down after the track laying work was stalled due to the pending litigation.

Initiated in 2008, the elevated railway line between Velachery and St. Thomas Mount is considered to be longest-delayed project in the history of Chennai railway division.

If executed, the plan will enable the city residents to take the Metro Rail from Koyambedu upto any station along the Chennai Beach-Velachery stretch after changing at St. Thomas Mount. Residents and IT employees from Thiruvanniyur, Adyar and Besant Nagar stretch can reach the Airport or Koyambedu bus stand via St. Thomas Mount station much faster once this project reaches completion.

Evicted Rattan Bazar hawkers back

MOHINI CHANDOLA

Chennai: Street hawkers on Rattan Bazar Road, near Pookadai Police Station have returned to the sidewalk days after the eviction drive conducted by Greater Chennai Corporation ended on February 6.

Most of the vendors rely on selling fruits and vegetables, mobile accessories and maligh-pu flowers for their income.

Meghala, a 22-year-old who strings and sells jasmine flowers by the sidewalk said, "We were born on these streets but now we have no rights. But we will not leave. We will stay here."

She continues, "Selling and

earning is all I know. I earn to feed my children and my family."

The vendors claim that the police used brute force and destroyed their stalls and personal belongings in order to evict them. They were forced to re-open their stalls because it was the only source of income for most vendors.

Several women who couldn't afford another stall sold flowers placed on old newspapers by the road. Murthi, a 45-year-old who sells mobile parts and accessories said, "Police have made lives difficult for us. We have no option but to open stalls here. Where else can we go?"

According to the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and

Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, every zone is required to form a Town Vending Committee (TVC) which is responsible for "issuing the certificate of vending for that vending zone and the remaining persons will be accommodated in any adjoining vending zone to avoid relocation."

There are no TVCs formed in Chennai yet. However, last year in October, members were nominated from the Corporation to issue identity cards for street hawkers.

Murthi continues, "We were supposed to be rehabilitated to another place. Had they given us a place to stay that would have been enough for us."

A police official at Pookadai

Traffic Police Station, A. Arun who supervised the drive on Feb 5 said, "We conducted the drive on a random basis everyday and every vendor with or without license was removed from the footpath."

Regarding the accommodation of unemployed vendors he said that it was not their responsibility to allocate them a vending zone. He said that the order was only to evict them. He also stated that the vendors were not given an eviction notice beforehand. Neither the Deputy Commissioner nor the Zonal Officer at Basin Bridge was available for comment. The street hawkers continue to sell and earn by the footpath, undaunted by the police.

Traffic signal helps few commuters

PRIYA LALWANI

Chennai: The new traffic signal on the Rajiv Gandhi IT Expressway fails to benefit the vehicles from Madhya Kailash as they cannot take a U-turn there; they have to go all the way to the Tidel Park signal to do a U-turn.

The 1.5-km-long stretch from Tidel Park to Madhya Kailash junction had no cuts in the median. Now a traffic signal has been installed there after the median was cut near the Indira Nagar MRTS station.

Commuters headed towards Adyar from the Tidel Park-end of the road are the only beneficiaries of the new junction. They can make a quick right-turn at this signal into Indira Nagar instead of travelling all the way to Madhya Kailash and making a U-turn to reach the same destination. Vehicles from Ramanujam IT Park can also use the signal to make a U-Turn towards Tidel Park instead of going



Barricades have been put to stop access for commuters coming from Madhya Kailash | PRIYA LALWANI

all the way to Madhya Kailash to do the same.

Traffic coming from Indira Nagar have to go to Tidel Park and take a U-turn to proceed towards Madhya Kailash. It would have been easier for them to take a right turn at the nw signal; but that is not permitted. "I have to deny passengers' requests to go to Sardar Patel side of the road. If they insist,

junction, the situation remains unchanged from this side of the signal."

Traffic police have been put on duty at the signal to assist the commuters. The offenders are not being fined as they are allowed a grace-period to get used to the new signal. "There's less traffic coming from Madhya Kailash as compared to Tidel Park, Ramanujam and Elnet IT parks," said the traffic constable B. Suresh Kumar.

He added that a month-long trial period had been assigned to monitor the traffic before finalizing the signal's functioning.

Traffic inspector S.Vinayakam said, "The directions are not yet finalized, there's a proposal by the TNRDC to expand the median cut to 20 metres as opposed to the current 10 metres to allow access to both sides because the main problem here is the cut's inability to incorporate large vehicles coming from all the sides of Adyar, Madhya Kailash and the IT parks."

A burning issue: the high cost of dying in Chennai

PURNASNEHA S.

The ailing widow of 45-year-old Srinivasan S (name changed) who jumped off his apartment and committed suicide due to financial distress last year, was forced to pledge her jewels in order to perform the last rites of her husband.

Ambulance services, freezer boxes, priests, a hearse to carry the body to the crematorium and, in some cases, professional mourners and dancers, are all expensive these days. Most services are offered for free by the Chennai Corporation, but poor management and the lack of awareness among people is leading to an increase in

exploitation.

Chandra Sekaran, a resident of Dharmapuram, who wanted to give a low-key farewell to his father, was forced to spending Rs. 20,000 — a package that included a freezer box, a priest, a van and three garlands that were later shredded on the roads that lead to the Velankandu Gas Burial Ground in Anna Nagar. "In that moment of complete emotional vulnerability, additional garlands sounded perfect. But later, when these contractors showed up with a bill of Rs.3000 only for those garlands, I was shocked to see extent of manipulation I was put through," he said. The Chennai Corporation charges Rs 250 for freezer boxes



Death - an expensive affair | PURNASNEHA S

but private contractors charge between Rs.3000 and Rs.5000 a day. Unlike the Corporation's freezer boxes that take a minimum of five hours to reach the venue, the private ones are delivered within 20 minutes of a phone call being

made.

Additionally, the private contractors also help in arranging priests, mourners, dancers and an ambulance under a "package deal."

Gaana Viji, 37, who has been singing Marana

Gaana (funeral songs) at funerals since the age of seven, charges between Rs.6000 and Rs.40,000 per performance that goes on for nine hours straight. "I perform mostly for deaths that happen in North Chennai since the people

are more appreciative of the art. Recently, a young man from the Government Hospital had called me. Though he was willing to pay me Rs 1 lakh, I rejected the offer because he said I could sing only for five hours. For me it's my art before the money," said the 35-year-old singer. However there are some NGOs that have stepped in.

A J Hariharan, founder-secretary of the Indian Community Welfare Organisation (ICWO), has taken up a contract for maintaining six crematoriums around the city and since then, most of these services have been offered for free or at a minimal cost.

"We have strictly maintained our policy to not charge for the

cremation per say, but those interested can give some amount of money to the operators at our crematoriums. Only traditional Hindu ceremonial services are charged here," he said.

"Our initial response was shocking. Most people did not know that cremation was free at a Corporation cremation ground," said Hariharan. The Corporation grants Rs.750 per body to contractors like the ICWO for cremation or burial. The expenses for firewood and gas are handled by the contractor who is in-charge for that period. These contractors have framed new norms to improve facilities and make crematoriums more accessible to people.

Students fret over NEET, public exam for Class 11

PURNIMA S DAS

Chennai: With Class 12 State Board examination commencing on March 1 and the National Eligibility Entrance Test (NEET) scheduled on May 6, students are finding it difficult to prepare for both — simultaneously.

From 2006 till 2016, admissions for medical courses across the State were held on the basis of Class 12 marks alone.

But now, NEET, an entrance examination for Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) has been made mandatory.

R Yogalakshmi, a Class 12 student said, “I always wanted to become a doctor so I will sit for NEET but I have not started preparing.”

Yogalakshmi said, “The syllabus of NEET is very different and difficult from what I have studied during my classes so I can only start preparing when my examinations get over.”

M R Jayanthi, assistant headmistress at the Government Higher Secondary School in Velachery, said “Since the time



Getting ready for examinations

| PURNIMA S DAS

NEET has been made compulsory, students have started preferring humanities and commerce over science.”

“Out of 342 students in Class 12, only 15 are going to coaching institutes to prepare for NEET,” she added.

“The NEET exam has fostered the coaching class culture which is undesirable according to many of us,” said S Shanthi, a mother of Class 12 student.

“My child is at school from 8:15 p.m. to 5 p.m. How can I expect

her to study for NEET which has a different syllabus, during the rest of the day?” she said.

Also, Class 11 students are fretting over writing a public examination for the first time. Last year the Tamil Nadu Government decided to introduce board examinations for Class 11 from the coming academic year 2017-18 and issue a consolidated mark sheet based on marks secured in Classes 11 and 12 for students passing out in 2019.

Annie Nirmala, a chemistry teacher said, “Even after the announcement, there is a lack of interest in students.”

Also there is no blueprint for the question papers.

Nirmala added, “We are following the old pattern for the ‘new’ public exam. It has become very difficult for us to guide the students.”

While on the other hand, M Deepa, another chemistry teacher said, “For some students who have taken it seriously, it would mean hard work for three successive years from Class 10 which would unnecessarily lead to distress.”

Adding to the academic burden is the situation at home for some students.

R Raj Sekhar, a commerce teacher said, “Parents, mostly fathers, indulge in heavy drinking which leads to an unhealthy atmosphere for the child to study. A couple of students have come up to us with this problem.”

G R Raj Shekhar, headmaster said, “There is an urgent need for full time counselor in schools to focus on mental health. Every three months, a counselor visits which is certainly not enough.”



Can actor Kamal Haasan pull out a political blockbuster?

| PTI

Will Kamal pull an MGR or Sivaji Ganesan?

PRATIBHA SHARMA

Chennai: Tamil Nadu has historically endured a synergy between cinema and politics. Kamal Haasan’s entry into politics has raised speculation over whether he would be embraced by the people of Tamil Nadu just like they welcomed AIADMK founder M.G Ramachandran and Jayalalitha, or whether he will be categorically rejected like actor Sivaji Ganesan was done.

There are others like “Captain” Vijayakant who are still around but seem to be losing their hold after an impressive entry.

Sivaji Ganesan, a staunch supporter of DMK, left the party to join Indian National Congress after his visit to temple despite being a member of an atheist movement created a controversy. Despite a huge fanbase, Sivaji lost elections from his constituency.

Vijayakant, another actor turned politician, launched his centre-left party Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK). His party won 27 seats in the 2009 Assembly elections but in 2016 his party was routed.

“Actors are crowd pullers. It is not necessary that a crowd puller will also be a mass leader. Therefore, Haasan should organize himself in order to become a mass leader”, said Duraisamy Ravindaran, a political observer.

Ravindaran also believed that Haasan had entered politics only after the death of AIADMK leader Jayalalitha and at a time when DMK supremo Karunanidhi was inactive. Haasan had not yet started groundwork to build the party whereas, actors like Vijayakant started it a lot before entering politics.

“Kamal Haasan is trying his luck in the leadership vacuum. However, starting political groundwork early is not the only factor to win an election. Had it been so, Vijayakant would have won,” he said.

MGR who entered politics much before he rose to fame, had a fan base larger than that of Rajinikanth or Kamal Haasan. Emerging as a mass leader he split from DMK to find his own party AIADMK and enjoyed a huge political success with the support of his fans.

Senior journalist G.C Shekhar said hero worshipping movies, which contributed to MGR’s success, were dying in Tamil Nadu and the story had become the major attraction for cinema lovers.

“This phenomenon which worked for other actors has now changed, and will force Haasan to make an impression as a politician and not as an actor”, he said.

Observers believed that Haasan should not compromise his political credibility by entering into alliances. This factor played against

Vijayakant when he formed his own party and later aligned with AIADMK.

Talking about Sivaji Ganesan, Ravindran said that though he had a huge fanbase he could not convert that into votes. The same could happen to Kamal Haasan who definitely has a smaller fan base.

“Sivaji Ganesan started with a strong party (Congress), whereas Haasan is starting from scratch. He should field candidates for 80 per cent of the seats to at least make a dent in politics or to rise as a major political force,” he said.

Sarvanan (31), a service sector employee said that it was a huge disadvantage for the state when people voted for actors because of affinity towards them. They should vote for knowledgeable people who had political and administrative skills.

Pradeep (42), another worker, said “Kamal cannot stand in politics for long. I have been voting for DMK and will continue to do so. Vijayakant’s character was flawed as he was a drinker, Rajinikanth is not a Tamilian. These people should not be in politics.”

G.C Shekhar said “More than personality based, party and ideology-based voting will take place. Rajni and Kamal are still unquantified forces in politics. Tamil nationalism and Dravidian nationalism are the two saleable commodities in Tamil Nadu.”

Students turn teachers at a slum

PRIYA LALWANI

Chennai: With a wide grin and with energy, children repeat the verses after their teachers, whom they address as ‘akka’ and ‘anna’ in a makeshift study centre on the Aiyundu Gudisai Street in a slum in Chintadripet.

The study centre organized by students of the Madras School of Social Work (MSSW) in collaboration with the Central Organisation of Tamil Nadu Electricity Employees aims at holistic development of over 25 children from this economically deprived locality.

Six students come in shifts to man the study centre, which functions five days a week. They take attendance and follow up personally on those who skip classes.

“Most of my time in the evenings was spent on doing the dishes and washing clothes. I have learned a good amount of English after joining

the centre,” said S. Anandhi.

Poova, 14, carefully reads a newspaper, often struggling with pronunciations. “I have a quiz competition at my school and akka (Janani, MSSW student) says reading the paper will boost my general knowledge,” she said.

The social work students convinced the Central Organisation of Tamil Nadu Electricity Employees to allow their vacant building to be used to establish a centre.

R.Revanth, another MSSW student, said that the main objective of conducting a centre here was to keep the children occupied, because once that was done, the guidance, motivation and behavioural classes were easy to take.

The students began with house visits and counseling parents on the importance of sending their children to the centre. As they got to know more about the community, they were shocked to find that only five students among

the 70 who had completed high school had enrolled for graduation last year.

“The dropout ratio is high. Most of them did not pursue higher studies and are now working as daily wage labourers in the Vanagaram fish market,” said Revanth.

The MSSW students then reached out to local leaders in the slum who helped them conduct counseling sessions and various workshops. With a special focus on soft skills, the class also has three tailoring machines.

“One of the slum dwellers named Kavaya knew how to sew and encouraged more women to come to the class where she teaches them the basics of tailoring,” said Janani. She added that most of these women were witness to domestic violence and worked as maids.

The initiative began in November 2017 and currently 53 students are spread across more than 20 study centres like this one.

Senior citizens worried over savings after scam

NISCHAI VATS

Chennai: The Rs.11, 400 crore fraud in the Punjab National Bank (PNB) has caused concern among senior citizens who have their savings in banks.

Businessmen Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi, owners and promoters of Firestar Diamond and Gitanjali Gems have been accused of borrowing the huge sum from the bank over a period of seven years since 2011 and fleeing the country without repaying the loan.

J Rajashekharan, a member of Tamil Nadu Senior Citizens Association said “Its an unfortunate event, senior citizens are concerned with this and want assurance from the government that their money will be safe and loans would be provided on strict norms.”

Rina Mathew, a member of the All India Federation of Pensioners Associations, said “The pensioners are agitated with the banking scams and due to such activities, the bad debts are increasing leading to a decrease in interest rates and higher lending rates. Even for a small loan banks are harassing the farmers.”

“The pending FRDI Bill has alarmed the pensioners as we cannot go for land or gold purchase,” she added.

There have been concerns that under the provisions of the Financial Resolution and Deposit Insurance Bill

people would lose their most of their fixed deposits and would get back only up to Rs 1 lakh if their bank becomes financially unviable.

In another scam, the CBI also filed an FIR against Rotomac Pens whose promoter Vikram Kothari has been allegedly defaulting on loans amounting to over Rs. 3,700 crore.

Almost seven state-run banks have come under the scanner and the Allahabad Debt Recovery Tribunal had alleged that “Banks showed gross misconduct and negligence in granting credit to Rotomac Global.”

S. Ramnarayan, Editor of Pensioners Advocate magazine said “The pensioners are concerned with the minimum balance rules and that banks are not keeping the good conduct and relations with pensioners while they have a cosy relationship with big businessmen.”

“The money lost in the fraud is

the tax payers money and government must be held accountable for it.”

Pandyan, owner of Kamal Book Stores in Adyar, said “It’s the public money which is illegally being siphoned and it’s a conspiracy between the businessmen and the government and that the accused will never get arrested.”

Archit Srivastava, Technical Consultant at Cognizant said “There seems to be a trend of committing a banking fraud and leaving the nation. It leads to a fall in share market and affects the interest rates of banks as their NPAs might increase, and even foreign investments might decline.”

M. Yelumalai, a security guard at Canara Bank said that “The government should get hold of the people involved. However, it will not affect my savings and it is one thing which happens every year.”



Banking fraud has hit the common man and increased bad debts

| THE HINDU

GST CONTINUES TO HIT BUSINESS

Handloom workers protest online

PRAJANMA DAS

Chennai: The All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association’s (AIACA) change.org petition to remove Goods and Services Tax (GST) has gathered 8137 signatures till now.

The already staggering handloom sector is still trying its best to recover from the 5 per cent GST levied from July last year. This has led to increase in prices and to customers looking for alternatives.

“Sales have decreased since last year and has not picked up pace since. The tax is too high,” said Rahim Mohammed, who manages a private garment shop, Rajasthan Emporium, in Adyar.

“We have a hard time convincing our customers the reason for the sudden hike. People opt for other products now. I still have last year’s handloom stock, almost untouched,” he said.

Private outlets and boutiques are the ones that are taking the fall along with the weavers who are

associated with them. “The weavers we get our fabric from are mainly from Salem. It’s not just small businesses like ours that have been hit, the weavers have been hit the worst,” said Prabha Sadagopan, owner of Beauville Vairavam, a boutique in Perungudi.

“We order only if there is demand. After the price hike even though some regular customers still stick to handloom, a lot of them have shifted to cheaper machine spun alternatives.”

The Tamil Nadu Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society (THWCS) though claims to have no such problems with either procurement or sales.

“We have had good sales. We did not take this up with the GST council because our weavers are not suffering. They are all members. We procure only from them,” said R. Balasubramanian,



The handloom weavers have been hit the worst

| PURNASNEHA S.

General Manager of Marketing at THWCS.

“We are following the required procedures; it is only the customers with whom we are facing problems. We have to explain to them that there is an additional tax now.”

Latha Tummuru, Dastkar Andhra Marketing Association (DAMA), said “The government

has been talking about preserving handloom and handicrafts since the beginning of its term; so, imposing GST on that very sector is a strange move.”

“This is an informal sector and imposing a tax burden on the weavers is a major setback for them. Many of them lack formal education. This is all they know,” Tummuru added.

Pre-summer air cooler sales down

PRAJANMA DAS

Chennai: The pre-summer electronics sales are not a big hit in the city this year.

The Union Budget 2018 might not have had a direct effect on home appliances but the burden of GST has not been relieved either.

There are not many takers for air-conditioners, air coolers or refrigerators as the prices have gone up a steep slope abruptly.

A hike in the import duties and a tax cut, as advocated by the industry moguls, would have

made air-conditioners, refrigerators and air coolers cheaper. The consumer appliances come under tax slabs of 28 to 18 percent.

“Prices (of air-conditioners) have increased twice in the last 8-9 months. Every new stock we bring in costs more than the previous one,” said Sendhil Kumar, manager of Vasanth and Co. at T. Nagar.

“Stock clearance was also a problem in December due to GST. The budget, I thought, will bring down the GST. Air conditioners are not luxury

anymore.”

The sales of coolers and air conditioners generally see a spike during these months but the market seems to be a bit dry this year.

Sharanya, a sales person at Vijay Electronics on North Usman Road, said, “People also buy from e-commerce sites these days but we have steady sales in spite of that. We took a bad hit after the introduction of GST. The price difference is wider now.”

N. Selvaraj, an Income Tax Department official, who was planning to buy air conditioners

for both his bedrooms, said “The prices of air conditioners (5-star rated) have gone up by almost Rs.10000 since last year. I would rather buy a high end air-cooler. Buying four of them would also cost less.”

“I never liked shopping online. I could never trust it. But now I do not think I have an option. This is a necessity but the showroom prices are too high,” he said.

The same model and brand of a 1.5 ton air conditioner costs around Rs.5000 less on online sites than at showrooms.

In 50 Years, creativity hasn't faded a shade

PUERNASNEHA S.

CHENNAI: In a world where digital art is taking over, the sound of a 78-year-old sculptor's chisel is a sign that the Cholamandal artist's village here in Injambakkam is alienated from the fast-paced city lifestyle.



India's self-supporting artists' colony survives even after five decades | PUERNASNEHA S.

P. S. Nandhan, who was working on a 3-foot tall modern version of the Lingam, was one of the 38 students who joined hands in 1963 with K.C.S. Paniker, the former principal of the Madras School of Arts, to establish the Artists' Handicrafts Association (AHA) in Madras.

"With a sum of Rs.500, I went along with my father to meet Paniker at his principal's office back in 1963. We were a bunch of students assembled at that meeting with the hope of finding a suitable space for our artists' community.

In a few months, Paniker bought a 3-acre plot worth Rs. 450 near Mahabalipuram, constructed a common studio space, some huts and created a first-of-its-kind artists' colony," recollected Nandhan, who has been working at

the village since its inception. Five decades later, the village now has studios, artists' homes, a permanent museum, an outdoor theatre, a store and a workshop for batik and metal work. The Madras Art Movement, which pioneered

modernism in art at the Cholamandal Artists' Village, is recognised as one of India's best art movements and an international model for sustainable art development.

"To avoid the migration of his students to other fields for financial sustenance and to build a community for artists to thrive without any government support, Paniker began this ambitious experiment by introducing the concept of arts-by-crafts, which meant economic stability for an artist through handicraft," added Nandhan.

This village, named after the Chola dynasty that encouraged arts in the Cholamandalam region in Tamil Nadu during the 9th and 13th centuries AD, now has a total of 23 artists, most of them are painters and nearly four to five are sculptors, who earn more than Rs 1

lakh for an artwork. A portion from each sale goes to the common fund for the village. This system, with the ever growing art-buying public crowd around the world, has made Cholamandal both a financial and an artistic success.

children into this field, due to the gaining visibility of contemporary art around the world.

"Despite the fluctuation in monetary returns, the rich market for artists along with popular media's arts coverage brings

to unavailability of artists — we strongly to hope to change that culture," said 82-year-old resident-painter D. Venkatapathy, who was also one of the first members to move to Cholamandal in May 1964.

Over the years, the village has undergone transformation due to its popularity among the international art communities. The Cholamandal Centre for Contemporary Art, inaugurated in 2009, has a permanent 'Museum of the Madras Movement', which as a part of the golden jubilee annual celebration, exhibits works of 55 artists of the movement including J. Sultan Ali and P.S. Nandhan.

"While our founding stones were laid on the basis of traditional knowledge, our personal creative characters which have evolved over the years make every work modern, and artistic," said Venkatapathy.



Sculptor P.S Nandhan carves a ganesha idol | THE HINDU

Since Cholamandal does not permit the entry of new members now, many artists are bringing their

motivation to our community. Such a venture can never be replicated in the same manner due



A scene from Ramayana enacted | NIKITA PRASAD

Theatre Olympics revives Ramayan

NIKITA PRASAD

CHENNAI: A colorful folk version of the Ramayana was staged by performers dressed as Rajasthani puppets at the 8th Theatre Olympics organized by National School of Drama (NSD) under the aegis of Union Ministry of Culture at the Tamil Isai Sangam in Esplanade here on February 20.

The 105 minute performance by the Rangasri Little Ballet Troupe from Bhopal combined the features of ballet and puppet play. The stage was lit up by multi coloured beams and the performance was backed by sitar, flute and tabla beats.

The actors wore square masks on which faces, crowns and head-gears were modeled and painted.

The performance began with Ayodhya celebrating the return of Rama and Lakshmana after Rama's wedding and ended with celebration of the victory of Rama over Ravana.

"Our elements are not isolated as the dialogues were conveyed in a rhythm through the sound de-

sign of the background music as it set the pace of the narrative," said Nirupa Johsi, Group Leader, Little Ballet Troupe.

A diverse audience including students, senior citizens and children filled the auditorium.

"Even though my son is only five years old, he was fascinated with the vibrancy of the colors, costumes and powerful music throughout the performance", said Narayan, who came to view the performance with his family.

Theatre Olympics, an international festival, provides a platform for theatrical exchange and a gathering place for students, where a dialogue across ideological, culture and language differences is encouraged.

It was established in 1993 in Delhi, Greece by a Greek theatre director, Theodoros Terzopoulos.

"India's rich cultural heritage complements the nature of this event as it serves as a platform to showcase the rich and traditional theatre forms," said Regine, Theatre Coordinator.

NITHIN KUMAR

Chennai: Motorcycle customization is on the rise in the city, with new workshops being opened and more motorcycles getting customized.

According to 'The Bullet Factory' workshop at Pallikaranai, most of the motorcycles that are now being customized are the Royal Enfield (RE) Classic and the Electra variants.

The majority of the Royal Enfield owners bring in their motorcycles shortly after purchase for minor customizations.

"I dont mind losing my warranty. I wanted to customise my bike as it would look and sound good."

-Anjan Krishnan

"Most of the REs we get in our shop are two or three months old. These owners opt for small changes like new seat covers, new decals and new exhaust pipe for better engine sound", said Mariyappan, a mechanic at the Bullet Club.

Only the owners of the older

models of Royal Enfields choose to do a full customization, where they opt to change the body, the engine, brakes and the exhaust systems of the bike.

new bikes for total customization because they prefer to use the first three free services and the two month warranty given by the manufacturer.

warranty. I wanted to customize my bike as it would look and sound good," said Anjan Krishnan, owner of a Classic 350cc Royal Enfield variant from Mylapore. He recently



A customized Royal Enfield | 350 CC.COM

"For the total customization, the owners spend more and take their vehicles to pioneers like the Rajputana Customs and Puranam Designs in Rajasthan and Delhi," said Mariyappan.

Vehicle owners do not bring in

According to factory showrooms in the city, customizing a motorcycle from unofficial workshops will lead to the motorcycle losing its warranty, sometimes even the free services.

"Personally, I didn't mind losing

changed the exhaust system of his two month old Royal Enfield.

"A Royal Enfield does not quickly change hands because of the brand and the agility of the bike. Most of the Royal Enfields stay with the first owners for many

years," he added.

The Bullet Club receives two bikes every day for major customization and many for smaller works.

Sujath Ali, the owner of CBX Racing workshop in Royapettah, works exclusively on imported and higher class sport bikes. CBX Racing, which has been around for 30 years, is a pioneer in modification and after repair.

"The motorcycles that people usually customize in the city are the Royal Enfields. The rest of the bikes are super bikes which are more than 1000 cc," said Sujath Ali.

"The smaller variants like the Bajaj Pulsar and Honda versions do not get customized much and are much harder to deal with when it comes to customization," he added. According to the mechanics in CBX Racing, customizing smaller capacity vehicles has always affected the bike's performance

"The mileage is reduced when we change the exhaust system, the life of the engine tends to get reduced when we tune it according to customer's wish. Yet they want to get the bikes customized," said Rafiq, a mechanic in the shop.

No Sanskrit chair to be set-up in IIT-Madras

NISCHAI VATS

CHENNAI: The Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at IIT-M has denied that a Sanskrit chair was being introduced on the campus.

Umakant Dash, HOD, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences said "A chair is being introduced but the purpose is not Sanskrit. The person involved has a degree in Sanskrit but the matter is very --- different."

The chair will be headed by Sampadananda Mishra, a Sanskrit scholar and director for Sri Aurobindo Foundation for Indian Culture.

"The person will hold seminars and workshops and the purpose will be Value System, not Sanskrit. So tomorrow if someone comes with other degree or background, he/she will hold the chair, it's not about Sanskrit every time," added Dash.

The funding for the chair has

come from an alumnus Rajinder Singh, who completed his B-Tech degree in Electrical Engineering from IIT-Madras in 1967. Rs. 90 lakh has been donated, out of which Rs. 15 lakh will be used for a student scholarship which can be offered to any deserving student.

On news reports that a Sanskrit chair is being introduced in the department, Dash said that "I will not say the news about Sanskrit chair is false or true but certainly it is being misinterpreted."

"It so happens that the profile of the person is with Sanskrit background and Sanskrit background does not mean you are going to introduce Sanskrit."

The alumnus, known to his disciples as Sant Rajinder Singh Maharaj has chosen Humanities department as he wanted to focus on cultural issues.

In a web-post for the alumni section of IIT-Madras site, Rajinder Singh wrote that "As in a science lab, we start with a hypothesis and

test it; the same approach could be used to test the spiritual hypothesis of whether there is a higher power." The new chair would deal with the same set of principles.

Dash feels that the "misinterpretation" abohappened as no one read the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which was signed between the two parties.

"Go by the MOU available on the institute's website and it does not say anything about Sanskrit," he said.

Eco-friendly space for meetings, seminars

NIKITA PRASAD

CHENNAI: Two Trees, a new naturalistic co working space built within an ecosystem of trees, was opened in Teynampet last week with a full-fledged Bistro and workshop space for meetups; and events like discussions, seminars and conferences.

-The place is named after the two tall trees which flank the main gate of the little white building - one a fragrant eucalyptus and other a lush mango. The height of the trees provides natural greenery and shade to the building and keeps its interiors cool and serene. The place is aesthetically designed with walls adorned by quotations, paintings and sketches while globes, maps, notebooks and other stationary items are shelved in racks.

The Summer House Eatery (café partner/bistro) on the ground floor dishes out chicken wings, pasta and sandwiches while a flight of stairs dotted with origami birds leads to the first floor that houses Two Trees. By collaborating with Hari Tharang, a nursery and an environment friendly enterprise in T Nagar, they have an in-house garden with potted plants which are up for sale. Each room is named after a tree



The Two Trees office lobby | NIKITA PRASAD

variety namely — oak, maple, bamboo, neem, pine and flame of the forest. While bamboo, oak and flame of the forest are built for private offices, neem, maple and pine rooms are co working spaces. The first floor has both private offices and hot desks, and also offers the option of hiring a virtual office. The lobby features a cozy nook with cushions that overlooks a garden through a large picture window.

Two Trees was started by three women entrepreneurs. "The three of us — Keerthana Chandrasekaran, Kanakadhara Srinivasan and me — come from diverse backgrounds, and have all held corporate jobs abroad, before

we decided to call it quits and head back to India in 2015", said Priya Gautham, Co-Founder, Two Trees.

Work began in September 2017, and the space has been functional since January, though the formal launch took place last week.

"Two Trees is our way of addressing issues that we faced during our hunt for a space. We are looking to create an ecosystem for early companies and entrepreneurs," said Kanakadhara.

Keerthana added, "It is not just a space to work. We help by connecting them to others. We plan to conduct regular events, where we get people from the industry, also events that break away from the routine, such as

laughter therapy, among others."

"We have not kept restricted timings. People who work here, can come and go whenever they want," said Rohan, Central Manager, Two Trees.

The founders are keen on tying up with companies that are into creating a social impact. "That would be in line with our own policy; such companies can also avail a discount," said Priya, adding that they were also trying to stay flexible when it came to the packages offered.

"So people can also choose to rent out just the conference room if they wish — for a workshop, class session or meetings. Our pricing is pretty competitive as well, beginning at Rs 8,000 and going up to Rs 12,000 a month, per seat."

The trio aims to set up more spaces across the city in the coming months.

"Our focus is on residential areas; areas that are away from the usual IT hubs," she said.



The two trees- Mango and Eucalyptus, after which the place is named | NIKITA PRASAD

Gaming maniacs

NEHAL CHALIAWALA

CHENNAI:With the rising interest of youngsters in playing online video games, psychologists warn of associated disorders, like addiction. Multiple gaming lounges have opened up in the city. These places offer gamers a chance to come together and play video games online as well as with each other over a LAN (Local Area Network) connection.

Players often spend hours on end playing games here. "We have customers who play up to 24-hours at a time," says E Praveen from Playerz Gaming, one such lounge in Nungambakkam. "These games are so engaging that once you start playing, you don't want to stop."

City based clinical psychologist J Anitha explains that any condition can be classified as a psychological disorder if it impairs the functioning of an individual in personal, social or occupational spheres.

"In case of playing video games," she says, "if it causes disturbance and hinders the functioning of the individual then it is imperative to understand the intensity and classify it based on the level of disturbance — mild, moderate or severe."

Many gaming lounges stay open 24x7, encouraging gamers to play for long hours. Some go a step further and even serve finger food and beverages. All this doesn't come cheap. However, a regular gamer can easily shell out more than Rs.1000 a week at such lounges only for gaming. Food could be much more expensive.

Dr. Anitha compares the addiction of video gaming to that of substance abuse. "There will be preoccupation or obsession with games just like for substances. Withdrawal symptoms may be present when not playing games," she said.

Further she says that the compulsion to play more is similar to the tolerance level developed in substance addiction. A person may try to stop playing online games, but the urge to play more may not let them succeed, just like the craving for substances.

However, gamers and gaming lounge owners feel otherwise. They compare the long hours spent playing video games to athletes devoting time practising their sport. They defend professional gaming as a legitimate source of income.

"If you are in the top 1000 players globally in any game, you will get sponsors who will pay you to play for them," explains Praveen, who himself is an avid Defence of the Ancients 2 (DotA2) player.